



# Truman Wesley Collins

1902-1964

Truman Wesley Collins was born in Ostrander, Washington, August 29, 1902. The third child of Everell Stanton Collins and Mary Laffey Collins, Truman followed the births of his brother, Alton, and his sister, Grace. Like those before them, the lives of this third generation Collins would revolve around trees. Truman embraced his father and grandfather's worlds as lumbermen, entrepreneurs, and philanthropists. There was just something in their britches that wondered what was over there, a venture big enough so a man could bump his chest on it and know he'd done what yesterday seemed impossible. For his grandfather, Teddy Collins, it was the hardwoods of Pennsylvania. For his father, Everell Collins, it was the giant softwoods of the West Coast. And for Truman, it was learning the value of sustainable forestry — for hardwoods and softwoods.

While he kept the lessons from the generations that preceded him, he also charted his own course. Similar to his grandfather, Truman entered the oil business — only in his case, with wildcatter, Jacob Abram Mull Jr. and a stroke of good fortune. And similar to his father, he became a silent partner in a number of ventures, in one case, with a college friend, George H. Atkinson of the Guy F. Atkinson Company. Together they built dams in Oregon, California, Washington, South Carolina, North Dakota, and all the way to Pakistan. But most of all, Truman increased, nurtured, and supported the forestlands he inherited; the flora, fauna, and fish that needed those lands and waters to thrive; and the people and their communities whose lives were dependent on the success of a shared vision.

For a man born to wealth, who could have chucked it all and lived a life of self-indulgent luxury, the challenge to work was pure joy. He once said to his wife, Maribeth, "I think I would pay money to do what I'm doing."

He started simply enough. Born in a little logging town in western Washington, he spent his young years in the woods of Ostrander, Washington, and Kellettville, Pennsylvania. In his teens his family moved to Portland, Oregon, where he graduated from Lincoln High School, went on to Willamette University, then to Harvard for a master's degree in business.

As a man, Truman was shy, quiet, reserved. He ate his toast burned and his eggs boiled firm. He raised turkeys too tough to eat and liked to experiment just when and where his car engine was likely to freeze up. He was not a drinking man, not a party man. If there was a macho bone in his body, it could be said that he did like hunting — pheasants, mostly. He climbed Mt. Hood and Mt. Rainier, skied, snowshoed, was a stunt pilot, played a good game of tennis, rode his tractor on Saturdays to mow his field, and rode a horse fast whenever he got a chance. He also liked walking his daughter to school; and long after his father died, when his mother was much older, he stopped to visit her every day on his way to work. He earned respect by giving respect and influenced, not by a show of power, but by a show of grace. Almost to a person, the people who worked for and with him would have walked over coals had he asked.

Mt. Adams Pine Company in Glenwood, Washington, was his first stop in the lumber business. Truman came under the tutelage of one savvy, unabashed, overstated, wheeler-dealer-storyteller, who was also one hell of a good logger, J.T. "Mac" McDonald. The year was 1926. Truman was 24 years old, the same age as Teddy when he started at Turkey Run, Pennsylvania, and when Everell started at Ostrander, Washington. The difference with Truman was that he had a mentor in J.T. and eventually a friend and partner.

Mt. Adams Pine Company taught Truman four valuable lessons. The first: Loyalty. Be loyal and fair and care about your employees and they'll return the favor 200%. The second: Be open to change. One example came when he embraced the new idea of truck logging, which was a

less expensive, less intrusive way than building a railroad to enter the woods. J.T. was one of the early truck logging pioneers, and Truman became one of its biggest proponents. His third lesson was clearly a holdover from his father and grandfather: If you're going to run a mill then live where it's located and help support that community. Don't strip it of its soul, take its riches, and leave. Truman always had a home wherever he had a timber operation. It didn't have to be palatial, and never was, but it had to be a place where he could put his roots down and people were welcome.

All of this was well and good, but lesson number four was the hardest to learn: Own it or lose it. If you don't own your own timber, you can lose it. In Glenwood, Truman lost.

The Grande Ronde Lumber Company in Pongosa, Oregon, was his next opportunity. Up for sale were the mill, the timberland, and the capital stock of the Big Creek & Telocaset Railroad Company. It was 1931, deep in The Depression. While he was against it, Everell Collins begrudgingly agreed to buy the operation but warned his son, Truman, "You're going to lose your shirt." Truman didn't lose it, but Pongosa tried hard to take it from him. He was now the manager, no longer the rookie. It was his to win or lose. He won — as did many of his employees who came with him from Glenwood.

By 1946, he formed a joint venture at the Grande Ronde Lumber Company with a number of his long-time employees. It was his way to keep the mill and community alive, and give an ownership stake to those who had given so much. The transaction took place in 1946. Production from the change-over averaged 18mmmbf. By 1952 it was up to 21mmmbf. But one of the lessons of Glenwood came around again. The company was running out of timber. In 1956 it was sold. This time he had learned his lesson.

In fact, he had already been putting into place a business and forestry model that combined everything he believed and had learned. The location was Chester, California, tucked into the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The land was 67,800 acres, originally purchased in 1902 by his grandfather, Teddy, and five partners. It was registered under the names of the primary owners, Curtis, Collins & Holbrook. When Teddy died his share passed to Everell who later bought out the remaining partners. On Everell's death in 1940, the management of these lands passed to Truman Collins.

Truman might have called that his "ah-ha" moment, when he recognized he was standing exactly where he belonged and was about to do exactly what he had dreamed. It was a June day in 1941. Truman and Ed McCulloch, his attorney and close business advisor, were standing looking out over this forest that had never seen a clear-cut — white fir, ponderosa pine, sugar pine, incense cedar, Douglas fir — most of the trees hundreds of years old. This was the place. Build a sawmill. Begin a sustainable logging operation. Create family-wage jobs. Support a healthy community. And do it all so it would last in perpetuity.

Once again he turned to the men who had started with him in Glenwood, moved on with him to Pongosa, and now, with their families, became the backbone of Chester and the future of what became the Collins Pine Company. This time the dream worked beyond what even he could have imagined. Long after his death those forestlands, known as the Collins Almanor Forest, became the first privately-owned forest in the United States to be independently certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. Sustainable. Not just in words, but in verifiable actions. The forest that he looked over in 1941 is healthier and has more timber today than when he began. The community is vibrant, the mill rebuilt, the jobs remain. But Truman would be the first to say he didn't do this or any other operation alone. There was Elmer Goudy, George Flanagan, Wally Reed, Al Hulse, Rusty

Denim, Charlie Genaux, George Gerbing, J.T. McDonald, Carroll McDonald, Alton Collins, Al Wellenbrock, Gene Sharp, and so many more. Together they built the Elk Lumber Company in Medford, Oregon; the Lakeview Sawmill and Fremont Sawmill in Lakeview, Oregon; the J.T. McDonald Logging Company and the Lakeview Logging Company; and, of course, Collins Pine Company in California and Pennsylvania.

Yet in the midst of all this there was, at the center, his family. He married Maribeth Akin Wilson, March 12, 1943. And like the women who had married into this Collins family before her, Maribeth embraced Truman's vision and brought her own strong values to join his.

Little did he know when he married her that Maribeth would go on to keep The Collins Companies intact and take it into the fifth generation as a family-owned business. "Guts and gumption," old Teddy Collins would say. She'd blush and then carry on.

Their first children, Timothy Wilson Collins and Terry Stanton Collins, identical twins, were born June 5, 1948. Two years later they were joined by their sister, Cherida Lynne Collins, born August 1, 1950. And three months to the day after Truman died, another son, Truman Wesley Collins, Jr. was born, May 23, 1964.

For any man this would have been enough. But for Truman Collins, a life well lived meant giving back what you've been given. To that end he created the Collins Medical Trust in the State of Oregon; the Almanor Scholarship Fund in the north half of Plumas County, California; the Collins-McDonald Trust Fund in and around Lakeview, Oregon; The Collins Foundation in the State of Oregon; and so much more.

He served as a Lieutenant Commander in the Naval Reserve during World War II; President of the Board of Trustees, Willamette University; Chairman, Keep Oregon Green Association; Member, the National Board of Missions of the Methodist Church; Board of Directors, YMCA, Crown Zellerbach Corp., Standard Insurance Co., and US National Bank; President, Pacific Logging Conference; Chairman, Forest Industries Council; Director, National Lumber Manufacturers Association; and was honored as Portland's First Citizen by the Portland Board of Realtors. All he would be too humble, quiet, and self-effacing to mention.

Maybe it is best to know that he was a man of decency with graciousness. A man of humility with humor. A man of modesty with integrity. A man of generosity with gentleness.

"Mr. Collins was that rare citizen who recognized no limit in the devotion of his resources, his time and his efforts to the good of his fellow citizens. His philanthropies were legion, and many of the most significant of them will forever go unrecorded, because he sincerely sought to avoid both private and public recognition of his many benefactions..."

But Truman Collins was not just a philanthropist in the sense of one who devotes his resources to the public good. He also gave much of himself to elevating the ethical and moral character of the many business and civil enterprises in which he took part. Although he was self-effacing and reticent about his own contributions, he brought strong convictions and vigorous expression into the councils of the organizations and institutions he served.

It can be said of Truman Collins, as of few others, that the community will miss his leadership and his example, which may be commended to others of resource and talent."

The Oregonian Editorial  
February 25, 1964

Truman Collins died of a heart attack February 23, 1964. He was 61 years old. Too short a life, but so very well-lived.