



Gordon John King

1929-

“Always do right; this will satisfy some people and astonish the rest.” Mark Twain

“You can do anything you want to do if you want to badly enough.” Anon.

From these simple quotes Gordon John King based his life principles, which carried him through a distinguished and satisfying life-long career in the Northwest’s forest products industry.

He was born on June 3, 1929 to Delma and Gordon King, Sr. in the sawmilling town of Raymond, Washington. His father spent 37 years in the lumber manufacturing business, ending as superintendent of Willapa Harbor Lumber Co. Young Gordon spent many days, evenings, and weekends in the sawmills with his father as his dad performed his duties.

Raised and schooled in Raymond, Gordon was a student-athlete, noted particularly for his basketball skills. He spent considerable time in his youth hunting, hiking, camping and became highly proficient at fishing. He attained the rank of Life Scout, which is the Boy Scouts’ second highest honor.

Gordon’s first saw milling job – at 85 cents an hour occurred between school and other activities when he worked swing shift at Grays Harbor Hardwoods stud mill. He was 15 at the time. During this period of the Second World War, sawmills employed women and older youths. On reaching “legal” age, Gordon worked summers and holidays at Willapa Harbor tackling such physically demanding positions as green chain puller, planing mill bundle tier, and timber sorter and cleanup.

In 1947, at age 18 and freshly graduated from high school, Gordon viewed college primarily as a place to play basketball. Majoring in forestry and business administration, he attended Washington State, Portland University and St. Martins, with the latter on a full athletic scholarship. He spent his collegiate summers working with the “River Rat Gang” as a boomman, rafting and sorting logs on the Willapa River.

With the onset of the Korean War in 1950, Gordon deferred his college education. As an active U.S. Navy reservist, he was subject to immediate call for active duty. Still, on August 4 of that same year, Gordon married his high school sweetheart, Dara C. “Dodie” Wilson, in Seattle, Washington, where the couple made their home.

After a brief stint as a cost accountant for Boeing Aircraft Co., Gordon signed on with the Barbee Lumber Co. as their sole boomman. Truck logging had begun by then and logs were dumped into Lake Washington. Gordon worked the log dump, breaking the jams and sorting the rafting by species for eventual delivery to the

mill by tugboat across the lake. Soon after, as winter conditions halted logging, the company transferred Gordon to the sawmill as a planer feeder and car loader.

The birth of their first son, Gordon, prompted him to search for a better and more lucrative future. The nearest big mill, the White River Lumber Co., was in Enumclaw, Washington. Weyerhaeuser Co. had just acquired substantial interest in the company. Wearing his only suite and sporting a homemade haircut, Gordon applied for work. He was initially turned down, but then spotted a person he presumed to be the personnel manager. With persistence and hope, he went around the office, entered by another door and introduced himself by asking how the fishing was. Fortunately, Mr. Les Kramer, who was indeed the personnel manager, enjoyed fishing too. Gordon was hired and he and Les became close friends.

This job required daily arrival with others at the yard shack at 6:00 a.m. Plant managers drew on this extra gang to fill in for short-term vacancies throughout the plant and woods. During this stint, Gordon worked diligently on a variety of tasks including digging ditches, driving log trucks and working in the planing mill, main sawmill and loading shed.

In addition, at this time, Weyerhaeuser management began planning a substantial construction program. Company managers selected Gordon to head the supply warehouse and oversee receiving and dispensing of machinery and equipment for the construction project and all daily mill and logging operations. For the first time, Gordon had secured a steady sure job, while also enjoying the arrival of a second son, Jeff.

In the fall of 1953, company plans called for Gordon to be trained as sawmill foreman for the newly completed plant. However, his good friend Les Kramer introduced him to Mr. Dave Troy, a Weyerhaeuser Sales Co. official in St. Paul, Minnesota. Mr. Troy was looking for sales trainees for Weyerhaeuser's expanding national sales force. The lure of selling proved irresistible. Gordon chose the sales training program, but it required a \$50-a-month cut in pay and a temporary move to the pine country in Emmett, Idaho.

Dodie and their two sons stayed in Enumclaw while Gordon boarded in a private Emmett home for what was originally to be a three-month training period prior to a territorial sales assignment. But the country went into a recession and Weyerhaeuser put all expansion on what they termed "slow bell."

In the interim, Gordon had become well acquainted with officials of the Boise Payette Co. and they asked him to stay in Emmett to do special projects until Weyerhaeuser assigned him a territory. His salary then was \$250 per month and Boise Payette officials offered to supplement that with \$50, an offer that could not be refused.

In January 1954, the young King family moved by U-Haul into a basement apartment on Freeze-Out Hill in Emmett. Outside temperature was 10 degrees below zero. For the next eight months Gordon ran an extraordinary variety of tests and studies, such as: production run grade and yield for lodgepole pine, then thought to be a fire hazard and weed; mechanical loading of boxcars; packaged short lumber for do-it-yourselfers, which was years ahead of its time; potential uses and yields from shop lumber into short pieces or cut stock; and a number of other special projects.

Finally, in September came the awaited telegram: "Report to Newark, New Jersey, on November 1 for assignment." Yet two weeks later, while attending a Western Pine Assn. District meeting in Boise, Idaho, Boise Payette President John Aram and Executive Vice President George Hjort approached Gordon and asked him to stay permanently with Boise Payette as its first road lumber salesman. Gordon accepted immediately.

Based in Boise, and working through a subsidiary, the Morrison-Merrill Co., Gordon covered most of southern and central Idaho and portions of eastern Oregon. Though working alone, he had the company of "lots of sagebrush and jackrabbits." During the next two years he rapidly developed this market for Boise Payette products and products from other producers representing most major West Coast sources. Seattle Cedar was one of the larger outside suppliers.

In 1956, impressed with his demonstrated skills, Boise Payette transferred Gordon to the headquarters office making him assistant sales manager under Mr. Del Shaw. There, Gordon quickly learned the national markets from his contacts and travels, which included customers throughout the U.S. It was also during this period that Gordon helped fund the Snake River Valley Hoo-Hoo Club, a fraternal organization of lumbermen, and served as its first president.

In December 1956, his friend and mentor, John Aram, resigned as president to become executive vice president for Weyerhaeuser Co. In Tacoma, Washington. Robert V. "Bob" Hansberger became Boise Payette's president and a 10-year period of dramatic growth began. The King family also grew with the addition of a daughter, Sandra Suzanne.

The following year, in 1957, Boise Payette and Cascade Lumber Co. merged to form the Boise Cascade Corp. In 1959, the company promoted Gordon to sales manager, western timber division, and transferred him to Yakima, Washington. Two weeks before the move to Yakima, a third son, Steven, was born.

In July 1961, a fourth son, Robert, joined the family, followed at Christmastime by the tragic death of Sandra Suzanne after a two-year battle with leukemia.

In 1962, all Boise Cascade sales personnel from four timber divisions were moved to the corporate headquarters. This move back to Boise resulted in a consolidation of sales for all corporate regions covering the U.S. Gordon was promoted to sales manager for the western region, an area that included Texas and all states west of the Mississippi River.

By 1965, Gordon's outstanding sales record and achievements gained him the position of national lumber sales manager for all regions.

By the following year, 1966, Boise Cascade had grown both in lumber and plywood production. Plywood sales were handled from an office in Portland, Oregon. Boise Cascade again consolidated its sales department, this time moving both lumber and plywood functions to Portland. The move, which involved the transfer of 26 families from Boise, occurred in July 1966. Not one hour of sales time was lost as the move took place on a weekend, with the new offices ready for business on Monday morning. With the move, Gordon became manager of national sales for both lumber and plywood.

It was during this period, from 1962 to 1969, that Gordon not only traveled the country extensively, but represented Boise Cascade on boards and committees for such trade associations as the North American Wholesale Lumber Assn., California Redwood Assn., Ponderosa Pine Woodworking Assn. and others. His ability to speak at large functions and in diverse situations was rigorously tested. By 1969, his expanding sales responsibilities included the production of 21 sawmills, 17 plywood plants, and one large redwood mill – a combined total of 176 carloads daily. He fortunately had a very professional and effective sales force.

In the fall of 1971, while attending a Western Wood Products Assn. meeting in Scottsdale, Ariz., Mr. Jack Zalaha, then general sales manager for Hampton Lumber Sales Co., asked Gordon if he might be interested in a change. Four months and several meetings with Jack and John Hampton convinced Gordon that this was a company with not only potential for growth, but also integrity and empathy toward employees, traits consistent with Gordon's values.

He resigned from Boise Cascade in January 1972 and became general sales manager for Hampton Lumber on February 1.

During the next 19 years, Gordon played an important role in the solid, prosperous growth of Hampton Lumber Sales Co., from sales of \$30 million dollars annually to \$200 million. Personal growth occurred as well, to vice president and general manager in 1973, to president in 1975.

The sales force also grew and, under Gordon's keen guidance, took an active role in many key developments including: construction and development in 1976 of All-Coast Forest Products, a wholesale distribution and remanufacturing company in Los Angeles and a similar operation, Hampton Industrial Forest Products, in Woodburn, Oregon; negotiated sales contracts with 10 outside independent sawmills, which included coordinating their production and marketing 100 percent of the output. One such agreement resulted in the first barge shipment of lumber from B.C. Canada, into Los Angeles. That contract eventually totaled 10 million board feet monthly.

Using his sharp business sense, Gordon also steered the company in developing and maintaining a large leased fleet of special center-beam flatcars to flow in conjunction with negotiated contract rates with railroads throughout the U.S. Such developments led Hampton Lumber to open the first origin reload in the Pacific Northwest, affording the lowest national rates on customer specifications shipped in a very timely manner. Lumber to match shipments of 15 carloads per day was trucked to the reload facility from as far south as Medford, Oregon and north to Bellingham, Washington.

Despite the exceeding demands on his time, Gordon continued to serve on the Western Wood Products Association's marketing services committee and was very active in the North American Wholesale Lumber Assn. (NAWLA), serving on the board, the executive committee, and as NAWLA's president in 1984-1985.

Throughout his career, he served in many other capacities including: American Lumber Standards Committee; Western Wood Products Assn., economic services committee; California Redwood Assn. promotion committee and board member; Ponderosa Pine Woodworking Assn. board member; American Plywood Assn., field services committee; World Forestry Center; Wood Products Advisory Committee board chairman; Dale Carnegie, graduate instructor; and United Good Neighbors, Boise, Idaho, board and budget chairman.

In June 1991, after a sterling professional career that spanned more than 40 years, involved hundreds of thousands of miles traveled and created countless friendships, Gordon retired at age 62. A retirement party, hosted by John Hampton, was held at the World Forestry Center in Portland, Oregon. Several speakers praised Gordon for his high standards of integrity and honesty that he kept throughout his dealings industrywide. Capping his satisfying and unparalleled career, he turned his attention to volunteer projects and organizations, more golf, fishing, outdoor pursuits, and time with Dodie at their second home on the Oregon coast.

In keeping with his outside interests, Gordon continued many activities including: past president's council, North American Wholesale Lumber Assn.; first vice president of the board of Portland's Parry Center; advisor and founder, Temperate Forest Foundation; president, Claremont Homeowners Assn.; volunteer, Oregon Salmon Trout Enhancement Program; Neah Kah Nie Land Use Task Force; and lecturer and eucharistic minister for St. Thomas More Catholic Church.

Gordon also formed King Resources to avert a complete cutoff from the industry and friends developed throughout his career. His venture led to several consulting assignments and, in his tradition of breaking new ground, trips to Russia to assess the Russian forests and their future.