

VOLDY — A FORESTER AT HEART

by Sandy Rangila

After forty years of professional forestry service, of which the last twenty-two were spent here on the Warm Springs Reservation, Voldemars V. Abrenietis didn't want to retire.

But Voldy, as he is known, officially entered the realm of retirement on the first of September at the age of 70. Still, he considers himself a forester at heart.

Born on June 25, 1908 on a family farm in Latvia, Voldy's experience and career spans two continents. Latvia is a tiny European country sandwiched between Estonia and Lithuania and bordered on the east by the Soviet Union.

After attending the local schools, Voldy entered the School of Forestry in Cirova, Latvia. This school was typical of the European professional schools of that period, with mandatory dormitory residence, very strict discipline, and required attendance at all classes. Classes were held six days a week from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and military training was a part of the required curriculum.

"The teaching staff of the schools of forestry all over Europe implanted in their students a love for the forests and nature in general," says Voldy. "They instilled in us complete dedication and great pride in being a professional forester. It is understandable because the forestry profession in Europe is recognized as one of the top professions, second only to that of the medical doctors," he explains.

In August 1927, he graduated in the top fifth of his class, and the next year began his professional career with the Latvian Forest Service. He worked his way up through the ranks to the position of District Forester, which is equivalent to a District Ranger position in the United States.

Voldy continued in this position during the first communist occupation of Latvia in June 1940, and stayed after the German invasion forced a communist withdrawal in June 1941.

In the fall of 1944 the communists returned, so Voldy, his wife Jana, and their three year-old daughter Lilita fled from Latvia to Germany with 300,000 other Latvian refugees. There Voldy was assigned work in the German Forest Service for one year as a technical Forester. He remained on that job until August of 1945 when Western Allied forces gathered the war refugees in Displaced Person camps. The next five years were spent in D.P. camps in West Germany.

With help from the Lutheran World Federation, Voldy and his family came to Hood River Oregon in March of 1950. The next six years were spent working at odd jobs — fruit picking, laborer and janitor. He and his family used that time to work on English language improvement and they all gained their U.S. citizenship in February 1956.

Both Voldy and his wife Jana speak four languages; Latvian, Russian, German, and English.

In August 1956, Voldy joined the Warm Springs Forestry staff as a GS 7 forester. In his twenty-two years at Warm Springs, Voldy has performed a wide variety of professional forestry work. He has seen the Forest Development Program grow from a part-time job to one

that now takes the full-time effort of four foresters, three technicians and two furlough aide-technicians.

Voldy says the question that arises most often is why he stayed so long in Warm Springs. "The answer to that is not a simple one," says Voldy. In answering that question, he says there are several factors involved, and he explains it in the following way:

"breed" of foresters developed in Europe. We strictly believe that the forester's job is to see that the seed put in the soil or seedling planted by him is growing and developing into the tree. Besides, there is the belief among European foresters that

the forester can start to really manage the forest under his care only after he has been with that particular forest for a minimum of ten years. That is why the foresters of the rank of District Forester and higher are not very often transferred or moved around.

"I remember when I took over my last district in Latvia for the retiring District Forester who had stayed in that place for over 23 years," Voldy recalls. "He took a promise from me that his beloved forest would not be overcut. He could not bear the sight of 'his' forest being ravaged by careless management."

"I gave him my solemn promise and did everything pos-

sible to keep it, for we both had the same task — the same ideal — to tend and preserve the forest for the next generation.

"Later, in Germany, I met several foresters who served a lifetime in one district. During one field trip in West Germany's forests, a group of foresters

visited an area where the old District Forester had been on the job for 30 years. After introducing us, his superior proudly mentioned that this forester was a walking history of that forest.

"The old forester could tell, by memory, when the young stand was planted, when a certain timber stand was cut, or when a fire destroyed a timber stand. And at his side stood his son, a recent graduate of a school of forestry, ready to take over and continue his father's lifetime work. The young man was born there, grew up there, and already knew the forest as he did his own pocket.

"There was no question in my mind that this particular forest would be managed and guarded as the forester's own property.

"Surely, if that old forester would move, look for a higher position or better pay, he would be considered a 'success' by others. But not by himself. He considered a success his lifetime work and devotion to this forest.

"Similarly, I could have moved from Warm Springs to apply for a higher position and higher pay elsewhere. But I never did write, not even one application. I liked Warm Springs too much. There were times when the working conditions and the pressure on the job was almost unbearable, and moving would most likely seem to be the best solution. But, obviously, I am a forester 'by heart' — not a forester by the paycheck. So I stayed put."

Voldy's wife Jana is now working as a teacher Aide in remedial reading program at the Warm Springs grade school. "We like Warm Springs, we like the Warm Springs people, and we feel at home in Warm Springs," Voldy says simply.

And Voldy, even in his retirement, is still watching out for the reservation forestland — a forester at heart.



Voldemars V. Abrenietis, better known as Voldy, retired this month after forty years of professional forestry services, the last 22 of which were here on the Warm Springs Reservation. Voldy and his two companions King and Zane have been a familiar sight in the Campus area through the years. The picture in the upper right corner is Voldy in 1938 when he was District Forester in his homeland, Latvia.

Sandy Rangila Photo

Learning as Custom Ritual Wisdoms

Elizabeth Woody
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Long time ago you remembered your tribes customs.
In this everyone had their living to do.
They made sure the tribe carried on.
The tribe carries on.
They all had traditional custom.
Everyone learned them and listened.
Learned and listened.
Not that everyone was the same, they had their differences.
But you were made into this world little, young, naive. So you listened..
The older ones knew life fifteen years or more. They were getting wisdom.
They learned to use their voices, and dance to ancient rhythms.
You were born with a body, but you had a mind yet to be given.
Many minds to be given.
Giving always to the young body wisdom.
Old songs and ritual dances.
Words to be taught and openings in ears to listen.
Collections of life substances;
Hunted bodies,
Bitter sweet plants,
Materials given to the Young Body.
Stories and jokes told facing the young in the Early East.
Carefully listening, the Old ones,
To the birth of knowledge and human laughter in the goodness of children.
Giving this to them, Young Bodies, open minds.
Long time ago they were living lessons, Old Wisdoms.
People depended on these customs to carry on their living. Carry on. Always.
Everyone learned to look and open the holes in their ears, flare wide their nostrils.
SMELL the breath of Rolling Thunder.
HEAR the loud clap of spirit wisdom. Thunder Clouds.
EYES grew wide with the sight of spirit flashing lessons. Lightning.
These same eyes closed with wrinkles pulling death at face muscles.
Women and Men dissolving under clearness in life-rain. Daily dying, beating out time.
Growing old, these ones, sharing ancient customs.
Giving to the Young Ones the ability to carry the limitless learning spirit on.
People learning, we are the learning ones.