Life as a Forester

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services throughout a six county area. With a work force of over 100 personnel and half a million dollar operating budget, my district provides protection to two million acres of forest land against wildland fires, insects and disease, training in wildfire suppression tactics to Division, industry and volunteer fire department personnel, professional and technical advice to non-industrial private landowners for the management and regeneration of their forest lands, support services in the administration of federally funded cost-share programs, disaster relief services to local county emergency units, the enforcement of the state forest laws, and information/education programs through our state forests and local county organization.

I have taken time to list many of the program services provided by our agency to illustrate that a forester must eventually learn to wear many hats. During my career I have been a field forester, teacher of forestry, supervisor, personnel manager, administrator of budgets, researcher, firefighter, law enforcer, public speaker, and forever more, always a student learning more with every new day. Forestry is an exciting, challenging career with diverse opportunities. It doesn't make you rich monetarily but it does provide a rich lifelong adventure.

My career in forestry which started in that classroom at Iowa State University 21 years ago has richly blessed me with a wonderful wife, four great children, a great educational foundation, five forestry positions with three different employers over three different geographical locations of the United States. And at 41 I've only just begun!

Bob Houseman ('78)

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**Life as a Forester**

By Susan Houseman

I was fortunate enough to arrive at ISU in the fall of 1975; 125 freshmen entered forestry that year. It was in that same year that acting department head, Dr. George Thompson, gave his famous “I'm happy as a clam to have all you women here” speech to the forestry club. I sincerely did not know until that moment (despite the preponderance of men in my classes) that choosing forestry as a profession was the least bit unusual for my gender.

My interest in forestry was total. I was not going to just study forestry for the next four years, I planned to live forestry in the jobs I took to earn college money. In view of my great skills, I managed to get Rich Faltonson to hire me to work in the forestry greenhouses on campus. Or did I get the job because I was one of the few forestry students eligible for payment under the college work study program? How fortuitous in any case.

The U.S. Forest Service in Washington state was another respectable entity that decided to hire me as a seasonal timber presale forest technician in 1977. I was quite nervous about being able to secure this job. A paperwork mix-up had nixed a similar job in Alaska. With spring quarter running out I found out that I had indeed gotten the job. The only other applicant for the job had accepted a position closer to home and had withdrawn from the running. I should also add that ISU alumnus Fred Walk was the initiator of the hiring package sent to ISU. How fortuitous indeed.
In 1978 I managed to be selected to use my superior research talents for Dr. Sandy McNabb in a 25 state collection trip for a joint ISU - U.S. Forest Service mychorrizae study in 1978. Or was I selected perhaps because there were no graduate students available to take the job and Dr. McNabb had lived next to my parents in Pammel Court before I was born? How fortuitous yet again.

As graduation neared, I applied to work with the Colville Confederated Indian Tribes out of Neapelem Washington. Was this out of my deep desire to train the Native Americans of eastern Washington to be forest technicians and because the tribe respected my newly acquired four year degree? Or was it because I was in the right place at the right time? My husband Bob had just been hired by the same tribe and would coincidentally be bringing his forester wife with him in a few weeks. Quite fortuitous, wouldn’t you say?

I decided to cut short my position with the tribe when I spent most of my workday mornings on the winding mountain roads being sick out the window. Bob and I had been married less than a year when I found out I was expecting our first. Climbing around in the tops of 150 foot conifers to collect superior cones was not to be. Fortuitous thing? I didn’t think so at the time.

I had been determined to be a forester. I was proud of the fact that I had never had to flip a burger or punch a cash register to finance my education in forestry. I had always worked in forestry. However, I was also determined to come home with my children as they needed. Therefore, when I was seven months pregnant, and my spiked boots could no longer keep me from sliding headfirst down the mountains in the snow, I was switched to office work. When my time came, I left. The walk from home to office was only about fifty yards but it was infinity for me now. I had no guarantees that I would ever be able to return to forestry. Had I acquired enough experiences to be considered a forester when I attempted to return to my profession?

Time passed. My husband got a professional forestry job with the state of North Carolina. My welcome to the state was a bite by a poisonous eastern copperhead snake in the first year. On the bright side, I noticed that the local community college had a mountain dendrology class. It even had a two year degree program in forest technology. My internal calendar told me that my career hiatus should be coming to a close. We now had four children with about two years between each. The last one was approaching school age. Ten years had passed. Time to write a letter.

I made a “cold call” by mail to the full time forestry instructor at Southeastern Community College in Whiteville, North Carolina. Who knows? Maybe he needed an assistant. I got an extremely brief no thank-you from this sole instructor of four or more classes per quarter, four quarters per year. He said he needed no help. I sat back to await the arrival of the day when I would take my last child to kindergarten, come home alone and ponder just how clean my linoleum floors needed to be. That day never arrived.

Eight weeks after I sent that letter, Desert Storm broke out. The busy man who needed no help teaching forestry classes was also a specialist in nuclear, biological and chemical warfare. At 57 years of age he was reactivated into the Army reserves with 48 hours notice. Guess who was the only professional forester with her resume on file? How fortuitous!
At 12 noon on a Thursday I got the job offer. At 8:30 am on the following Monday, I taught six hours of forestry classes, including a four hour lab on heavy equipment. Send your cards and letters care of this magazine if you think you have ever been as challenged on the job as I was that first day. I recall hearing one of the speakers in the “Women in Forestry” seminar at ISU relate her feelings upon finding herself unable to winch her vehicle out of a remote ditch. At least she didn’t have 45 young men in their late teens and early 20’s come upon the scene thinking it might be sporting to see if they could keep her stuck. You might think that I would have been relieved when the full time instructor returned from Desert Storm in eight short/long weeks. I was thrilled that they kept me on. I taught one forestry class per quarter for the next two years. I won a grant to create a public forestry presentation exploring a special timbered land form indigenous to the area (Carolina Bays). I began to play up the undergraduate minor I received at ISU. I was accepted into the Master of Business Administration degree program at the University of North Carolina. I began to teach a Human Relations course for foresters at SCC. I took a course in computer software and became addicted. I took on a computer class for forestry and recreation students. I taught canoeing trips. I tried to make myself indispensable. I rejoined SAF and joined the NC forestry Association. By this time I did have a full time teaching contract but only half of it was forestry classes. I was not the advisor for the forestry students and I did not run the program. At this point, the full time forestry instructor decided to retire early. I got the job.

I am now the sole forestry instructor for one of three forest technician programs in the state of North Carolina. Enrollment is the highest it has ever been. The largest pulp and paper mill in the world is just to the east. The largest contiguous pine plantation in the world is in my district. The oldest trees (Bald Cypress) east of the Mississippi are on the Black River where I canoe. I am hour from the beach and six hours from the mountains. I believe I fell into something good. I could stay here thirty years and never run out of things to do.

Was the situation simply fortuitous this time? I don’t think so. For the first time in my forestry career I knew what it was like to pursue a forestry job through determination and long hard work. Hours of heartfelt talks with my husband and hours of prayer inspired my efforts. God held out a present for me and I will never forget it.

“Blessings On Thee, Little Man —”
By George Wilhelm

“How did you get to where you are today?” is a conundrum presented for consideration and clarification. The answer is that I have no idea, except that I have been the recipient of many blessings along the way, which supported dedication to the task at hand and a “fruit bearing” attitude in all things. Basically that covers it, but read on.

I attended Iowa State when it seemed the goal was to take the Junior Forester’s Exam on graduation, hoping to pass in pursuit of an appointment in