

Upper Puget Sound

Bill & Erin Woods

Outside, traffic roars in the distance as cars speed past the end of the driveway. Inside, streams and ponds meander through the property – a park within a city. Bill and Erin Woods have surrounded themselves with a forested paradise in the heart of King County and its encroaching development.

Bill is in his element as we turn down a trail past a pond. The couple walks with tree nippers in hand. Erin has her binoculars. She points out where a mountain beaver has been chewing on smaller trees and where weevils have damaged the treetops. They point out the Spruce Tip Galls and a large fungus conk and talk about tree disease. A large nest box provides a home for wood ducks.



During the interview, Bill lurches from his chair at the kitchen table and waves his arms at the window as Erin raises her arms in the air shouting, “Shoo!” Bill explains the commotion in a word, “Starlings,” who appear to be dominating the bird food areas. The Woods are avid birders.

The 20 acres they purchased in 1951 showed scars of fire and partial blow down. It was last logged in 1905. Old growth stumps with board notches show how big the trees were once upon a time. The Woods cleaned and cleared sections of their land and built the home they live in today. Their home’s wall paneling is the result of hardwood trees logged from the property and milled locally. “We have a combination of alder and maple and a bit of cherry in the other room.”

“The window frames are birch.” Erin says with pride. The forest surrounding their home is equally mixed, consisting of western red cedar, Douglas fir, western hemlock and one big Sitka spruce. On inauguration day 1993, a big windstorm demolished seven acres of their forestland. Erin, “It looked like Mount St. Helens after the eruption. Of course we had a salvage logging operation that made a capital gain and then had to reforest. In reforesting, Bill put in white pine.”

The windstorm took them by surprise. Bill and Erin hadn’t planned on planting and had difficulty finding seedlings for their area. “Douglas fir is very particular as to where it grows. Each subspecies, you might say, is particular to the climate in which it grows. We didn’t want to plant trees that wouldn’t do well. Then there were areas where we knew we had root rot problems, so we planted western white pine and giant Sequoia,” Bill says with the words of an experienced woodsman.

Not having enough land to qualify for a forestland designation, the Woods rezoned in 1980, 15 of their 20 acres as “Open Space Timber Land” to reduce the tax burden. Around the time they were applying for rezoning, Bill and Erin joined the Washington Farm Forestry Association (WFFA). Dr. Hinton Baker was president. Both have been active locally and statewide, doing what they can to share information and educate the public. Erin has been the treasurer for Upper Puget Sound (UPS) since 1987. Bill is editor and publisher of “Knothole News” the UPS chapter newsletter. In 1999 they became co-secretaries for the WFFA.

Bill was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, and Erin comes from Superior, Arizona, a small mining town. They met in a singing group in Berkley, California, while attending the

University of California. Bill graduated in 1949 with a bachelor of science in physics and went on to MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he received a master's in electrical engineering. Erin received a bachelor of science in biochemistry in 1947 then worked in medical research in Boston. They married June 17, 1950, and began a search for the ideal place to live. Rapidly crossing off places they had already lived, Bill and Erin chose Washington State, where Bill took a job with Boeing as an engineer and physicist. Staying in King County, they built their home, their life, and raised two daughters.

Between work, forestry, and raising children, Bill and Erin found time for another passion in birding and bicycling. Bill, "We bicycled in Oregon, Montana, Vermont, Minnesota and Mississippi. We bicycle a lot of places. We go to Elderhostels that are having birding programs. We take our bicycles on the airplane, then we bicycle to and from where these events are being held. We have bicycled in Europe, Scandinavia, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Germany."

Bill adds, "We generally avoid mob scenes." Erin, "We go to where there are birds." The Woods did a Scandinavian bike tour to Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland. Erin, "It was fantastic. We usually go in May and June, because that's when the birds are most active and seen the most. Bill lugs all the equipment on his bicycle: the spotting scope, tripod, bird books, and binoculars." Erin chuckles, "It works fine. All I have to haul are my toiletries."

Together they have written three books: *Bicycling the Back Roads Around the Puget Sound*; *Bicycling the Back Roads of Northwest Washington*; and *Bicycling the Back Roads of Southwest Washington*, with updated versions printed regularly.

Bill points out their living room window and Erin comments, "There's a Flicker." Bill adds, "A female northern Flicker, red-shafted variety." Bill and Erin doubt the legacy of their tree farm will continue after they are gone, as both daughters have chosen urban careers as lawyers. When asked why they tree farm, their answer is simple "Lebensraum" – a German word for living space.

William Woods, June 27, 1925

Degrees in physics and electrical engineering

Erin Flanagan Woods September 12, 1925

Graduated UC Berkley 1947, degree in biochemistry

Woods Tree Farm

Treasurer Upper Puget Sound, 1987

Editor Knot hole News

WFFA Co-Secretaries, 1999