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 him and the first two of this third generation of Collins, he would revolve around trees. Truman embraced his father and grandfather’s worlds of lumbermen, entrepreneurs, and philanthropists. There was just something in their britches about your employees and they’ll return the favor 200%. About your customer and they’ll return the favor 200%. About your neighbors and they’ll return it 100%. About your community, and they’ll return it 300%. About your country, and they’ll return it 1000%. About your world, and they’ll return it 10000%. About the whole world, and you’ll make this place a better place. Truman was the third child of Everell Collins, it was the hardwoods of Pennsylvania. For his grandfather, Everell Collins, it was the giant softwoods of the West Coast.

For his father, Truman Collins, it was the giant softwoods of the West Coast. And for Truman, it was learning the value of sustainable forestry and interior 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 this case, with wildcatter, Jacob Abram Mull Jr. and a stroke of fortunate timing. He was 61 years old. Too short a life, but so very well-lived.

It can be said of Truman Collins, as of few others, that the dream worked beyond what even he could have imagined. The transaction took place in 1946. Production from the change-over averaged 18mbf. By 1952 it was up to 121mbf. But one of the lessons of Glenwood was learned again and all the lessons of timing 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, wanted, 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.

As a man, Truman was shy, quiet, reserved. He ate his toast burned and his eggs boiled firm. He raised turkeys too. He was — 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 18mbf. By 1952 it was up to 121mbf. But one of the lessons of Glenwood was learned again and all the lessons of timing of timber.

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 all it so well it would last in perpetuity.

Once again he turned to the men who had started with him in Glenwood, moved on with him to Pondosa, 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 forestslands, 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 were Elmer Goudy, George Flanagan, Wally Reed, Al Hille, Rusty Denim, Charlie Genaux, George Gerbing, J.T. McDonald, Carroll McDonald, Allie Collins, Al Wellerbreek, 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 him.

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, Cherrida 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 west plain of Plumas County, California; the Collins-Donaldson 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 limitation 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 be 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 never have had another 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.