

Theodore Vern Coffelt
March 20, 1930 – September 5, 2013

Vern Coffelt was born in Westsound on Orcas Island to Amos and Helen Smedberg Coffelt. He grew up on the Smedberg farm on Turtleback Mountain, the youngest of four brothers. The family worked the farm for a frugal and healthy livelihood, learning old world farming know how from his Grandfather John Gus “JG” Smedberg. His grandfather Smedberg was a pioneer Orcas farmer known for his prize-winning apples and pears.

Vern's grandfather and father were instrumental in getting the electric co-op started on Orcas Island. Grandfather Smedberg helped connect the Orcas Power & Light boosters with the federal Rural Electric Administration in the 1930's and Vern's father Amos was one of the original twelve signers of OPALCO's documents of formation and was on the first OPALCO Board. Vern and his brothers went with their father to visit folks around the island and try to get them to sign up for power to support the co-op.

SAmos worked on the early freight boats and ferries and died in 1942. The family was very young. The Coffelt boys were known for being an active, lively bunch having to work hard long and hard to make ends meet. They had many childhood adventures in the Westsound area. Vern and his brothers Jack, Amos (Ed) and Russel all attended grade school and high school on Orcas Island. Each of Vern's brothers went onto higher education and into successful engineering careers.

In the early 1950's, the family moved from the Smedberg place on Turtleback to the fertile Crow Valley farm. Vern stayed with his mother to work the place now known as the Coffelt Farm. Helen Coffelt passed in 1955. Vern was left with an active farm with sheep, cattle, dairy and poultry. With the livestock and hay crop to manage, Vern was faced with a full-time operation. Vern cherished having had a long and thorough farm education from the years with his Grandfather Smedberg on the Turtleback farm.

Family farms were struggling to survive in those years and Vern found it prudent to find other work for several years to support the farm, while working the farm the rest of his time. In 1960, Vern went to work full-time for Orcas Power & Light Cooperative.

In 1977, Vern and Sidney Reynolds were married and formed a life partnership and team that carried the farm to the successful operation that was recently purchased by the Land Bank and put into retail operation.

1995, after 35 years of service, Vern retired from OPALCO after becoming Line Foreman and later Operations Manager. Vern spent the rest of his life doing what he was meant and chosen to do. He seldom left the farm and put each day to his calling of working the farm. He loved producing the cleanest, highest grade of food known to man for a failing planet.

August 20, 2013 was Vern's last day on his beloved farm doing the chores and daily work to fulfill his calling. During the night, Vern suffered a crippling stroke and was airlifted to the hospital in Bellingham and then to a hospice in Fairhaven where he rested and was tended to by Sidney and visited by family and friends.

Vern earned his final rest after two weeks in constant care of Sidney in hospice. He passed on to his reward on September 5, 2013.

Vern is survived by his wife Sidney; sons Tim and John (Sara); grandchildren Brandon, Kendra, Jordan and Rayna; and numerous nieces and nephews. Vern was famous for being the most favorite uncle.

Vern will be remembered for his legendary integrity, wide and frequent smile and his wonderful, keen and sharp sense of humor. He had a remarkable ability to shift words to have a clearer meaning with a twinkle.