

Howard C. Arnold

1913, Fruitland-1996, Atwater

Livingston High School, 1931

Central California Commercial College, (4C's) Fresno, 1934

Married Wilma Combs 1942, Glen, Jerry, Bill, Larry

First Job: Wood Fruit Company, Atwater

Howard and Ruth graduated from Livingstone High School in 1931. He was a year older, but she had skipped a grade. In his yearbook, he wrote his Prophecy Thirty Years Hence: "Still shooting rubber bands, only now at his wife across the breakfast table."

Howard and Ruth both attended 4 C's (Central California Commercial College) in Fresno. He met a bookkeeping student, Wilma Combs, from Denair, CA, and he fell in love with her. Wilma was the youngest of seven children, and her mother did not want her to marry. Instead, she was to stay home and take care of mother. He asked her to marry him, and she said no.

Howard graduated around 1936 and moved back to the Arnold ranch. He worked for Pop and trimmed peaches for Wood Fruit Company. He bought a ranch with 32 acres and a house at 5511 North Stein Road, close to the Arnold ranch. The house had a windmill to pump water up into his tank house. One day was hot and still, with no wind. He came home hot and dirty and could not clean up. The next day he bought an electric pump.

Wilma was working as a bookkeeper for Cortez Growers. They continued to date and she still refused to marry him. He decided he would ask one last time and if she refused, he would move on. She said yes and they drove to Fresno and got married in 1942 by a Justice of the Peace with no family invited. She moved into his house and never left.

Pop farmed 15 acres at 8245 Fruitland and purchased 15 acres across the street and leased 20 acres from his mother-in-law. In 1940, Howard took over Pop's acres and grew the ranch to 300 acres. Howard was a member of the Farm Bureau, on the Atwater School Board and active in the Atwater Methodist Church. He led the 4H group with Ken Miyamoto from the Cortez Growers Association, and they led the kids in farm projects.

During WWII, farmers were needed to supply food to the troops and Howard was busy drying peaches. Many Japanese immigrants had farm land in Livingstone, Denair and Cressey. The Arnolds knew these families and their children who went to Livingstone High School with the Arnold children. They had formed the Cortez Growers Association and belonged to the Cortez Buddhist Temple. During the Japanese internment, the Cortez Growers Association hired Mr. Momberg to set up a trust to lease their farm lands. Howard and his brother Frank took some acers. Howard's sister Mae and her husband, Avery moved into the home of Sam Mayeda. Avery was the field foreman. The Japanese were taken to the Merced Fairgrounds and were taken to camps in Colorado. When they returned, they were given their land back

and they had money from the lease of their land and profits from their crop sales. Wilma was working for Cortez Growers at the time. She was honored in 1980 for her service during the internment.

Howard had four boys, Glen, Jerry and twins Bill and Larry. The boys worked the farm every day. They drove the tractor when their feet could reach the pedals, at about 8 or 9 years old. They drove the pickup on the ranch at 12 or 13. They were driving loads on the roads by 14 or 15.

Howard bought a used 1943 Buick right after WWII, when newer cars were difficult to find. Next, he bought a used 1956 Chevy station wagon. He finally bought a new 1960 DeSoto four-door sedan.

Before he was married, Howard took camping trips to hunt and fish. Since he had four boys, he didn't want to tent cabin, so he bought a travel trailer and took them camping in Yosemite. Glen graduated from Atwater High School in 1963 and was leaving for U. C. Davis. Howard thought that they should take one last trip as a family. Wilma wanted the boys to see Washington D.C.

Trips were planned around the irrigation and harvest cycle. Howard watered the night before the trip and he had three weeks until the next irrigation cycle. They drove the DeSoto cross-country with three in the front seat and three in the back. They took the northern route and the southern route on return. They stopped along the way and visited relatives and friends from Castle Air Force Base who used to live in Atwater. As soon as they got home, Howard started the next irrigation cycle. In 1965, Howard bought a cabin at Bass Lake and started a tradition of having Thanksgiving at the cabin. That tradition is still going on with his grandkids.

Bill and Glen took over the ranch in 1979 and they continued to grow the ranch to 900 acres. They farmed land by leasing it and paying the owner a percentage of the harvest profits. They purchased land with loans on credit through the banks. Frequently farmers received financing from the landholder that they worked with.

Migrant farm workers cycled through the area and used word-of-mouth to find jobs. They were Hispanic or from the Dust Bowl. The farmers could speak Spanish and provided workers with health and safety breaks. Farmers didn't have migrant housing for them.

As Bill and Glen took on the operation of ranch, they formed a corporation. Howard had a workshop to repair farming equipment. He started a hobby of welding animal sculptures out of shovels and other discarded tools. Howard and Wilma had seven grandchildren and they enjoyed coming to the ranch for watermelon-spitting contests. Howard refurbished Pop's first tractor and let the kids climb on it. They enjoyed letting the grandkids explore the farm.

Pop raised 5 kids on 30 acres.

Howard raised 4 kids on 300 acres.

Glen and Bill raised two families on 900 acres

Bill's son Craig is now taking on the Arnold Farms Business.

By Barbara Gill Salerno with information from Bill Arnold January 2024