

Biography of Loy Sullivan

Loy Sullivan was born on September 28, 1928, on his parents' farm about three miles south of present-day Highfill, Arkansas. His grandfather Frank Sullivan had come into the area from Boston, Arkansas, and settled in the late 1890s at the Logan Community near Osage Creek. His grandfather built a dam and watermill there and ran a gristmill and sawmill with the water power. Later, he bought a farm nearer Highfill and moved there.

Loy's parents were W. B. "Buster" Sullivan and Maco Pitts Sullivan. His mother had lived in Madison County where the Pitts family farmed vegetables and operated a small canning factory. Very interestingly, they, along with neighbors, operated a small coal mine for fuel for family and community use. Loy's grandfather bought eighty acres near Highfill and gave forty acres to Loy's father and the rest to his uncle. Loy was the middle of three boys born on this farm. Roy Richard was the oldest and Denver the youngest of the three brothers. Sadly, both brothers have passed away. Loy's youth was spent doing all the usual farm chores one would expect for the Depression and World War II years.

At the age of sixteen, Loy left home and ventured into the wheat fields in Kansas. The wheat harvest was done by hand at the time. After a season with the wheat harvest, he was employed by the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad in Oklahoma. He worked with a crew "raising track," which was just what the term implies. The workers lifted the rails and ties and built up the bed of the track.

At the age of eighteen, Loy left home for Oregon to obtain employment in the logging industry. When he arrived, he was asked to join a group fighting fires in the national forest. He signed on and began working the fire lines to contain the fires. He liked that job because it paid well. The crews worked twenty-four on and twenty-four off. This meant that after a normal eight hours of work he would be paid time and a half for the next eight hours and double pay for the other eight hours. After two weeks at this, he was able to purchase his first automobile, a 1935 Pontiac.

When he did gain employment with a logging company, he would work for the summer months until the rains came, and he would then return to Highfill for the winters. The logging involved cutting down fir and cedar trees and the huge sugar pines. The pines were huge trees which could attain a girth of nine feet. It was the type logging most of us only know about from photographs and television programs.

In 1950 he married Sue Epperson, who was also born and raised at Highfill. As of this writing they have been married for fifty-eight years. Their children are Kathy Genson, Kenny Sullivan, and Mary Jeck. Loy and Sue have nine grandchildren and four great grandchildren. They are lucky in that all their extended family live close by.

After marrying, Loy and Sue went back to the logging forests of Oregon for a year. In 1951 they moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where Loy worked in the Kansas City, Kansas, General Motors plant building Buick, Oldsmobile, and Pontiac automobiles. In 1954 they moved back to the farm at Highfill.

Loy had been working the family farm and sawmill from time to time with his father, but he now began in earnest. He sawed lumber and built chicken houses and began raising chickens for the processing plants. Chickens brought about two cents a pound. He kept milk cows and sold milk for

about eight cents per gallon. He grew tomatoes and sold them for as much as \$14 a ton. It was hard work to make a living at those prices. The chicken plants culled many chickens and charged them against the growers' pay. On one occasion when he had received sick baby chickens, he was paid \$6.75 for 20,000 chickens. And too, the canning company dropped the pay for tomatoes to as low as \$8 per ton. The price paid wouldn't even pay the cost of hiring pickers much of the time. In 1961, he sold the farm and moved to Gentry for a few months and then to Highfill where he sawed lumber and built his present home.

He moved his sawmill to Highfill and began a prosperous business cutting timber, buying logs, and sawing lumber. His main sawing involved his personal selection of the best logs to be sawed into lumber for cabinet framing. He had a deal with the Whillock Furniture Company of Springdale. The Sullivan mill also cut railroad ties during this time. Ties were selling at \$4 each, and for a while he could earn as much as \$300 per day. All this sawmill work paid well until the political climate and economic factors brought inflation and the tie business and furniture business went into decline. The contract for furniture framing ended and ties were selling for \$1.50 each. Price went below cost, and he had to lay off his workers. He began working the mill by himself at this point.

About 1973, he had built a kiln to dry lumber. He now specialized in providing the best kiln-dried lumber available for the market. Other than the logs he cut and sawed into lumber, most of the top grade lumber for drying was bought from mills in several states, a lot from as far away as Texas. He was somewhat forced into the long-distance purchases because larger sawmills began contracting with the smaller Northwest Arkansas mills for their lumber, thus cutting his local supply of lumber for drying and reselling. This entire process remained very profitable, but in 2000, health issues forced Loy to start scaling back on his work activities. He gradually shut down his sawmill and kiln. His sawmill remains in excellent operating condition. The electric motors hum quietly and the saw blade shines, but no logs are cut. These days, Loy spends his time in his shop and following his other passion, fishing.

This Tired Iron Newsletter is not the only claim to fame for Loy. He has gained great renown from a full-page article, with photographs, about him in the Morning News (Wednesday, March 18, 1981) and in an excellent four-page article, with lots of pictures, in the national magazine Creative Woodworks & Crafts (February 1995). Both articles give excellent accounts of Loy's expertise in sawmilling.

Loy joined Tired Iron when the club shows were held west of Gentry at the Rose of Sharon property. He helped setup the sawmill at the site. His main interest in the club is with the club sawmill. He likes old tractors and farm equipment also. He has a 1948 Ford 8N, which has been in his family since new. He previously owned at least three antique tractors which are now owned by Tired Iron members. We give special thanks to Loy for all the work he has done with the Tired Iron sawmill.

