Countless stories come to mind as I reflect upon the 37 wonderful years I served as coach of the Finger Lakes Woodsmen Team. Most recently, 12 former woodsmen from the mid-80s invited me to their sixth reunion, this time on Sue Cook ’85 Juve’s property in northeastern Oregon. Capturing the experience of reunion adequately in words remains an unfulfilled challenge… but let me try again.

Though much of our global culture seems swept up in the unsustainable lunacy of accumulating stuff and status, a reunion of close friends reminds us with joyful clarity what is really is important. To love and to be loved follows immediately after obtaining minimal food, clothing, shelter and a sense of purpose in the hierarchy of human needs.

Travel to western Oregon from the airport in Spokane, Wash., carried the eastern contingent of the group through spectacular territory – rich rolling agricultural fields of wheat, lentils and garbanzo beans with snow-specked mountain ranges on the western horizon. The highway plunged into the Snake River gorge… winding down across and back up the 2500-foot canyon from Washington, through Idaho and then Oregon, vastly expanding my memory bank of incredible places. Our destination at the foot of the Wallowa Mountain Range, between the towns of Enterprise and Joseph, was surrounded by lush, spray-irrigated fields of forage grasses and alfalfa.

I write to celebrate the lives of those who gathered in this place at this time to share experiences.

Our host, Susan Cook Juve ’84,85, living near Enterprise, Ore., followed her calling as a naturalist in Isle Royal, Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks then moved to Oregon, taking a position with the U.S. Forest Service for six years. Here, she met her husband, an accomplished potter, and settled into the local culture as a dental hygienist and vocalist for a most colorful Home Made Jam musical group.
Steve Kozlowski ’85, now living in Laramie, Wyo., with his wife and five children, graduated from FLCC, obtained a B.S. degree from Colorado State University and works as a fish and wildlife biologist for the Forest Service. One of his passions is disc golf – his oldest son won the 2008 disc golf world championship in the junior division.

Jodi Bush Grimmett ’86, lives with her husband and two sons in Rochester, Wash. Jodi went on to Colorado State University and completed degrees in wildlife and fisheries biology. For most of her career she has been involved with endangered species issues, working with the spotted owl, gray wolf, bald eagle and grizzly bear, among others. Currently, Jodi is the program manager responsible for listing and recovery of endangered species throughout Washington state.

Ellen Weber Jones ’84,’85, resides on a small farm in Buckeye, Colo., with her husband, son and daughter. Her degree in wildlife biology, fisheries biology and range management from Colorado State University has landed her in a number of outdoor positions with the Colorado Division of Wildlife and U.S. Forest Service. Currently she is working for Colorado State University as part of the equine sciences/reproduction team. Ellen and her kids raise prize- winning 4-H chickens as well as dairy and beef cattle and harvest 45 to 60 tons of alfalfa hay per year.

Robert Vermey ’85, now from Elk City, Idaho, earned a degree in forestry from CSU and has worked as a silviculturalist for the Forest Service since 1990. Perhaps his greatest extracurricular passion lies in working with a large handful of faithful canine friends.

Bill Dean ’84 lives with his wife and family in Bend, Ore., and has, since his graduation from CSU, settled into work as a field manager for the Bureau of Land Management involved in wild and scenic rivers, wildlife and botanical and archeological issues. Bill bow hunts avidly, kayaks and delights in sharing time with his kids.

Kathy Chociet McFarland ’86 and her husband live in their timber frame home in Moran, Wyo. Following her graduation from CSU, Kathy has enjoyed a series of positions in Wyoming engaged in elk and bison research as well as extensive wilderness trail maintenance. Kathy now works for the National Park Service, as the property manager for Grand Teton National Park. She and her family take horseback expeditions into the Wyoming backcountry.

Joe Doucette’86 lives with his family in Bellingham, Wash. His degree in forest ecology from SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry carried him through positions with the Appalachian Mountain Club, fisheries research in Alaska to a teaching position in a Waldorf School. Currently, Joe seeks a graduate degree in education administration with intent to land a position as a principal.

Christine VanGee ’87 must be granted sparkplug status as the primary initiator of the series of non-wedding related woodsmen reunions, starting in the summer of 2000. Living now in Marion, N.Y., Christine has been deeply involved in equestrian instruction and horse training first on her parent’s farm in Phelps and currently on her own farm. In 1994, Christine earned World Champion underhand chopping status at the first international Women’s Championships held in Hayward, Wisc.
Jeff Towner ’86 lives in Marion, N.Y. with his spouse, Christine VanGee. Following his graduation from CCFL, Jeff served as assistant ranger for the Warren Cutler Boy Scout Reservation and later as a nature interpreter for Hawk Mountain in Kempton, Pa. For a number of years, Jeff served as superintendent of the Executive South golf course in Henrietta. Jeff, too, is a lover of the out-of-doors with a passion for lumberjacking and enduro dirt bike racing.

Kathy Cogswell ’87 lives with her husband in Jamesville, N.Y. Following her graduation from CCFL, Kathy served in a series of positions as an interpretive naturalist. Currently, she serves as an analyst for the SRC Corporation, compiling and analyzing research reports on toxic chemicals and their potential impact on human and environmental health. Kathy retains her fondness for outdoor activity, including hiking and canoeing.

Dan Phelps ’86 of Webster, N.Y. participated on the woodsmen team with many of those mentioned above. Dan joined the mid-80s Woodsmen Reunion for the first time this summer in Oregon as a consequence of his activity as Jeff Towner’s lumberjack partner. Dan obtained a criminal justice degree from SUNY Cortland and has been involved in land survey activities related to timber rights. He served in the Army National Guard and recently retired from his position with the Monroe County Sheriff’s Department where he was involved in the enforcement of toxic materials laws.

The tradition that started in 1994 with the marriage celebration of Jodi Bush and Dave Grimmett will continue! Already, we all look forward to the next adventure in Moran, Wyo. that Kathy and Mack McFarland intend to host in 2015.