

Thanksgiving: Remembering those who trusted, encouraged and inspired us

by Ted Bailey

This Thanksgiving I recalled and was thankful that so many helped me on my way to become a (now-retired) professional wildlife biologist. These are folks who helped me build confidence to pursue a career I never dreamed was possible when I was young. Perhaps it is a sign of growing older that this holiday is now (for me) a good time for reflection.

I think of those in the military who trusted that I knew what I was doing when I worked on aircraft costing millions of dollars, and of the lives of the aircrews that depended on my mechanical skills and knowledge. I think of two roommates in the military who in the evenings took out their slide rules and opened their textbooks on differential and integral calculus so that they could eventually obtain their degrees in electrical engineering. It was they who encouraged me to think of college and led me to earn a year's worth of college credits while in the military that worked to my advantage later.

I think of my late parents who could not financially help me in college when I returned from the military, but who offered me words of encouragement that my efforts would somehow be financially rewarded. I am thankful for a wife who delayed her higher education goals so that I could obtain mine.

I am thankful that a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit leader encouraged me to continue on to graduate school with the promise that "I will find you a fellowship so that you won't have to worry about the cost." I am thankful that yet another Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit leader obtained other fellowships for me, allowed me to choose a research project of my interest (bobcat ecology and

social behavior) in Idaho, and then found funding and trusted me to complete research projects on wolverines in Montana and African leopards in the Republic of South Africa.

I think of a colleague who was influential in my coming to Alaska and later a refuge manager who, unknown to me, went beyond the call of normal duty to hire me in a new position that opened up numerous opportunities for wildlife research and management.

I am also thankful for those who inspired me by their writings—"Walden" by Henry David Thoreau, "A Sand County Almanac" by Aldo Leopold, and "Of Men and Marshes" by Paul Errington. And those who inspired me by their efforts, some of whom I was fortunate to eventually meet—Durwood Allen's research on wolves on Isle Royale, George Schaller's studies on mountain gorillas, tigers, lions, and Himalayan and Tibetan wildlife, and my advisor and mentor Maurice Hornocker's studies on grizzly bears and cougars and later on wolverines, river otters and Siberian tigers.

Some of these people, including my parents and wife, have already passed on. But they all helped me in ways they probably never knew, and for that I am most thankful.

Dr. Ted Bailey retired from the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge where he was the supervisory wildlife biologist for many years. He has lived on the Kenai Peninsula for over 38 years and still maintains a keen interest in its wildlife and natural history. Find more information about the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge at <http://kenai.fws.gov> or <http://www.facebook.com/kenainationalwildliferefuge>.