



Steve Tool/Chieftain

Ken and Patti Coreson next to a Creating Memories van headed for Portland. "In no way could I do Creating Memories without Patti. She's my rock," Ken Coreson said.

'Unsung Hero' Ken Coreson has made a life of providing memories for others

by Steve Tool

Wallowa County Chieftain

Anyone who hears Ken Coreson's story knows he and his wife Patti live a life of service. Outside of 40-plus seasons working the fishing boats of Alaska, he's built churches and pastored them. He's offered counseling services to other pastors and even worked producing films.

Coreson is winner of the 2014 "Unsung Heroes" award from the Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce for his leadership role in forming and sustaining the local charity "Creating Memories." He isn't the kind of person who spends a lot of time thinking about awards or how to win them — he's too busy helping both disabled children and adults create memories by connecting with nature. The calling for what Coreson describes as his true life's work came to him through a surreal spiritual experience he had as a fisherman in Alaska — an incident that affects him as profoundly now as it did some 45 years ago.

As Coreson stood on a bluff overseeing some fishing boat nets in the ocean, he looked several hundred yards up the beach and saw six or eight seagulls dive-bombing a small black object moving on the beach. As the object struggled in his direction, Coreson realized it was a raven with a badly broken wing.

"Those seagulls were trying to kill that raven, and they'd knock him off his feet, but he'd struggle back up. And I could sense just how hopeless and tired he was. I was awash in sympathy for him," Coreson said.

At the same time, Coreson noted two ravens in the sky that swooped down and landed on each side of the struggling raven and began fighting off the seagulls while guiding the wounded raven into a pile of driftwood before flying away. "I know he died in there, but at least he died in comfort. I've never seen a disabled person since then who I haven't stopped and told them about our program," Coreson said.

The raven story figured later on in Coreson's life as he learned of the Boy Scout camp at Wallowa Lake and went for a visit. After parking and looking down toward what's called the Driftwood Inn, Coreson noted a totem pole topped by a raven with a broken wing. He knew it was a sign. "I put my heart into putting this thing back together and I know that God will help us be successful with it," he said. Today, the totem pole is restored, as is Karen's Cabin at the camp, and the Driftwood Inn is on the road to restoration.

Creating Memories now has a 50-year lease with the Boy Scouts for the camp with an option to renew for another 50 years, all for the price of \$1. Buying the camp outright is another option on the table.

Creating Memories didn't exist as a nonprofit until recently. Coreson originally financed his no-name philanthropic efforts with proceeds from his fishing career and other endeavors until he gave up the fishing three years ago at the behest