

Reflections on 25 years of The Forest Steward Guild

Written by Jeffrey Smith

As I sit and write this several days from my 60th birthday, it is hard to believe that it's been more than 25 years since I met a bunch of forest stewards at the Biltmore Estate in Ashville, North Carolina. That first gathering was one of the highlights of my forestry career. Meeting and interacting with foresters who were passionate about their work-with a "forest first" approach reinforced my beliefs and have supported them ever since. Taking part in the now standard "forest circle" that begins most Guild Gatherings was humbling. Listening to others speak of their heartfelt connections to the forest and how they approached their forestry practice was eye-opening. I went from feeling somewhat alone in my beliefs and philosophy to having a community of forest practitioners that I could share ideas with and learn from.

At the completion of this first meeting, armed with a name for our organization and energized by the "spark" that was lit, my traveling companions and I were not quite ready for the long drive back to New England. After consulting with Bill Alexander, the forest manager at the Biltmore, we headed to the 3,800-acre Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest to see what Bill described as some "very large trees." Indeed, there was a portion of the Memorial Forest that contained old growth. Forests with large old trees have a spiritual quality that tends to draw people who care deeply about them. So, it was not too surprising when we ran into other folks who had attended the meeting as well. I do not remember everyone who was there, but I do recall running into Bob Perschel and Linwood Gill wandering about. Both became good friends and I consider them to be among the best examples of the kind of people with integrity and passion that are attracted to the Forest Stewards Guild.

Which brings me to my final thoughts about what makes the Guild so special to me. It is the people who I have met and friends that I have made that I would not have had a chance to meet otherwise. This list is too long to include here but is extensive and includes people throughout the United States and in Canada. While some are no longer with us, and some I have lost track of, they all remain with me – even if I cannot always remember their names. I hope that in the next 25 years I have the chance to meet more (especially some of the newer members), as I consider Forest Stewards Guild members to be some of the finest people I know.



Shown in this photo: Bob Perschel, Linwood Gill, Charlie Moreno, Dan Stepanauskas, and Charlie Koch