

Greg Buck and Serendipity



Buck and friends, "On The Road Again."

Serendipity is the effect by which one accidentally discovers something fortunate, especially while looking for something else entirely.

During a conversation with Greg Buck, in advance of writing this article, I was struck both by his easy manner and his humility. Indeed, Buck is a gentle man, and yet has lived a life of extraordinary diversity and discovery, driven by a love of life, a compassion for his peers, a willingness to try new things - and the talent to excel at them.

As President of Productivity Inc., Buck is most likely known in the Minnesota manufacturing community for his long-term leadership role within this company. His beginnings at Productivity came not through professional connections but through his church. Dan Stenoien, founder of Productivity Inc., was a chaperone at one of Buck's high school church choir events. Years later, once Buck had completed four years at St. Olaf

College and two more years earning his MBA at Columbia University, Stenoien found Buck again and offered him a job.

Buck has been with Productivity since 1981, where he began as controller and ultimately became president as Stenoien and his immediate predecessor, Jim Krantz, moved on. His comments about work focus not on his own efforts but on those around him. For example, he speaks easily of the experts in Productivity's various departments, painting himself as a facilitator for others' success.

Buck's quiet exterior belies his special effervescence, glimpsed in a ready smile. What a joy for life! My favorite story during our time together was of a season in Buck's life during his college years - actually one whole

year in which he took off on a grand adventure: 1974. Buck and two friends, Roger Heegaard and Charlie Grist, together bought a "step van" and spent a year exploring the country. They herded cattle in South Dakota and Wyoming; dragged Christmas trees out of the Olympia Mountains in Washington; lived and worked on H.P. Skogland's ranch in Cody, Wyoming; worked on a dairy farm in North Carolina. They also explored cities, working for a month in San Francisco as bicycle messengers. At one point this trio even decided to go on a three-day fast, "just to see what it felt like," Buck explains with a self-effacing grin and a shrug.

Buck's wife Lisa has a similar heart for adventure. In fact, they met while both were exploring the world. They met during a semester program through St. Olaf in Jerusalem, living in the Old City for four months. Ultimately, they married in 1979, and today have two grown children, Paul and Madeline (Maddy). The entire family will have become St. Olaf graduates by the time Maddy completes her degree. "It just worked out that way," comments Buck. As the children grow up and move away, Greg and Lisa's adventurous natures will send them packing again. They enjoy visiting lake places and traveling together. Currently, they are scheduling a trip to Australia through St. Olaf's "Lifelong Learning Program." As Buck puts it, "It's a different kind of trip - staying in YMCAs or tents, but with the opportunity to see, hike, and study the different environments including gorges, rainforests, and the Great Barrier Reef, under the guidance of a former biology professor. Lisa has always wanted to explore that part of the world from more than a pure tourist perspective."

When asked to reflect on life choices that ultimately have shaped his life, Buck first goes back to his four months in Jerusalem: "The biggest benefit for me of that time in my life was to see the United States from a different perspective, from the outside," says Buck. "I am so proud to be an American, but now I better understand our responsibility as well - to do the right thing, to be the best leader we can be, to treat people and other countries as fairly as possible, to have the highest ethics and never waver... Relationships are rarely black and white, a reality made quite clear to me during my time in Jerusalem."

And serendipity? Well... Buck found life while he was on that year-long road trip, when he may have been looking for something else entirely. To illustrate, at one point in their trip they were driving through North Carolina. As their van neared a small town on the outskirts of Raleigh, they saw a truck broken down on the side of the road. Ralph Reich, a resident of the nearby Moravian community, was having car trouble. So these three college kids, with their long hair and well-traveled van, offered their help. Sure they figured this year-long journey was all about them and their own adventures, and yet they paused to help Mr. Reich. This assistance led to their short term job opportunity at a nearby dairy farm and a new outlook on their way out: the local newspaper ran an article about how these three college kids were a miracle that appeared just as Ralph Reich needed help.

Now that's serendipity. Maybe this trip was more about the people they met and served after all? Greg Buck seems to feel that way about his life in general... and he wasn't even looking for it. [PM](#)

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