

Plinking, Hunting and Competing as a Junior Shooter for the first time

By: Raymond Walters

While it has been a long time since anyone has called me a junior shooter or junior anything for that matter, those first experiences plinking, hunting, and competing are as clear and vivid in my mind as if they had happened yesterday. It seems as though I have had a gun in my hands for as long as I can remember. One of the earliest photos I have of my brother and myself shows me at about age two dressed in overalls, sitting on my grandpa's knee out in the yard at his farm holding a toy double-barreled shotgun just waiting for the quail to come by. As early as five years of age my father would take me out in the Idaho desert shooting cans, rocks, and makeshift targets teaching me the rudimentary principles of safe gun handling, marksmanship, and hunting skills.

In the early 1950s my dad sold and serviced Massey Harris farm equipment, primarily tractors, mowers, hay bailers, and combines. His work often took him to the dry-land farming areas southeast of our home in Meridian, Idaho and in those early years, before I was in school and during the summers after I started elementary school, he would take me with him on service calls to the high desert country. The dual purpose served by taking me with him was to give my mom some much needed non-kid down time and to give me another opportunity to help thin the over population of black-tailed Jack rabbits which were the bane of every dry-land farmer in the area. Each evening as we drove back home, dad would find some old wagon trail headed out through the sage brush and I would prop up his old Remington Model-12A pump rifle out the rear window of his four-door Keiser and knock off Jack rabbits until my ration of

.22 shells was exhausted and then we would hit the highway for home.

Many happy childhood days were spent at my paternal grandfather's farm thinning the English Sparrow and Starling population around his feed lot, first with my Daisy Red Rider BB gun, then a Benjamin .177 caliber air rifle, and finally with a variety of .22 rimfire rifles. Rocks, cans, and more than a few bottles at the farm dump site were gunned down by my brother and me as we exercised the privilege afforded to us by our dad and grandpa who always saw to it that we had plenty of ammo for the day's or weekend's shooting. The competition between my older brother and me to see who could shoot the best, fastest, and most was always fierce to say the least. Organized competition as we know it today was nearly unheard of in rural southwest Idaho at that time but we managed to develop our own brand of competition, in brotherly love of course.

I consider myself very fortunate and blessed to have been raised by parents who didn't just tolerate, but encouraged shooting and hunting and forming in me a basic love for firearms and the shooting sports that while the direction it has taken me has varied, has never diminished or faded. The lessons I learned first from my dad and grandfathers and later from the military and NRA instructor courses I have taken have served me well and helped me grow and mature. And interestingly enough, I am still learning. The path walked by well trained shooters and hunters is one that has been trod by many before us and will be followed, hopefully, by many others. Shooting, hunting, competing, and collecting all build character and can lead to a lifetime of enjoyment and satisfaction.



The Joy of Plinking

By: Marshall Hopper

When talking about plinking, let's first define the term. Plinking is recreational shooting. Plinking is practicing your shooting techniques. Plinking is spending quality time with a youngster teaching him or her to shoot their first BB gun. Plinking is target practicing. Plinking is steadyng on an old tin can with your favorite .22 rimfire. Plinking is enjoying the outdoors and the beauty Mother Nature blessed us with and the freedom given to us by our forefathers to enjoy the company of an old single-action Colt and all the joys that come from shooting it. The truth is, "plinking" may have a different definition for each of us.

One of my fondest memories as a young boy growing up in the Mississippi Delta was the walks I used to take with my father in the woods plinking away at various targets from tree knots to pine cones to walnuts, shooting his nickel plated High Standard Double-Nine revolver or the old Colt my grandfather had given him. Sometimes dad would let me bring along an old single-shot Winchester bolt-action .22 my grandfather had given me. Now that was my favorite. I could strike a match with that old gun at 20 yards four out of five shots.

I know several young shooters who like to dress in their cowboy gear, strap on their holster rigs, and ride through the desert just reliving the feeling their ancestors must have had as they settled this vast open country shooting snakes and varmints of all sizes.

For the beginner, plinking is definitely the most enjoyable and affordable way to get the practice needed to become proficient with handguns as well as long guns.

As for the joys of plinking, there are definitely too many to list or define. Plinking is a shooting past time that can be shared with friends, young people, old people, relatives, strangers, and on and on.



Those same plinking guns can also be great hunting firearms as well. The same guns we shot for recreation we also depended on to feed our family. That Double-Nine put many a squirrel in the pot for mom to make dumplings with. That same Winchester .22 harvested many rabbits, squirrels, raccoons, small deer, and hogs.

Plinking can be a lot of fun if done safely. My daughter Candice when younger really enjoyed that same old Winchester .22 bolt-action and the skills she developed while plinking later helped her win the Idaho State Junior Cowboy Action Championship. Candice gave me a grandson a few years ago and I have to admit I can hardly wait to take that little feller out plinking, hunting that first squirrel, and just enjoying his company and the countryside.

Always practice safe shooting habits while plinking and treat all firearms as though they are loaded. Even while plinking, never point your firearm at anything that you don't intend to destroy.

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By: Raymond Walters

Firearms of one sort or another were always a part of our home. Growing up in the 1950s and 1960s was a whole lot different than it is today. It is interesting to reflect on the differences between child rearing and family life then and now. Parents didn't have to worry about where Junior was every minute of every day. During the summer in our neighborhood all the kids played outside all day. Only rules were, "Don't get into trouble

The Family Hunting Experience

and be home in time for supper." Lunch was usually provided when we were hungry enough to come in.

Television consisted of three channels that were mostly taken up with local broadcasts, variety shows like Ed Sullivan, and best of all, Westerns. Mom and dad didn't have to worry about the kids seeing anything "R" rated because first off, there was no rating system and second, the programming was such that there was no need for a rating system. Not a single swear word, naked lady, or gore and blood murder scene.

Dad worked and mom stayed at home and raised the kids and took care of the chores. Life was simple and good. But there was another major difference seen in many of the homes of that day, not just small rural towns like I grew up in but in most homes, at least out here in the West. That big difference was that firearms were not feared nor hidden and locked up as they seem to have to be today. Shoot, I never even laid eyes on a gun safe until after I was married and having kids of my own. Didn't have any mass neighborhood murders or school massacres anywhere that I can remember, but then again my friends and I feared our parents and respected the law, and early on had a pretty strong sense of right and wrong pounded into our heads.

Still, in our house firearms were the norm, they were stored where they were completely and easily accessible and, interestingly enough, were primarily used for recreation and hunting, not home protection. Yup, hunting as a family sport and adventure was a huge part of my upbringing and that of most of my friends too. And when I say family I mean the whole outfit at times and others just the men folk. My dad was primarily a deer and pheasant hunter and we went on many outings to my grandfather's farm for pheasants and the mountains of central Idaho for deer and elk. Some of my fondest memories are of those trips and so, when I started a family of my own, the natural evolution was to take my wife and kids to the mountains with me. First it was just my beautiful bride and me. She had already made a number of one-day deer hunting trips with me before we were married. In fact, we spent part of our honeymoon hunting mule deer on the Middle Fork of the Boise River. By our first anniversary, I had purchased a new Remington hunting rifle for her and that fall she shot her first buck. As the kids started coming along, things slowed a little in the family hunting department. But as soon as we could, we were in the old camper and headed to the woods. Fall is the most beautiful time imaginable in the mountains and that is where we could be found many weekends each autumn.

The lure was not just the hunting but the beauty of the woods and streams, fishing the creeks and rivers, and spending what now carries the trendy title of "quality time" around the camp fire with each other. All three of our children learned to shoot air rifles and later .22 rifles and handguns while on these trips. Our children, now grown with families of their own, tell us how much they enjoyed those times together.

The family hunting experience is what you make it. But to me, both as a youngster and as a parent, those were some of the best of times. It is something everyone should try at least once because once you try it, you'll be hooked.

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Hunting with Traditional Firearms

By: Marshall Hopper

When you think about hunting traditional firearms must be a consideration. Man has survived decades of winters depending on traditional firearms to feed his family. There is no better feeling than harvesting an animal with a traditional firearm: a muzzleloader, a single-shot long-range black powder cartridge rifle, or lever-gun. These types of firearms, in keeping with tradition, allow for good fair chase hunting and require the hunter to develop his or her shooting skills as well as solid hunting and tracking skills. When all of these talents and firearms are applied to a successful hunt, it has to bring back memories of one's childhood when the simplest things brought the most pleasure. My fondest hunting memory is of a cold February morning in 1969. I was about 10 years old and my grandfather was taking me squirrel hunting. We had gotten up early and loaded his double barrel muzzleloading shotgun. Just after daylight I had my first squirrel in the bag. By noon we had a total of eight squirrels and one cotton tail that made the mistake of running across the ditch I was covering. From that day forward I developed a love for the muzzleloader. The next fall I harvested my first whitetail with a .45 caliber Hawken.

Needless to say, I may be a little bias when it comes to traditional firearms. The muzzleloader is not my only passion. I enjoy hunting with leverguns as well as the long-range black powder cartridge rifles. One of my biggest dreams is to someday have the opportunity to hunt an American Buffalo with a traditional firearm, preferably with my 1873 model Springfield Trapdoor .45-70 loaded with a black powder cartridge.

Many traditionalist big game hunters prefer the single-shot long-range black powder cartridge rifles for their accuracy and dependability.

The passion and exhilaration of hunting with traditional firearms gives you the opportunity to relive those formative years in which the firearm represents as well as the commitment to practicing and persistence required to complete a successful hunt.

This experience when shared with a junior shooter can only help in continuing the traditions of our grandfathers and forefathers, but it also fosters an appreciation for the traditional firearm and hunting traditions on which this great country was founded. I took my youngest daughter Candice on her first deer hunt with an old Winchester Model '94 .30-30 caliber levergun that will keep my safe warm until I can pass it on to my grandson. When my grandson Grayson was born, the first firearm I purchased was a Thompson Center .50 caliber carbine. I look forward to the day when, like my grandfather, I can take him on his first muzzleloader hunt.

There are far too many "traditional firearms" to even try to list in this article and many have been lost to age over the years or are no longer in shooting condition. Thankfully, several companies over the past 10 years or so have reproduced many of the most popular models to give us an opportunity to keep the tradition alive.

In closing, I would ask that in an effort to keep traditional firearms hunting alive, don't hesitate to take a junior with you



on your next hunt. Teach him or her respect for the firearm, as well as the game, and feed their curious minds the right stuff that will instill safe hunting and shooting practices. They will appreciate it, practice it, and learn a little history in the process.

These things can only help keep our traditions and heritage alive for generations to come.



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The First Experience



By: Raymond Walters

What was your first shooting experience? Do you remember the excitement that you felt as you celebrated that first pull of the trigger? Like a rite of passage into the mysterious world of manhood (or I guess womanhood for you ladies). For me it was at my grandpa's farm north of Meridian, Idaho. Dad was hunkered down in my grandma's chicken coop waiting for a weasel (ermine when in white winter dress) that had killed one of her laying hens. It wasn't long before the little rodent showed himself and my father, who held the lofty position of "expert" rifle shot in the U.S. Army, eliminated the chicken killer with one shot. I was near the tender age of five years then and I convinced

dad that he should let me fire the little Remington pump-action rifle at a few cans behind the milk barn. From that point I was hooked on firearms and shooting.

That first experience in addition to the hours spent listening to the deer and pheasant hunting stories that my dad and uncles told around the dinner table, led me into a life of shooting, hunting, and in later life, competition, that is more a part of me and who I am than perhaps any other one factor. Love of and respect for firearms and shooting came to life out behind that barn and is still flourishing today.

Many of you reading this can share similar experiences and feelings beginning with your early childhood. For many others your desire

to shoot and be involved in the shooting sports came later in life, but that desire is just as strong and vibrant as mine. Still others have yet to take that first step of firing your first shot, but are seriously considering it. The world of shooting and of the shooting sports is one of excitement, pride, accomplishment, and satisfaction that can last a lifetime and is part of a heritage that has been handed down to us from past generations who gave much and in some cases their all to afford us the opportunity to do what we love to do.

Whether you are a life-long shooter, beginning youngster, or somewhere in the middle, I hope you will find yourself inside these lines and relive a past life of shooting pleasures or begin that journey for yourself.



How to Take a Youngster Hunting

By: Steve Wagner

About half of U.S. hunters live in states where parents – not politicians – decide when their sons and daughters are ready for big-game hunting. These family-friendly hunting states are at record number. Many other states are inching their way toward such freedom, creating more opportunities to introduce youngsters to the rewards and values of America's traditional outdoor lifestyle.

Most adult hunters say that learning to hunt was an essential step in their lives. They learned responsibility, discipline, and respect for nature and cycles of life. Invariably, hunting also has given them a lifetime of wonderful memories of being outdoors with family and friends," said Melissa Schilling, manager of hunter recruitment and retention programs for the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF).

But what's the best way to start (or strengthen) your own family's hunting tradition?



Find Out More Online @ <http://www.nssf.org/>

10 Ways to Ensure a Family-Friendly, Can't-Wait-to-Go-Again Experience

NSSF's STEP OUTSIDE® program, which encourages hunters to introduce newcomers to the sport, offers parents the following tips.

1. Instill safety, etiquette, and ethics. Teaching safety standards gives youngsters the responsibility they'll need to enjoy a lifetime of great hunting experiences. And by teaching etiquette and ethics you'll be showing what the traditional lifestyle is all about.
2. Keep it fun. Don't get too serious or competitive. There's no need to turn novices into pros on their first outing. It's far more important to just have a good time.
3. Start with the basics. If you learned to hunt when you were young, today you likely perform the whole process automatically. Make a conscious effort to explain and demonstrate step-by-step what newcomers should do, so they will feel comfortable later doing these things on their own.
4. Create instant success. Recognize small accomplishments. Shooting game is always a bonus and helps them appreciate the experience even more. Youths also enjoy the pride of having provided a meal for their family.
5. Be positive. If you build a youngster's self esteem and confidence, it is more likely they'll enjoy hunting and want to go again. A well-timed compliment can go a long way.
6. Share your love of the outdoors. Help your young guests notice things around them. Stop and listen to birdcalls and sounds of a rushing stream. Draw their attention to signs of wildlife. Help them understand the important role that hunters play in the conservation of natural resources.

7. Provide appropriate equipment. Make sure the equipment you use is the right size and weight for a youngster.
8. Hands-on instruction helps. Everyone learns best by doing. Lecture is necessary, but as much as possible, intersperse the talking with doing.
9. Create a feeling of independence. Youngsters want to become increasingly independent. Having youths develop new skills and then giving them the freedom to practice those skills on their own will prove very rewarding for you both.
10. Choose the right location. Convenience is a consideration. Whether on public or private land, NSSF offers online resources to find great places to hunt through www.huntinfo.org and www.wingshootingusa.org.

Since its inception, STEP OUTSIDE has helped introduce thousands to target shooting, hunting, fishing, and archery by encouraging outdoor enthusiasts to invite others to share in their outdoor experiences. The program has assisted state fish and wildlife agencies, manufacturers, distributors, retailers, hunting clubs, and conservation organizations in providing first-time experiences for newcomers through grants, workshops, and other sponsored events. Learn more at www.stepoutside.org.

To learn more about national efforts to expand family hunting opportunities, a program called Families Afield, visit www.nssf.org.



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The Finn Aagaard Youth Mentorship Program Event



By: Berit Aagaard

It is amazing what can come out of one phone call! About a year ago the telephone rang: "This is Charlie Sisk, custom rifle maker. I would like to make a Finn Aagaard memorial rifle to be raffled off at the Houston Safari Club Convention, would you have any objections?" Charlie had admired my late husband's writings about hunting, firearms, and ammunition; they were often quite technical, but always flowed easily. He often shared views on hunting ethics and gave advice as well, often sprinkled with a dry sense of humor. He frequently talked about the importance of teaching the younger generations about guns and shooting, for herein lies the future of the sport.

Of course I had no objections; I was even able to provide Charlie with notes Finn had made about what he would want if someone were to make him another .375 big game hunting rifle, his favorite caliber. Incidentally, the gun was eventually won by a professional hunter from Australia, who would use the rifle for what it was built for, and understood the value of a fine firearm.

While Charlie and I communicated back and forth about the rifle, he had the idea of creating a youth mentorship program in Finn's honor. Part of the proceeds from the raffle of the Finn Aagaard rifle would go to sponsor a youth at some future event. We would announce an essay competition, which would be open to high

school seniors, any boy or girl in the nation with a hunter's safety course. "What hunting means to me" was to be the subject of the essay.

Charlie Sisk sponsors the Sisk Invitational Shoot where participants take part in a shooting workshop on practical handling of guns with top-notch instructors followed by a challenging and realistic outdoor shooting (marksman) competition. The winner of the essay contest was to be included in this event, meet the shooters, and also mingle with the writers and instructors expected to be present. What a chance of a lifetime!

Reading the essays I received made me realize that there still are decent young people out there, and it warmed my heart. One entry stood out though, a young man from Pennsylvania named Kyle Yeubernetsky seemed to have captured the essence of hunting. He not only was aware of the beauty and magic of being in the woods, but also understood the challenge of the hunt and the responsibility and opportunity to learn.

When we met him at the Hacienda Ranch near Uvalde, Texas in February of 2007, Kyle quickly showed everyone that he was indeed an outstanding young man. He blended effortlessly with well-known writers, shooting instructors, clients, and staff alike. The first morning out he faced a challenging handgun session.

Even though he was on rifle and air gun teams back home, hand guns were relatively new to him. The instructor Dave Biggers of XS Sight Systems took him under his wing; it was impressive to see how the young man concentrated and listened. He went from being quite uncertain in his handling of the 9 mm Glock to shooting a very decent score during the competition.

The next event was shooting offhand using one of Charlie Sisk's rifles; the targets were almost live sized animals cut out of heavy board. A "wounded" leopard popped out of the bush for five seconds and you had to shoot him in the kill zone before he disappeared. A whitetail buck was half hidden in the bush, you had to shoot him, pretend he ran off, follow him, and find the same deer now partially hidden by a doe. The object was to shoot the right animal in the correct spot. There was a zebra target moving on rails through the bush that you must put two shots into, and finally, using shooting sticks, you put three shots into a gazelle at 200 yards. Time was important, but shot placement counted more heavily in the final score. Needless to say, Kyle did extremely well here. Outdoor writer Richard Mann of Ballistic Technologies, the instructor for this part of the course, teased Kyle and told him that he was just a kid and was not supposed to outshoot the adults!

The shooting event that everyone enjoyed the most was a charging buffalo. This time the target was the picture of a buffalo mounted on a small cart on rails, pulled by an ATV, it accelerated to about 17 miles/hr and the shooter had seven seconds in which to put as many shots as he was able into the kill-zone. Kyle again smoked the target with two well placed shots. None of the other competitors did any better. John Barsness, well-known outdoor writer for Wolfe Publishing and instructor for this stage, glowed as much as young Kyle did.

At the end of the day, Kyle came out winning third place overall; the prize was a Sisk rifle .35 Whelen! His grin was beyond his ears, and he had a hard time putting the gun down. As I handed him an awards plaque for winning the essay contest, it came to me that he had not only won third place in the shoot, he had won all our hearts.

As a special treat the owner of Hacienda Mark Brown, donated one exotic animal, and Kyle, guided by the ranch foreman Brad Draughon had a pleasant hunt. After an interesting stalk he used the shooting sticks with confidence, and made a clean, one shot kill at a beautiful fallow buck. It absolutely made his day. When all was said and done though, I think that Kyle meeting the other writers may have been the best part of the whole experience. They quickly recognized in him a young man they could connect with; I saw seasoned writers and fellow shooters seek him out and treat him as an equal. What a confidence builder for the young man! What a way to honor the memory of Finn Aagaard who knew the value of teaching youth. Charlie initially dedicated the rifle he built to the memory of Finn. By raffling off this highly desirable gun, it enabled a young man to have a magical weekend. It was a truly productive way to ensure that the sport of shooting and hunting would be carried on to the next generation. We all recognize that one of the best ways to influence our future in a positive way is through our youth.



What Hunting Means to Me

By: Kyle Yeubernetsky

Hunting . . . I have hunted for as long as I can remember. I was a hunter before anything else. I have always known hunting. In my family, generations and generations before me have hunted. I was brought up in the tradition and immersed in it. Life without hunting would be unimaginable; I would be lost. To me, hunting means fun, it means friends and family, it means a better environment, it means a renewable resource, and it means conservation.

I can't think of anything better on a brisk fall morning, than sitting in a tree-stand, watching the sun break over the age-old hills. My senses alert, waiting for that twig to snap, or that flicker of movement. It is an exhilarating experience whether calling turkey, still hunting for deer, or trying to flush a grouse. I enjoy every moment I'm outside doing what I love. When one season ends, I count the days till the next. The Mossy Oak slogan describes me best, "It's not just a passion it is an obsession." Hunting lures me in so I will return again and again. Not for the killing, but for the experience, the thrill of the hunt, and the serenity of it. Regardless of whether an animal is harvested or not, that is not what hunting is about, it is about the experience you have in the great outdoors with friends and family enjoying nature and what it provides.

Hunting also means a better environment. The act of hunting keeps game populations in check which reduces starvation, which is a tough way to go certainly tougher than by bullet or arrow. Hunting also reduces the risk of diseases such as rabies and chronic wasting disease. Hunting also deepens the gene pool by allowing other animals to breed and benefits the entire species as a whole. Without hunting, the environment would be an utter mess. Hunting keeps the animals in balance with their habitat so other non-game species may flourish as well.

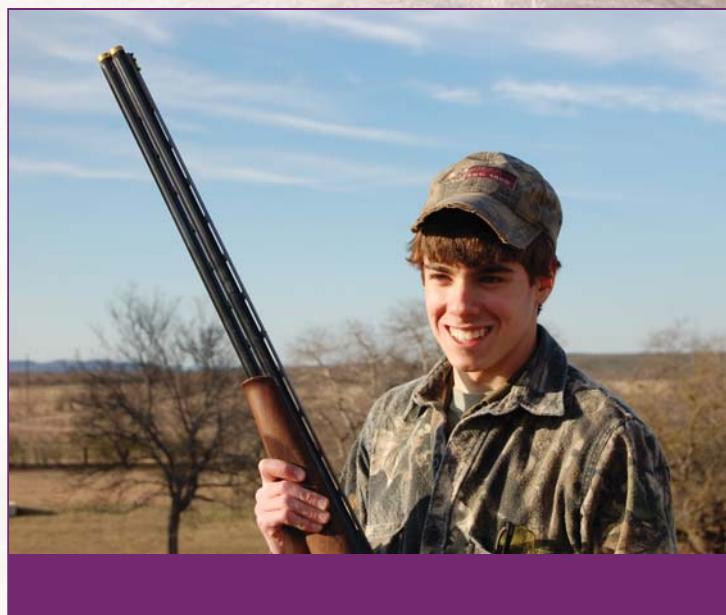
Hunting allows me to spend time with family and friends, some of which I may not see very often. Hunting brings us, as a family, closer together. Family visits for archery season, I visit my grandfather at deer camp and hear how the day's hunt went, a 20 person bear drive, the list goes on and on. Hunting has brought me close to people I might not have otherwise been close to. Hunting also enables me to spend time with friends who are just as passionate as I am about the outdoors. Hunting can also be a solitary sport. Nothing calms, relaxes, and relieves stress as much as a walk in the woods. Even if I am not carrying a firearm, the woods and wildlife help me to keep my composure in my busy, and at times, stressful life.

Hunting means a renewable resource. To me hunting provides delicious and mouth-watering foods such as steaks, hamburgers, chili, and roasted turkey. Nothing goes to waste. Animals, if managed correctly, will always provide a source of food and enjoyment. Nothing teaches self-reliance as much as knowing where your food came from and how it got there.

Hunting means conservation. If we don't conserve, what will we have left? True sportsmen, by their very nature, are conservationists. They would have to be; otherwise we would lose our sport as there would be nothing left to hunt. By working to conserve and improve the habitat for game animals, sportsmen benefit the whole ecosystem from the various plants and trees to the non-game animals and birds. Hunters, such as myself, actively work towards this mission of conservation by creating, improving, and preserving habitat, managing wildlife properly, and supporting and in some cases working hand in hand with your state wildlife agency.

Hunting has taught me a lot. The sport has taught me to be responsible and mature, to respect the land and the life it supports, given me a spirit of cooperation and ethics, and shown me the cycle of life and death. It has also shown me that success comes from a little patience and a lot of hard work. What I have learned from hunting has helped me through school, through work, and whatever else life might throw at me in the future. I have gained so much knowledge and wisdom from hunting that I will always be grateful for what it has given me, and will strive to pass on the hunting heritage in hopes that it will take root in others, like it did in me, so that they too may reap the many rewards this sport has to offer.

Without hunting, I surely wouldn't be the person I am today. Hunting has molded and crafted me into the outstanding individual I have become. Hunting drives and inspires me to become better. Being outdoors hunting means the world to me. I believe Henry David Thoreau said it best, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front the only essential facts of life and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."





My Buffalo Hunt



By: Rebba Wallace

It all started about a year ago. A good friend Dennis and his family went on their third buffalo hunt and wrote about it in their Christmas letter.

When we would go to Meridian for our shooting club practice, we would occasionally stop by Dennis's store (Snake River Truck) to visit. On those occasions, they always invited us to go with them the next year on the big buffalo hunt. From that point forward it all started to come together. The following dates come to mind.

January 1, 2007

My favorite football team wins the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl in overtime. It was the Boise State Broncos in a 43-42 shootout win over the seven-time national champs, the Oklahoma Sooners!

January 2, 2007

It's off to Dennis's house to meet with the other shooters and plan the hunt's final details. We munch on buffalo jerky from last year's hunt!

We will drive up to Bozeman, Montana on the 5th. Seven people, two full-sized four-wheel drive trucks, and a covered trailer will make the trip. A covered trailer is the best way to keep the meat clean.

January 3, 2007

Time to start packing. Warm clothes first. Cartridges and rifle next.

January 5, 2007

My Dad and I leave the house at 9:30 a.m. and head to Dennis's shop in Meridian. The guys there haven't quite finished building the steel "A Frame" – helpful in efficient buffalo skinning while in the field. It will be hooked to the back of the covered trailer and used in tandem with an electric winch mounted inside. But a last minute check reveals we still need long Sawsall blades. We already have extra batteries for the cordless unit. So my dad and I make a quick trip across the street to Home Depot.

When we get back, everyone is ready to go. So the call to "load up" was made at 11 a.m. Two hours later we stop in Twin

Falls for coffee and gas. Then it was on the road again. At 3 p.m. we stop for lunch in Idaho Falls. Then we drive and drive and drive. We stop to regroup in West Yellowstone. It's dark and we'd driven three hours on snow and ice. Good thing we brought the four-wheel drives. We maintained a speed of 60-65 mph! The trailer was basically empty. Then it was two more hours to our Bozeman hotel. The total drive time is eight hours. We pull into the hotel at 8 p.m. Then after a little rest and hot tubing, we crawl down to the hotel restaurant for a quick dinner at 10 p.m. See ya'all in the morning at 6:30 a.m.!

January 6, 2007

After breakfast, about 7:15 a.m., we head out to the Flying D Ranch, about 30 miles out of town for our prime buffalo shoot! There were people signed up before us, so there was plenty of time to set up the brand new A-Frame. It had been strength-tested in the shop with a snowmobile and two big guys hanging on. No problem. Before our professional guides (required for this private land, private animal hunt) take us out, there is paperwork to complete. Then we split up and load into the guides' trucks about 9:30 a.m., and it's over-the-hill to where the buffalo roam.

The first time we "set-up" with the shooting sticks, my dad and our guide Wayne pick out a nice cow for me to take down with my .30-06 Tikka Lite. The shell has a 180-grain bullet, a factory load this time. But the cow would not separate from the herd and they all moved off. The cows are very much herd animals. So we move too. As we set up again, we hear my friend Matt (with the other group) shoot his. We get to move and set-up once more before "my" buffalo provides a clear shot. By then, Wayne has mentioned a couple times, "you buy everything you hit."

When she was finally clear, I took her down with one shot at 100 yards. But buffalo don't fall right away, or even twitch. With the recommended lung shot, it seemed to take a few minutes for her to go down. She was estimated to weigh 1,100 pounds on the hoof. Six hundred pounds of wrapped meat would come





back from the butcher, not including the liver and "blue" tongue. It was time for pictures and appreciation! We will be eating buffalo all year, with tons of memories to go with it. Wayne field dressed her for us (part of the package). His truck had a mounted electric winch and an "A-Frame" hanging off the back. He too used a cordless Sawsall. While working, Wayne told us about when a buffalo hooked her horn under the truck's bumper and lifted the truck well above the ground.

But the day was young and there was still a lot of work and fun to be had. There were two more buffalo to shoot and a lot of

skinning to do. After we had all four buffalo down, we headed back to the trucks and trailer for skinning and tall tails. The only bad thing about skinning is your hands get really cold (it was 25 below with the wind chill). But wait, we brought a propane heater to warm our hands with inside the trailer!

Following four fun hours of skinning, quartering, and much camaraderie, we pack everything up and start back to town, stopping at the nearby Madison River to wash our hands in the flowing ice. Back in town, we eat at Dave's BBQ – a big dinner with all the trimmings. Then a good long soak in the hotel hot tub. All in all, a great day!

January 7, 2007

We get up at 6:30 a.m. and pack the trucks. We still haven't seen Bozeman in the daylight. Then to the lobby for coffee. My dad and I walk over to the gas station and get some postcards. The buffalo quarters have cooled during the night. Not completely frozen like in other years, but close enough. Then it's on the road again. Idaho bound via West Yellowstone Park and hopefully some big bull elk along the way. Yes, we see many large bulls going through the park. Breakfast in West Yellowstone is tasty and welcome. We gas up. We'll stop more often for gas on the return leg. A couple thousand pounds of meat really puts a hurting on gas mileage. We push along and get back to Meridian about 4:00 p.m. We are met by family and say our good byes. Dad and Dennis will take the quarters into the butcher in the morning.

And that is how this year started for me. Thank you Jesus and thank you everyone else who helped make this all happen! I hope to do it all again next year!



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