

HUNTING'S ULTIMATE HAPPINESS

By Paige Patterson

December 14, 2009

God has been gracious to allow me to hunt all over the world. When I was nine years old, I had managed to lay hold of a contraband twenty-two rifle (not stolen—it belonged to my grandfather), and I roamed the heavily wooded area of the famous Big Thicket in Southeast Texas, with a companion or by myself. I confess that if my parents had any idea that I was in the Big Thicket by myself, I also would have been in big trouble in the Big Thicket. My parents were not superstitious, so the stories of the infamous Saratoga Light and the other ghost stories did not phase them, but they knew well enough that there was real danger there, and the thought of their nine-year-old boy roaming through that splendid forest by himself would have been too much. There I learned by observation to track animals, and I observed their habits. Since then, I have hunted in Colorado, Oregon, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, and virtually all over the state of Texas. In addition, I have, as God has enabled me, hunted in Pakistan and in more than eight countries in Africa on at least sixteen different occasions.

So you can imagine that I love to get into the out-of-doors, and I especially love the challenge of hunting dangerous game. I must confess that the greatest happiness for me in hunting is no longer what I do myself but in teaching young men to hunt. First, I had the privilege of being a part of the instruction of my son and, to some degree, even my son-in-law in the hunting enterprise. Now they are grown, and both as hunters are superior to anything that I could ever be, but I enjoyed that mentoring task so much that every year I take two to four boys and give them the opportunity to learn to shoot and to acquire the basic rudiments of hunting. Seeing the unbridled anticipation written on their faces, like the writing on the wall in Belshazzar's palace in the book of Daniel, as they spend their first night out on the hunt in preparation for the early morning is worth every second of my time and effort invested in this

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foray into the wilderness. The excitement, of course, builds to almost fever pitch when the fog begins to lift, the sun rises, and a boy sees his first deer. One of the things that makes Texas a great place to teach young people to hunt is that the game may not just be deer. One morning a short time back, at the very same moment, javelinas, turkeys, and deer were all coming to the same watering hole, and they were virtually close enough to touch. Anyone who has been around children knows that nothing surpasses the elation of seeing the uninhibited happiness that graces the face of a child when he is excited about what is transpiring.

Then, of course, there is the moment when the first shot rings out, the kick of the rifle, the sound of the discharge, the smell of cordite, and the hearty approval of the teacher for his smiling pupil. In the process of teaching a boy to hunt, a number of important sequences follow. These, by no means, constitute the whole list but are some of the more important ones:

1. Do not just teach the boy to wait to see an animal clearly before shooting; rather teach him to be a keen observer of nature. I have always thought that was important, but hunting Africa in the presence of native trackers convinced me more than ever before that enormous fun having nothing to do with the final shot is available to the hunter. Learning to read the spoor and assess the situation, analyzing wind strength and direction, finding the right spot, or stalking in the right way—these are all critically important if the boy is to develop the skills of a good hunter.
2. Teach the boy bow hunting and the art of camouflage. If I have any regrets in my hunting life, I am sorry that I never learned to bow hunt. However, I have been around enough bow hunters to know that the exhilaration of being as close to the

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animals as they must be and the art of learning adequate camouflage brings an excitement all of its own. Heavily camouflaged with a bow hunter in West Texas one day, I remember becoming so amused at a flock of wild turkey that I finally ran them off by my laughing. Turkeys fly much better than most people imagine; but because of their weight, landing can be an interesting event. Watching them land not twenty feet from you in a great flock of more than 100 turkeys is like watching too many fighter jets trying to land on an aircraft carrier at one time. One gobbler would be happily perched only to be knocked winding by a landing turkey who didn't quite get it right. What a joy!

3. When teaching a young man to shoot with the rifle, encourage him to shoot with open sights. Anybody can learn to use a scope, and there will be a time to add that; but my favorite shooting, even at age sixty-seven, is still with an open sight. My 500-nitro-express rifle for dangerous game has no scope, and my 30/30 lever action saddle rifle is still my overall favorite gun. It has no scope. If you can learn to shoot without a scope, you will only be better with a scope.
4. Once an animal has been taken, the student hunter must learn to field dress, skin, and prepare the animal either for mounting or for the deep freeze, as the case may be. Many a teaching hunter simply does the job of field dressing for the boy. This is a mistake. The clever hunter will know that he can teach the child more biology in the twenty to thirty minutes it may take the child to learn how to field dress the deer than he would most likely learn in a classroom in the next three years. In the process of field dressing, the boy will learn about the behavior of bullets on

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impact, and he will probably learn why it is so important to make sure that he shoots the animal in the right place in order to avoid the difficulties of dressing out a “gut-shot” animal.

5. Teach the student hunter that every animal, yes, even snakes, is the handiwork of an incredible Creator. In fact, the hunt is the perfect place to begin to tell the young hunter about the most prolific artist who ever existed, namely, God Himself. His handiwork is clearly in view in the fields and the streams, the forests and the mountains, the oceans, the lakes, the rivers, as well as in the fish and the animals themselves. Consequently, the student hunter needs to be taught that you do not just “shoot to kill.” PETA is in error in what God says about the use of the animals for the human family; but, as much as I disagree with PETA, I find just as much disagreement with indiscriminant hunting that shoots only to kill. My own son, for example, found that when he shot his first rattlesnake, he had to make some real psychological adjustments in order to skin the snake. However, later he was thrilled since he got one of the most beautiful rattlesnake belts that I ever saw from this western diamondback that he had taken. He also learned that even skunks and porcupines are God’s creatures and that while you may have to kill these, each of them is useful. As a matter of fact, with many animals, every part of the animal has value to man. This was brought home to me especially through watching the tribal people of Africa make use of every portion of the animal.
6. Teach your son to cook. This was the one mistake my father made. He himself was not a proficient cook, and so he simply failed to teach me. My son, on the

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other hand, has become a fabulous chef, and whatever is taken in the wild usually ends up on somebody's table and is inevitably a feast. This, after all, is exactly one of the purposes that God intended for the animals.

But most of all, any hunt is not a continuing whirlwind of activity. There are intense moments and moments when ultimate concentration is necessitated. Learning to be still and to listen and to watch is all part of it, but when the hunt is not actually in progress there will be ample times to talk. The talk will include stories of previous hunts to whet the appetite of the young hunter. Further, there will be opportunity to talk about those things other than hunting in which the young man has interest and to encourage him in whatever that may be, whether it is playing a guitar in the church band, a trumpet in the school band, or developing a grasp of electronic knowledge through the computer.

Most important will be the opportunity to speak about the things of God. There is no cell phone to ring. Please turn them off. There is no visiting dignitary to entertain. The warmth before a fireplace in a cabin or the fellowship around an open fire outdoors provides the opportunity to speak of the Creator, who in His great grace made all that is observable around you. An awareness of the artistry and grace of God in nature is but a step to the ultimate act of God's grace, i.e., the giving of Christ to save us from our sins. If the boy has not heard that story, he should hear it in this setting and have the opportunity to receive Christ for himself. If he has already done that, the time has come to relive it and to learn even more about the vistas of life touched by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. When you have taught your own son or grandson, the time has

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come to take a boy who has not had the opportunity to be placed in such a circumstance

and watch the joy on his own face as he experiences all of these things.

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