



A HUNTER'S STORY

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He clearly recalls the day he laid down his gun for the last time. After 38 years, he decided to call it quits. It wasn't a big emotional moment, because he wasn't a particularly sensitive guy. But he had hunted since he was seven.

He still remembers brisk early morning treks through the woods with his Dad. It was a rite of passage to wear his small, rugged boots and warm flannel shirt, like Dad. To hike amid graceful trees, under a rising sun, in search of squirrels and rabbits, or sometimes ducks. They brought their two beagles. He loved those dogs...

He wanted to do stuff with Dad. He cherished their quiet camaraderie, deep in the woods—the silence broken by gunshot blasts and the rustling leaves of fleeing prey.

It's not that he lacked empathy for the animals he hunted. He just really didn't think about them at all. They were objects in the "sport" he'd learned as a child. He could see no reason to ever quit hunting.

He was a decent man. Kind and gentle. He loved his wife and children. They always had pets. People described him as "a good sport," friendly.

But one day, as he carefully aimed skyward toward a flying duck, something inside him changed. The duck screeched in pain and fell to the earth bleeding. At the same moment, the hunter heard leaves crackling wildly and another duck's troubled quacking.



The second duck rushed over to the wounded female duck. Ducks mate for life. The grief-stricken male was there to stand vigil over his dying partner.

The hunter stood back in awe to witness the duck's anguish. He thought about reaching in to grab his "prize," but his fingers froze around his gun. He'd never really given much thought to the ducks he'd killed. Their lives didn't matter to him. But, at that moment he made a connection. This one dead duck's life DID matter to someone—to the other duck.

So, although he knew his buddies would chide him for walking away, he decided to walk away. They'd say he'd gone soft, had turned into "a woman." But he knew better: In that moment he understood that blowing the life out of a defenseless animal was probably a pretty lame excuse for a sport. That, in fact, it was a bloody act of violence. And that perhaps a "real man" could see the pain in the dying animal, as well as the suffering of the other animal who cared for her.

He decided to hone his golf game and play more softball with his kids. Now those were sports. He'd leave hunting to the losers.

myth "I love animals. I'm a conservationist. I'm helping manage wildlife overpopulation."

reality

◆ Sounds compassionate, huh? Such pro-hunting babble usually comes from Game Commission personnel whose salaries depend on hunting and trapping license fees. Case in point: Game Commission press releases issued prior to hunting season describe agricultural losses due to wandering herds of hungry deer. The annual public relations blitz talks about car-deer collisions. In response to their own media spin, Fish & Game agencies offer the same old solution: Hunt more to stem deer overpopulation and prevent starvation. The "good for the deer" pitch is really about increasing hunting and license revenues.

myth "Deer eat shrubbery, collide with cars. The population would explode without hunting."

reality

◆ Nature manages itself through size of habitat, availability of food and water, natural predators, severe weather conditions. Urban development's destruction of wildlife habitat calls for the establishment of refuges—not sport hunting. If hunting is "necessary" to control overpopulation and prevent "nuisance-animals," why is this argument applied only to white-tailed deer? Reality: Most states deliberately boost deer populations to provide prey for hunters. State game agencies allow hunting to "manage" artificially stimulated "surplus animals." There are no surpluses in nature. Ecology functions in natural cycles.

White-tailed deer account for only 2% (6 million) of the 200 million animals killed yearly by hunters. 25% (50 million) are mourning doves and 15% (30 million) are squirrels. Millions more are geese and ducks. Have you ever heard the wildlife-management excuse applied to doves, ducks, or geese? In fact, wildlife managers restrict waterfowl killings so that species don't become extinct! Sport hunting does not exist to manage wildlife. Sport hunting exists as "enjoyable recreation."

myth It's more humane to shoot 200 deer than let them linger in starvation.

reality

◆ HUNTING TRIGGERS HERD GROWTH. It's simple science: When part of the animal population is removed, new animals migrate in, or the remaining population rebounds due to food abundance. The deer propagate and the population increases. Since hunters always want more deer to shoot, they kill bucks over does. Pregnant does left with an ample food supply tend to give birth to a higher ratio of fawns. In most states there are 3 does for every buck. In Michigan and Pennsylvania, there are over 20 does per each buck. With less bucks competing for territory, mating becomes the primary focus of the herd.

Starvation? When is the last time you heard a hunter claim to track down the sickest, thinnest deer in an effort to "wean" the herd? Natural selection maintains deer herd size. Starvation is an essential mechanism of natural selection. Without humans, guns, arrows or traps—the weak naturally die off and the strong survive. Some wild areas preserved for hunting alter terrain to favor target animals. For example, intentional forest fires, timber clearing and flooding draw waterfowl. Manipulating nature to favor one species causes the endangerment or extinction of another. According to the Federal Endangered Species Act: "The 2 major causes of extinction are hunting and habitat destruction."

myth "It's okay if I eat what I kill, right?"

reality

◆ Hunting is big business, marketed as recreation or sport. Even in rural areas, no one needs hunted meat to survive. It is cruel and inhumane to stalk, injure and murder animals for recreation. Whether the killer actually eats the meat (which he doesn't need to survive) is frivolous.

myth "Animals are slaughtered for meat sold in stores and restaurants...so why not hunt?"

reality

◆ Exactly. Billions of animals raised for food already suffer intensive confinement, mutilations such as debeaking and tail-cutting, disease, and violent, painful deaths. Hunting doesn't change this; it only adds to the many who already suffer. And while you may not be able to control the cruel factory farming industry—you can easily choose to not hunt.

myth "Hunting is a family tradition. It's how I bonded with my father."

reality

◆ A young child who learns to replace his natural empathy for another creature's suffering with the bigger prize—a parent's attention—is desensitized at an early age. Positive bonding experiences between parent, child and nature can center around woodland hikes with a camera or camping trips. Why bond with killing, especially when increasing studies link animal violence to human violence? Appreciation of nature can be passed from parent to child, without the cruelty and death central to hunting.

myth "Humans have always hunted. It's in our genes."

reality

◆ Under 8% of the current population hunt. 54% claim to be opposed to sport hunting—U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 1994. Between 1990-1998: adults who hunt dropped to 17%. Median age rose, meaning children are not entering the sport at rate they did. "Wallstreet Journal, Sports Afield" and other demographic researchers and hunting agencies state: If current trends continue, there will be no sport hunting by 2050. If hunting were genetic, wouldn't the numbers be larger? Part of what makes us human is our power to choose. Tradition is no excuse for cruelty.