



Hunting the Whitetailed Deer: A Lifetime of Memories

by Rebecca E. Neely

A watercolor awash in warm hues of pink, purple and orange lit the sky that greeted him that winter morning. Ancient pines were silhouettes against the rising sun. The day was crisp with promise. His breath, visible in the air, was a testament to the chill. The snow that whipped so wildly the night before now lay calmly, like a crystalline blanket protecting the earth. Birds chirping to welcome the glory of a new day made him pause in reflection. Each step he took crunched with anticipation, bringing him closer to his familiar place in the forest. He felt quiet, but great satisfaction with the superior fit of his boots, the trusted weight of his coat, and the snug warmth of his lucky cap. His ensemble was no accident; in fact, it was the result of years of trial and error. He approached the spot he called his own, his eyes and ears always alert for movement. The rustle of a tree branch stopped him suddenly. Was that an antler he saw, or perhaps the flash of a tail? Just some snow falling, he realized, smiling at his boyish excitement. This excitement, along with his respect for the whitetailed deer, had steadily grown over the years. Here he felt alive, and part of yet another family. Here, on the ridge, he was home.

The scene played in my mind as James Mullner, venerable hunter, master outdoorsman, and good friend, spoke of his traditions and adventures of almost half a century, and their profound influence on his life.

Jim says he can't remember a time when deer hunting and the outdoors weren't an important part of his life. A lifetime resident of western Pennsylvania, he has been hunting those woods since he was twelve. He "inherited" the ridge, as he so fondly calls it, from his father, who introduced him to deer hunting as a boy. "There's a lot of memories and reverence for that hallowed ground," says Jim. "It's very special to me." He recalls the first time he went deer hunting; he was so excited he couldn't eat his breakfast. The cherished family hunting tradition has continued through the years with his older brother Fred, Jim's son, Jimmy, and nephews.

Collectively, that's over 200 years of tradition, memories, and laughs.

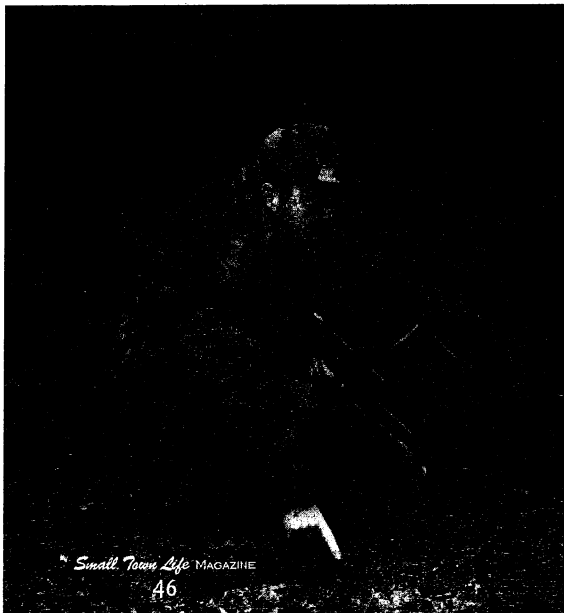
Jim has spent many years educating himself about the whitetailed deer, in and out of the woods. He has read literally hundreds of books on the subject. Experience has also been a good teacher. With a rueful grin, he tells of a morning that he walked the entire way to his



spot in the forest, only to realize that he had forgotten his ammunition in his truck. Frustrations like this led him to develop a checklist for his gear. The two-week deer season starts on the Monday after Thanksgiving, but preparation for the hunt begins in late summer. Jim starts to scout the ridge for signs of deer, most notably "rubs." Rubs are usually seen on tree trunks, where the deer has "rubbed" his antlers against it, or made a "signpost." Jim will invest his time over the coming months driving the back roads, talking to farmers about local deer activity, spotting deer, and meeting landowners. Even though Jim hunts the same area every year, it takes years to learn the subtleties of a piece of land because things are constantly changing. As a schoolteacher, Jim relates the woods to "an outdoor classroom, where one learns, but never learns it all." Perhaps this is the strongest draw of the outdoors.

His love of the outdoors, coupled with an entrepreneurial spirit, led him to open his own business, "Outdoor Paradise," which he operated for a decade in the '70s. Says Jim, "I always loved fishing and hunting and the equipment that went with it. I outfitted a lot of my friends, and soon everyone was suggesting that I open a store. The rest was history." Jim says he met a lot of friends and expanded his hunting opportunities through the store. He still has many of these friends today.

When the long-awaited first day of deer season arrives, Jim will stand all day as he waits for his quarry. Discipline, perseverance, and patience are all part of what makes a hunter successful. He has tried to prepare for every eventuality, but a little luck won't hurt. He's carefully selected his clothing, he's scouted the area scores of times, and most importantly, he's trying to stay downwind. As I've heard Jim say many times, "Deer may question their eyes and ears, but never their nose. It's their main defense." Therefore, he will go to great lengths to ensure that the deer cannot smell him, even going so far as to tie a thread onto his rifle barrel so the direction of the wind can be monitored. Even after all of this preparation, he doesn't always get his deer. Is this disappointing? Says Jim, "I learned a long time ago that the hunt cannot be judged solely by whether or not the hunt results in getting the prey. Far more important

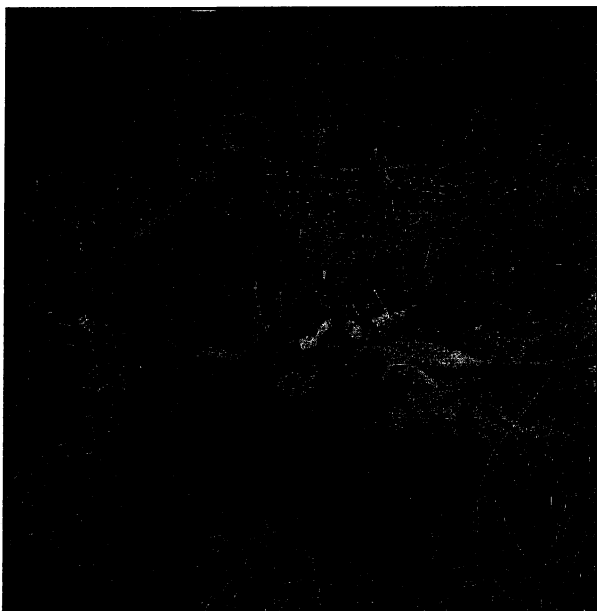




is the experience of being in touch with, and learning nature. Think about it - most days the hunter doesn't harvest an animal." If everything has gone well, and the hunt is successful, it is a thrill. And venison, as Jim says, is "excellent table fare."

From nervous boy to confident business owner, Jim's love of the outdoors has been a lifelong journey. Looking back over the years, it seems the deer seasons have "marked the time" for Jim. He explains. "There's a lot of time to reflect on your life when deer hunting. Each year those reflections change as my life changes - young, single, married, children, business - all the things everyone thinks about as life goes on. Deer season is a time for me to mark the calendar of my life."

And so it was for me, too. As not only my good friend, but my father, the memories Jim created for me are lovingly etched in my mind. I can still feel his beard, grown especially for those two weeks, scratching roughly against my cheek as he kissed me goodbye to embark on that year's adventure. Turkey and stuffing sandwiches - Jim's own creation - were made with love by my mother from Thanksgiving leftovers. An enormous pot of soup simmered all day, waiting to warm cold, tired hunters, deer or no deer. As the family came together to share a steaming, blissful bowl, the stories of the day would be told, some of which remain legendary. Deer hunting, to Jim, has a cycle, like all things in nature. It's part of his past, present and future - a future he hopes will include his grandchildren. As time goes by, the spirit of this hunter will live on.



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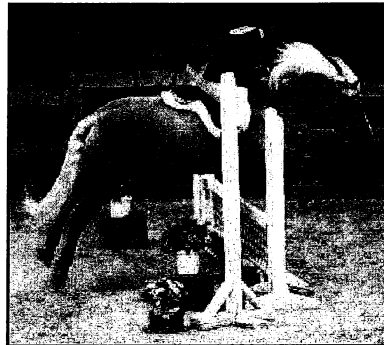
has a living room, dining area, reading room, eat-in kitchen, laundry room, and full bathroom. Two of Nellie Hutchison's quilts hang in the living area, which also includes a gas fireplace. The reading room, which can also serve as a fourth bedroom, has books, videotapes, and puzzles for guests to enjoy.

Guests have many options when it comes to things to do. They can rock on the front porch, fish in the pond, relax in the hot tub on the back patio, help brush and feed the horses, and walk or ski the many trails through the forest on the farm.



A guest fishing in the pond

In addition, Paul and Kristin have also taken over the farm's breeding programs. One of our Haflingers, Golden Girl, ridden by Janelle Hegland, has consistently placed in jumping at the National Haflinger Show. She will be bred this spring to one of the best Austrian imported stallions in the United States, now standing at Tudor Oaks Farm near Chicago. Adler, a yearling gelding out of Aristocrat, a former



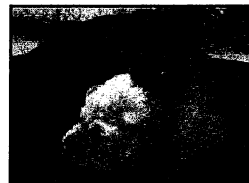
Janelle and Golden Girl



Adler

National Champion, has already begun his training.

The Labrador retriever breeding program has also been quite

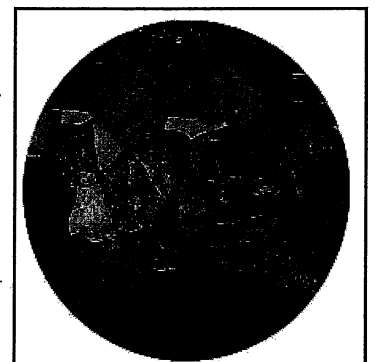


Puppies from the last litter

successful. Puppies have been placed in homes throughout the East Coast. Currently, two of the Labrador retrievers have been bred to Ch. Franklin's Pickpocket for Kerrybrook, one of just 29 dogs ever in the history of the breed to achieve both highly coveted titles, Champion and AKC Master Hunter. Last year, he won the Stud Class at the National Specialty Show. These lit-

ters are due in December.

This past summer, Claus celebrated the 50th anniversary of his family's arrival in North America by visiting Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. After living through so much political upheaval, including two world wars, Guenter and Sieglinde achieved their dreams of providing peace and security for their four children. They spent many happy years with children and grandchildren on the farm. Their dream was for the farm to continue to be a family homestead. Today, Kristin, Paul, and their daughter, Emily, are fulfilling that dream.



Kristin and Oma

