

A HUNTING STORY

MY INTERRUPTED PERFECT SHOT BECOMES FOND MEMORY

Around September 2002, I went up near Vinegar Hill with my good friend and hunting partner, the late Dave Kline.

I say “hunting partner,” but to be perfectly clear, Dave was more than that.

I hunted, but Dave wore several hats. He was the camp cook, the outfitter, mule skinner, camp bartender and a good friend, to name a few.

Dave’s family has a cabin near Vinegar Hill, and for several years he had invited me to hunt from the cabin during archery season.

Dave didn’t hunt during that season, but he would use the time to putter around the cabin, working on small projects, fixing the horse pen and I suppose taking the occasional nap.

He always had some pack animals around on the outside chance I’d eventually kill something with my longbow and an arrow.

Many a time I came dragging only my feet back to camp, and Dave would meet me with a Black Velvet and spring water cocktail.

I’d tell him about my missed opportunities, and he would listen attentively with a truly disgusted look on his face when I got to the part about a bull being only yards from me and I didn’t even get a shot.

Then, like a good hunting partner, Dave would launch into some story that I’d already heard about 100 times about how he had shot a magnificent bull on a dead run from 300 yards in a blinding snowstorm.

Somewhere in the middle of his story, I’d fake a leg cramp and go refill my drink because apparently the bartender was now off duty and had put on his storyteller hat.

On this particular weekend, Dave, his beagle Bridget, a couple of pack animals and I all headed to the cabin for a weekend of hunting.

The first morning I left the cabin around 4:30 a.m. or so. I had everything ready the night before, so I did a good job of sneaking out undetected by Dave or the animals. I had about a 4-mile hike to get where I wanted to hunt and an early start was essential to my plans.

A few hours after the sun came up, I ran into a “some-time” hunting buddy named Gerry, and we decided to hunt the rest of the day together.

Gerry and I only run into each other during archery season, so about midday we sat down and “BS’d” for a while.

Once we got walking again, we had only gone a short distance when I saw a spruce tree about 12 yards ahead of me

that just didn’t look right.

Upon further inspection, I realized there was an elk foot near the trunk of the tree. I stopped in my tracks, and Gerry nearly ran into me. But like any seasoned hunter, he didn’t ask any stupid questions — he just waited.

The more I looked, the more the elk foot slowly turned into an entire cow elk. She was grazing and slowly moving uphill.

Gerry and I had been walking around side-hill, so this cow was broadside at 12 yards with only a spruce tree between us.

Now it’s worth noting at this point of the story that I am not a particularly successful hunter. I have eaten more “tag soup” than I like to admit.

The fact is, I only have two good hunting stories that truly end in my success; I’ve just learned over the years how to tell those two stories about six different ways each. It’s not my fault if the guys I’m telling stories to can’t tell the subtle differences.

I don’t figure I’m lying. I just think they are bad listeners (just ask their wives).

Anyway, somehow I drew an arrow and got it placed on my rest without being detected by the cow. She just needs to take two steps now... I lift my bow... Only one step now... I draw my bow... She hesitates... I hit my anchor point... She waits... My arms start to shake at holding the 60 pound longbow at full draw. Suddenly

the cow’s head jerks up. She looks up the hill (still not seeing Gerry and I, just 12 yards away). Her ears move forward then back, then in an instant the cow and about six other unseen cows wheel and escape down the hill sounding like, well, a herd of spooked elk.

About the time I’m ready to ask Gerry what the hell he did to spook that cow, I hear this snuffling, snorting noise. I’m thinking, “Fine! I’ll just kill the @\$%@’n badger that just cost me an elk!”

Then I see her... Dave’s beagle Bridget with her nose to the ground, completely oblivious to what had just happened.

That dog had tracked Gerry and me over 5 miles and finally caught up to us at the most inopportune time.

Against my better judgment, I did not shoot the dog.

I grabbed a rope from my pack and made a noose, er, I mean a short leash, and headed back to the cabin.

Somewhere along the way, Gerry peeled off towards his camp (possibly anticipating the hostile address I was soon to give the dog’s owner).

When I got to within about 100 yards of the cabin, Dave looked up from his putterings and yelled, “Hey, you found my dog.”

We all know that hunting stories can be about the bull or buck of a lifetime, a life-or-death situation, or hopefully like mine they turn into a fond memory.



Story by Mike Springer
For the Blue Mountain Eagle

As I got closer, I could hear him saying that his dog Bridget had run off some time that morning, and he hadn’t seen her since.

He said he had looked for a while, but figured she would find her way back.

I clenched my jaw and recounted the story of how I had this elk at 12 yards and only one step away from me sending my broad-head tipped arrow into her.

Dave listened attentively.

When I got to the part where his dog entered the story, he visibly jerked and his eyes blinked several times then his mouth just hung open.

All was quiet for a second or two then Dave said, “Yeah, that’s my wife’s dog. I didn’t even want to bring it up here.”

After a few Black Velvet and spring waters from the camp bartender, I was calmed down enough to laugh at the day’s events.

I guess we all know that hunting stories can end with the bull or buck of a lifetime. They may be told about a hunting trip that turned into a life-or-death situation, or hopefully like mine, they turn into a fond memory about someone I’ll never forget.

May God bless my old hunting partner.