

THE PROMISE

By A.K. Moss

For the Blue Mountain Eagle

For the record, I love horses, and my husband loves hunting. This is how our anniversary worked.

Archery season 1998: Our anniversary — 12 years — 12 successful years of marriage and an anniversary in the middle of archery season. What? You might say: Married in the middle of archery season?

Well, don't judge too hard, for my husband was a rifle man before we were married. I was the one who bought him a bow for Christmas and well, here we are.

Years of diehard hunting, several seasons of tag stew and hundreds of complete rerun stories of that famous Elusive Almost Bull.

The eve of our anniversary:

5:05 p.m.: Tracy is home from work, getting his camo on for the anticipated pickup at 5:15 p.m. So far this hunting season, it has not been very successful — no sign, no bulls calling, just dry hot days and lots of miles hiking.

Tracy is pulling his camo shirt over his head when he hears my voice. "So, do we have plans for our anniversary tomorrow?" I casually mention. I notice Tracy freeze, his head still in his shirt. I can tell his wheels are spinning for I notice his hands clench in a fist of emotion. He regroups quickly and finishes pulling the shirt over his head, with a deer-in-the-headlights look.

I wait.

With one motion pulling on his shirt, he slips his baseball cap on his head and scoops up his hiking boots — um, I mean his hunting boots — sitting down on the couch to pull them on.

"I've been thinking about that, babe." Seconds tick by. "Tomorrow I thought we could do whatever you wanted to. Just you and me."

"Really," I get excited, "anything?"

He finishes tying his boots, stands up to grab his bow and fanny pack, glances at his watch, three minutes to spare. "Anything."

I grin. I have a whole evening to plan our

day. I am excited for this one promise on one day, a promise that this anniversary would be all about us. The romance of it, the forgiveness, a month of me doing all the chores, all of the rerun hunting videos, all of the lonely evenings and long weekends of alone time. I would set it all aside and relish in the accomplishment of 12 years and sweet memories. The thought of him looking me in the eyes, taking my hand during a candle-lit dinner, the whisper of sweet nothings in my ear — oh, the romance of it!

5:14 p.m.: I hear the familiar sound of his hunting partner's pickup pull up in the driveway.

Without a glance or second thought, my husband reaches for the door. "Make it a day you won't forget," he says as he walks over the threshold. He pauses turns around wraps his bow-laden arm around me for a half hug, gives me a kiss on the cheek, "See you later, love ya," as he heads to the awaiting vehicle.

I just have to grin as I shake my head, turn back into the now empty house and start to come up with ideas for our special day, as I put a load of camo clothes in the washer.

Amended promise

9:58 p.m.: Tracy comes strutting into the house, playing with the excited dogs, who by the way are happy to have him home. Certainly not the normal quiet-as-a-mouse man he had been for the last 25 days. Adrenalin still run-

ning, he proceeds to wake me from my sleep on the couch and tells me his story of smelling fresh elk, seeing tracks and hearing distant mewing of cows. Then comes the request.

"Ummmm, babe, can I amend my promise?"

I look at him, with his eyes twinkling with excitement, yet my heart is a little broken, knowing I could not turn him down. "What do you propose for an amendment?" I answer back hoping he would at least take me to breakfast.

"Well, can I go hunting in the morning?" He sounded like a child asking for a candy bar that lay within his grasp. "I will be home by 11, I promise. Then we can do the anniversary thing. We were so close, Kath, so close," he stated, reinforcing the excitement of the hunt.

I have to smile. I don't get to see this man excited very often and know he has hunted hard — and to get that close. "OK," I say, "as long as we get to go out and get lunch or something."

"I will take you to lunch," he stated confidently. "Are you sure you're not upset?" he asked cautiously.

"No, I'm good" I stated, knowing he is usually back by 11 o'clock for a nap until midafternoon or early evening hunt.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I promise." I smiled, knowing after this many years, this was his time of the year to enjoy and have fun.

He gives me a hug, "Thanks, babe." He

grabs the fresh laundered camo I laid out and prepares for his morning hunt. Apparently he had already told his hunting partner he would be ready at 4:30 a.m.

The anniversary

4:30 a.m.: Alarm goes off. I wait for Tracy to shut it off. He doesn't. I roll over, and he is already dressed and ready to go. "Happy anniversary," he whispers as he slips out of the room. I hear the door close, and he is gone.

I roll back over and go back to sleep. It's Saturday. I have all morning.

11:30 a.m.: I have done the dishes, taken the dogs for a walk, vacuumed and dusted.

12 p.m.: Laundry folded put away.

12:30 p.m.: Beds stripped and fresh linens on bed made.

1 p.m.: I call my mom and visit about her day.

1:30 p.m.: Packing a weekend bag to go see my mom.

1:46 p.m.: Car loaded.

1:47 p.m.: Phone rings as I am walking out the door to leave. I debate whether to answer or just go ahead and go the movies with my mom. I pick up the phone.

"Hey, Kath, I got an elk!" my husband states excitedly. "Umm, do you want to help us pack it out?" He was quiet a moment, then as if to sweeten the pot he said, "We are going to be using horses. We will come by and pick you up."

I was quiet, weighing my options: movies with my mom or an anniversary ride in the mountains with my husband — 12 years on that day I said "I do." I have to smile. If only I had known what kind of monster I was going to create buying him that dang bow. "Alright, I will catch my horse."

2:30 p.m.: My husband drives up and hands me a cold gas station burrito for lunch.

8:32 p.m.: Elk in cooler, unsaddling my horse.

9:15 p.m.: Cold roast beef sandwich for dinner, a shower and clean sheets.



Contributed photo
A.K. Moss

'A PRECIOUS TRADITION'



Trinity Howard, the granddaughter of Neil and Jan Bauer, shot this buck last year. Nissa Howard wrote, 'After what was seeming to be a dud buck season, this boy ran across the highway in front of us heading right into the field where it was clear to shoot. Trinity barreled out of the truck with her gun and her Daddy right behind her. She put one in the chamber as she crossed the road and a within a minute or so the shot was heard. A happy and grateful girl. Proud parents and grandpa. Hunting in Grant County is a precious tradition.'

Contributed photo