

FROM THE EDITOR

Some photos do more than simply depict a scene; they manage to capture a moment, one that sparks an emotion in us and causes us to stop and ponder for a while. I was leafing through the pages of a mid-90s hunting magazine—pulled from a box of memorabilia that I had meant to throw out—when just such a photo caught my eye and my imagination.

In a sense, the photo was quite ordinary: Three hunters, one of them likely in his mid- to late-40s and the other two in their early 20s, standing together in a corn stubble field with shotguns resting on their shoulders and posing for that classic end-of-the-day shot. The hunters, judging by the age differential, were likely dad and his grown boys.

There was light snow cover on the ground, and I could tell by the way these hunters were bundled up that it had been a cold and windy day. Two of the hunters held a single pheasant each. Hardly, one would think, the end of the day at a high-end pheasant

club; far more likely, a late-season outing on public land, a hardscrabble hunt where two birds might well be considered an above-average day.

Whatever the story of their hunt, what stood out in this photo, what caused me to stop and take a closer look, was the smile on each of these hunter's faces. No one had to say, "cheese" to prompt these grins. These were smiles that came from deep within, from men happy to have spent a day with one another, shotgun in hand, walking through the stubble and hoping to bust up a rooster or two along the way.

It was easy to imagine that the "boys" in this group had, perhaps, moved out of state a few years ago but were now back at the family home for Thanksgiving. They'd grown up hunting with dad, but now, this annual "Turkey Day" hunt was what kept this family tradition alive. You can bet that they would serve the two pheasants for a dinner over the holiday weekend. The family would hold hands and dad would say grace. Then the kidding would begin.

I imagine that dad would make the point that, considering he's by far the best shot in the family, it was truly amazing that these two roosters were shot by the boys. The boys would counter that dad was perhaps getting a step or two slower. Aunt Emma would find a shot pellet in her serving and declare, "I guess this proves you boys actually went out and shot these birds!" Good laughs. Good times. Great memories.

If you look at hunting studies and surveys over the years, three key aspects ring true. First, hunters rate spending time with family and friends as, far and away, the single most-valuable return from their hunting experience. Second, and moving up on the list in recent years, is bringing home game for the family table. And always near the top, is the satisfaction hunters express in having made a good and fair-chase effort, whether the hunt was successful or not.

As we head out this season, let's keep the above in mind. Sure, that picture of you



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and that big bull elk is still going to be the centerpiece of your "album." In a time, however, when the visuals of our hunt may well include a broader posting on social media, let's also remember Paul Harvey's famous phrase, "and now, for the rest of the story."

That "rest" may well include a photo of Uncle Joe lashing an elk quarter to his pack frame. It might be a back strap sizzling in a cast-iron skillet over the campfire. It could be the family or hunting buddies, all standing together with big smiles all around. You get the picture. We have a great story to tell. Let's not forget to tell it.

Hope to see you down the trail. ■

Doug Painter

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