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Gray N. Thornton
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I Am a Hunter

I am a hunter. Why? Quite frankly I don't know.

Neither my father nor my mother hunted and neither came from hunting families. After their divorce when I was

five, both remarried, but a family interest in hunting was not something that came with my fine stepparents. So nurture is out. Nature? I did not grow up on a farm or around hunters. What has now become "Silicon Valley" although much more rural in the 60s and 70s was not farmland or conducive to stepping out the backdoor and into the woods. Nor did I know or associate with friends who hunted with their parents. So nature is out as well. Still, love for the outdoors and an incredible innate interest in hunting somehow was in my blood.

When I was 7 or 8, a Czech friend of my mom gave me a long bow. I took lessons at a nearby archery lane and my dad and I often spent weekends shooting at a community college. I dreamed of hunting with that bow and a year or two later, with dad in tow, bought a couple of two-bladed broadhead arrows and stalked "wild Russian boar" in Carmel Valley, California. I don't know what we would have done if we actually saw a hog, which was pretty unlikely in the five-acre patch of Carmel River floodplain we "hunted." At least the road noise from the nearby highway covered the sounds of our footsteps. Ah, what a dad will endure to fulfill the boyhood fantasy of his son.

With money earned mowing lawns, picking weeds, and washing neighbor's cars, I bought subscriptions to *Sports Afield*, *Outdoor Life*, and *Field & Stream* and read each cover to cover. The books, *My Side of the Mountain* and *Survival with Style* had a profound affect on me, as did the movie *Jeremiah Johnson*. I spent countless hours tramping about the hills and oak woods near my folk's cabin in northern California with the family dog — a rather "birdy" Weimaraner named "Tiffany Silver." Her points on valley quail brought pride and thrill to a young boy as I walked up to the flush and wing shot with my imaginary double gun. I pretended to be the mountain man "Hatchet Jack" from the aforementioned movie and with an Army Surplus hatchet at my side and my copy of *Survival with Style* in hand,

built shelters, water stills, set snares, and hunted blacktail deer with my imaginary .50 caliber Hawken rifle. I felt I was born 100 years too late and should have been exploring and trapping the Rockies and attending the annual Green River Rendezvous with Bridger, Hoback, Sublette, and Carson. Like the mountain men of yesteryear and like you, I am a hunter.

Years have past since my "imaginary" hunting days and under the tutelage of a great friend and past Xerox client, my imaginary hunts became real. He taught me to handload, and about ballistics, hunting techniques, and how to field dress game. We hunted dove, quail, and blacktail deer in California, pronghorn, and mule deer in Wyoming, elk and mule deer in Colorado, moose and caribou in Alaska and our beloved Coues' deer in Arizona. We both bought wall tents and prided ourselves in hosting (in our not so humble opinion) the finest elk and Coues' deer camps in the land. We took mostly "representative trophies," a few monsters, but always had the best of times.

This innate interest in hunting became my profession in 1990 and has allowed me to hunt and make friends throughout the world. It has also enabled me to give back and share this love of the outdoors to those who supported me in my formative years.

In late 1999 I had the pleasure of sharing Africa and the thrill of the hunt with my mother. I bought her a .22 rifle to practice — once mastered, we moved to a .22-250 and finally a .270 — she shot all well. Her first game animal was a trophy-class mountain reedbuck taken with one well-placed shot. Her second trophy was an impala taken with a spectacular uphill shot at last light. The tears she shed were both of joy and reverence for the lives she had taken. That night around the campfire was one of the finest I have enjoyed. I almost gave up hunting after that safari as I knew all others would pale in comparison.

This March, I will have the pleasure of hunting and fly fishing in New Zealand with my father. Although we have fished together often, this will be the first time we have hunted since the days with the long bow in Carmel Valley. Life comes full circle.

Good hunting,