

the GREAT outdoors

It's the memories made,
The friendships never forgotten;
It's the thrill of the hunt,
That spoils us rotten...

It's where our highways,
Are paved with grass and dirt;
And our business attire is replaced,
By a camo shirt...

It's the stories told,
From a wise old man;
It's the feeling of the world,
In the palm of your hand...

It's the silence you hear,
Under a sky filled with stars;
It's no cell phones ringing,
And no honking cars...

It's the moments spent,
Outdoors with a dad;
The most memorable moments,
A child can have...

It's big mud tires.
It's four wheel drive trucks;
It's loud country music,
And big ol' bucks...

It's the feeling of excitement,
The feeling of wonder;
It's the beating of your heart,
Louder than thunder...

It's the skin chilling gobble,
Of a Tom heading your way;
And the sun through the trees,
On a crisp spring day...

It's where nature's clock,
Ticks at it's own pace;
It's a peace deep inside,
Putting a smile on your face...

It's the stories told,
Of the one that got away;
It's the anxious countdown,
To opening day...

It's seeing a young hunter,
take his first bird;
And where stresses of life,
Are momentarily blurred...

It's a place where brothers,
Become great friends;
Companions for life,
Having stories without end...

Perhaps,
It's the feeling of accomplishment.
Maybe a job well done?
But for us good ol' boys,
We just call it FUN!!!

PHOTO BY GEORGE BECKER

It is my hope that the poem above brings back pleasurable memories of some of your cherished encounters in *The Great Outdoors*. This is precisely what comes to mind when describing my outdoor experiences. I have been blessed to have been given the opportunity to spend countless hours in the wilderness, listening and watching creation, as well as observing how we interact with Mother Nature on a common plane.

What is it exactly that draws us to the outdoors? To me, being in the outdoors is a special time alone with God, to sit and admire His unfathomable works; to witness firsthand the miracles that He has allowed to take place on the earth stemming from the beginning of time.

"I hunt because it makes me feel good, complete", as some might say. I don't hunt for any cheap thrill in killing an animal, nor am I on an ego trip. I hunt because I love the challenge and the great outdoors. Many times while hunting I've felt closer to God than I ever feel sitting in a church. Hunting has helped me understand that God and Mother Nature are one and the same. Once we become in tune with our environment, then and only then do we gear ourselves to proper attitude. Being in the woods does something for my soul. I don't have to rely upon my tools to carry me through the next winter, but I do get an indescribably good feeling in my bones on a crisp autumn day as I get closer to everything beautiful. I'm more alive, closer to nature and closer to God."

Gene Wensel, *Come November*

It is where I can take time to pray, but more than that, where I can listen without all the worldly distractions and interruptions that are all too common. Sitting in silence as the sun peeks through the trees on a cool,

spring morning and observing the woods as they come to life lights a fire within me that is difficult to describe. It soothes my mind in ways no other earthly experience has yet to provide.

We must dig deep to truly understand the soul of an outdoorsman and the wilderness he inhabits. The outdoors is a place where people from all walks of life can come together in total unison and equality to be a part of something we admire. Here, we are one. We are brothers. We are fathers. We are sons and daughters. And we are children of God. The outdoors is a place where we can go back and experience the joys we shared as kids on the creek banks with friends. It is fascinating that being in the outdoors can take us back in time, where we can temporarily throw our worries aside, and resort back to the ways of those who walked in our footsteps generations before us.

"I am the hunter. I marvel that I have live to enjoy this moment, and the opportunity of hunting in a land teeming with wildlife; a land painted by our maker's hand. I cherish this moment, this mountain, this day and this life. Where but here can a man know such freedom?"

Gene Wensel, *Come November*

No matter what our background, where we are from, or what our occupation may be, we as outdoorsmen all share a common interest, appreciation, and admiration of encounters provided to us in the hunting world. In my opinion, few topics seem to spark more interest than conversations stemming from our outdoor experiences. At times we get so busy with the rush of life that we need a place to get away, to meditate, to reflect, and just to be at

peace with one's self. Where, other than here in the outdoors, can a man feel more at home? The place where creation abides in abundance; where the day is not rushed and where time truly ticks at its own pace; where brothers become friends; where rushes of adrenaline surpass any level of excitement witnessed elsewhere; and where father/son-daughter bonds reach levels of unmatched friendship.

I am truly fascinated by the simplicity and innocence of the outdoors, but at the same time awed of the complexity of detail and imagination that our Creator used to produce such a magnificent place for His creatures to inhabit. Spending year after year in pursuit of numerous types of game, I've learned to appreciate not only the hunt, but all that goes along with it.

"You know, every now and then you just can't resist coming to a place where there's a lot of deer, and you really enjoy just coming and sitting, enjoying the outdoors. This is one of those places. This is our place. This is, well I guess you'd say God's place. He provided it for us, and gave us the opportunity to own it, to have it, and be able to hunt it."

Randy Reece

I thoroughly enjoy beginning my outdoor quests well before first light, with my head rested against a tree to merely enjoy the unbroken silence, to gaze at a sky filled with stars, and witness the magical occurrence of the first chirping bird awakening creation at the start of a new day. There are no cell phones ringing, no dogs barking, and no honking cars. Here, our time is measured in more simple terms; before daylight, just after daylight, mid-morning, noon, early afternoon, mid-afternoon, just

before dark, and so on. The paved sidewalks are replaced with soft grass, and the smell of dirt reminds you that you are alive. The outdoors is a place where the child in us all rears his head once more; the place where joy is found in watching the smile on a young hunter's face after a successful hunt and where you think back to the time of your early experiences in the outdoors and the fond memories.

It amazes me how the sight of a sunrise where God paints the sky on the horizon can put a restless mind at ease; where the stresses of everyday life seem to slowly fade away. I feel exceptionally alive each time I hear the sound of a turkey gobbling in the distance, causing my heart to almost jump out of my chest. I love the feeling I get when the confident footsteps of an approaching whitetail cause my knees to shake uncontrollably, as if I were about to take my first deer all over again. These experiences bring joy and excitement to my life in ways that are difficult for earthly words to portray.

"Go only gives us so many sunrises. I don't see any need to miss one of 'em."

Toxey Haas, circa: 2000-2005

When I return from the outdoors time after time, I come back restored, renewed, and revived. I come back with a new outlook on life, a new respect for creation, and a new appreciation for the simple things in life. These are the things that matter most. You see, it's not the killing of a wild animal that defines the hunter. No, rather it is the sights, the sounds, and the experiences in the outdoors that renew our spirits and keep us coming back year after year.

The wilderness has a strange power that is difficult to understand. In my opinion, the reason countless masses of people continue to increasingly desire spending time in the outdoors is because this is the one place that we as humans cannot tame.

No place on earth provides more successes, more failures, or more humbling experiences than the outdoors, nor is there a place where more lessons can be learned than here,

off the beaten path, where the way of life is no longer structured or planned. Here in the outdoors, we don't call the shots. The circumstances are provided to us, and it is then that we are able to give it our best to overcome the odds.

How many times have you, as a hunter, set up for a hunt that was a *for sure kill*, where you already had it in the bag, and suddenly it get totally flipped around in a matter of seconds, leaving you sitting there in awe wondering what happened. Never has this happened to me more than while chasing after the wise eastern wild turkey. I can tell you story after story of times when I knew the exact limb the ol' Tom roosted on, knew the terrain like the back of my hand, made the perfect calls at the perfect time, and he used his seemingly sixth sense to avoid me.

How about the times I've had a gobbler running in to my decoy, as my heart thumped uncontrollably in my chest, only to have him freeze up at 60 yards in full strut, displaying one of the most beautiful shows ever seen, and never make it into gun range? Or countless encounters where we as hunters have been the victim of a disheartening hunt, where a whitetail was coming right like we wanted it, and then for no reason at all stop, like it knew something just wasn't right, and change its route as we sit in disbelief? I hate those hunts so much! Or do I? In retrospect, I, as a hunter, love the unpredictability that the hunt offers each time we try our hand at taking a wild animal. I love the hunts that show me that no matter how good of a woodsman I become, how good of a caller, or how good of a shot I may claim to be, that I am never better, nor superior to this particular way of life.



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So I ask, where can one prove himself more truly than to put himself up to a challenge he isn't sure of winning, to be part of something greater than himself, and to have the odds against him while at the same time striving to overcome? This is what defines the true character of the hunter. You see, we cannot simply walk away. It holds a part of us, instilled in our blood, passed down from our ancestors, generations and generations before our existence. It is fascinating the things we take from the outdoors, experiences, encounters, and successes, but at the same time we leave a part of ourselves there. We go back time and time again to reunite with the part of us that makes us whole, to grow in our faith, develop our character, and to find who we really are; the part of us that cannot be found behind a desk at the office. Nowhere, but here in the outdoors, can one feel more at home, more at peace, and more alive, where our spirit is free, our worries cease to overpower us, and the simple things in life are far superior to the material ones.

Who knows where this life will take each of us, who we will become, or what fate awaits us all? We all take our place in this big world, and for the most part, have no control over what our future holds. But, it is my hope that as we continue with our adventures in the outdoors, that we take the time to pause and thank our Creator for this place which we have been blessed; and to look to Him for guidance to strive to be the people He created us to be. Above all else, I feel confident in this: If I am blessed to travel far down the road of life, fortunate enough to become an old man, I will sit on my front porch one day and reflect on the days of my youth. I will remember the days where my most memorable moments will not have been the days at the office, nor other past occurrences forced by life's demanding schedule, but rather the memorable moments spent in the outdoors with my Creator, my family, and my friends.

I will reflect upon the experiences I was blessed to encounter and be thankful for the opportunities

witnessed in the outdoors, for the sunrises that spark the start of a new day, for the feeling of joy watching the fawns as they play, for moments of awe in the midst of amazement, for sunsets in silence and peaceful meditation, for laughs and smiles, disappointments and sorrows, for thrills and excitements, and "*there's always tomorrows*", for friendships and memories, for hard work and toil, for the smell of fresh cut grass, and newly plowed soil, for encountering beauty in a land untamed, for witnessing miracles that simply couldn't be explained, for feeling so tiny beside a mountain so tall, for watching the autumn leaves as their colors change in the fall, for the chance to walk by faith on the road less trod, and finishing the race set before me by God, for passing on a heritage, passing on the torch; and in that moment once again, I will look to Heaven with a smile, pause, and just say a small thank you for the view *Off Go's Front Porch*.