

# Bit by The Hunting Bug

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I can't quite recall how young I was when I first witnessed a deer being dressed out, maybe I was four, maybe even five. As I think back on it, it really didn't seem to bother me to sit and watch my Uncles and my Dad cut the flesh from the deer. Their knives seemed to work with exact precision. They made it all seem effortless but in reality I knew that each of them worked hard at refining their skills each and every season. While watching them, I remember how intrigued I was at the shape and size of the organs they cut away from the deer and how every organ fit so neatly in its place inside the body cavity. Those first 8 years of my life, living in Michigan, seemed like one great big science experiment to me and learning how to gut a deer was just a fraction of what I was about to unearth about the world around me. I learned a lot about hunting and being in the woods in those short years, in fact, I guess you could say that's where I got bit by the hunting bug.

It was easy to get bit by the hunting bug because most of my relatives in Michigan were hunters. They hunted for whitetail deer mainly but there was also duck, pheasant and turkey season. I also remember eating turtle soup, which we ate whenever an unsuspecting snapping turtle wandered in from some nearby swamp only to end up in our cooking pot. Then there was "froggin" season. That's when all the menfolk would put on their waders and wade through the swamps at night with flashlights, shining for bullfrogs. Whenever they heard or saw a bullfrog, they'd quickly snatch the amphibian out of the water, barehanded, and throw it into a gunny sack. And when the gunny sacks were full enough, it was time to go home for a batch of fried froglegs, yum, yum.

Those days of my childhood seem so long ago, 34 years ago to be exact. And now, well, now all that knowledge I discovered is finally paying off. I'm an outdoor freelance writer and photographer now, living in a cabin in Northern Arizona. My articles and photos have been published in such magazines as Bow & Arrow magazine, Buckmasters, Outdoor Life, Big Game Adventures, Wheelin' Sportsmen, Arizona Outdoorsman, Bugle magazine and Michigan Out of Doors.

On the weekends, I host a television show in Pinetop called, "Stepping Outdoors." It's an outdoor program all about the people and places of the White Mountains. Segments from the show include everything from fly-fishing seminars to turkey, deer and bull elk hunts, to kid's rodeos and archery competitions, to treestand and hunter's safety tips, to backpacking, camping and hiking in the wilderness along with projects with the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Arizona Game and Fish Department and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

Since the show is filmed entirely in the White Mountains, a place surrounded by the largest stand of Ponderosa Pines in the world, along with access to hundreds of miles of clear blue streams, numerous pristine mountain lakes and abundant wildlife such as bear, deer, turkey and elk, I don't have to travel far to find something or someone to film a show about. That's also why I became an outdoor freelance writer. Having such easy access to the outdoors provides me with an abundant source of ideas and photo opportunities, so it was just natural to start writing about those experiences. The other wonderful part of being a writer and television host is that I get to not only share my hunts with others but I get to write about and film other peoples' hunts too.

On occasion, I film hunts for clients who want their hunting memories kept alive on tape but I also film projects for such organizations as the Timber Trails Children's project in Phoenix, the Catch a Dream Foundation and the Hunt of a Lifetime organization. Those are my favorite hunts to film. There is nothing so awe-inspiring as watching a smile appear from a child's face after they've heard a bull elk bugle for the first time or giving a youngster a high five after they've shot their first turkey.

These memories along with recollections of my personal hunts with my father, my brother, my mother, my cousins along with all the other relatives I've had the opportunity to hunt with are the memories I cherish the most. Each and every hunt I've trekked along on has provided me with new clues and insight on how to be a better hunter.

I am indebted to my Uncles and especially my father for always allowing me to sit and watch and eventually when I was old enough, to participate in the art of hunting. I feel very fortunate for the life I lead, my job allows me to do what I enjoy most and that's being in the great outdoors. Because of my good fortune, I've been lucky enough to hunt black bear, mule deer, turkey, javelina, dove, quail, mountain lion and bull elk. The life I lead wouldn't have been possible, if it hadn't been for my family who never once believed that just because I was born a girl, I couldn't be a hunter. I for one am glad I got bit by the hunting bug and it's good to see so many others who have been bitten by that very same bug. It's one bug, I hope they never find a cure for! -AZOD-