

# The Teacher

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**L**ISTEN...ALONG THE CREEK...

Twigs snapping in the cool quiet autumn air and the unmistakable “uurrrh uurrrh” might have sounded like thunder to the uninitiated, but it was the grunt of a bull moose responding to my amorous imitation of a despondent cow. My partner glanced at me in anticipation of what might transpire. The shivering, which only moments earlier had me longing for the comforts of my sleeping bag tucked in our tent a few miles upriver were suddenly gone. All senses were on red alert, pulses quickened as thoughts raced as to what might happen. The camera, on the tripod, was concealed but pointed in the right direction, ready for action as were the firearms previously sighted in should this bull come to the point of call. The cold hands suddenly turned warm as I fondled the camera button and firearm – more twigs snapping, more grunts, antlers raking on the willows – he was approaching the river.

But wait, I am ahead of myself, much preparation had gone into this hunt with the basic outdoor knowledge passed to me by my biologist father, the positive reinforcement from my mom, the knowledge garnered from my university years and many years as a practising wildlife biologist, past moose hunts and tips shared with me by friends. The aforementioned placed me in an excellent position to offer my partner the opportunity to harvest the approaching bull. Equally rewarding over the subsequent years has been the opportunity to pass my knowledge and expertise to others enabling them to enjoy the rewards Mother Nature offers.

Concern exists for the future of hunting in Canada with populations of some game species on the decline due to technology, cultural and societal changes and overharvesting. As advocates for regulated hunting, we must become more vocal in pressing for change to ensure resources continue to offer Canadians opportunities for viewing, photography and yes hunting, plus securing the biodiversity passed to us. We must urge educators for example to address hunting as a game

management tool. For those of us who have made the wildlife game a career we must be advocates for more educational programs dealing with wildlife biology, management and press for proactive conservation based on science to take precedence over politics and for politicians to be proactive and not remain blind to difficult issues.

Hunting is a pursuit, but it is also the mornings, the nights with the howl of the wolf, the land, the lakes and rivers, the sounds of nature, camp life in a tent and yes the camaraderie of friends – all of which contribute to a successful hunt which is more than just bounty in the freezer.

We must broaden public understanding of hunting, respectfully listen to concerns of those with differing philosophies and discuss these and other contemporary issues which assuredly will impact licensed hunting. It is imperative that we develop workable partnerships in a spirit of openness and transparency and work toward conservation of our legacy and protect the biodiversity. Only then can we be sure of having a rich legacy to pass to others. Hunters have done a multitude of things in support of conservation which cannot be stroked from the historical record. The document entitled “Hunter Contributions to Wildlife Habitat in Canada” published in 2000 clearly illustrates that hunters over the preceding 10 years period contributed \$325,000,000 to Wildlife Habitat Canada via the impost paid on the migratory game bird stamp – and, these funds do not go to moose habitat but to wetlands, endangered species work as examples. What have some of the outspoken antis contributed? Hunters must become more informed, and being more informed be outspoken in emulating the positives of regulated hunting. It cannot be left solely to the wildlife professional who in many instances are civil servants and constrained by the need for political correctness. Those of us who have retired after successful careers now have that freedom. More and more hunters need to hear the wakeup call and as I have said many times in the past, “it’s your game, get involved”.

As the moose exploded from the willows he was immediately in the creek. A quick look at my partner, a head shake got the “don’t shoot” message through loud and clear. The bull was quickly out of the water and behind the willows perhaps uncertain as to the whereabouts

of the melodious cow but sniffing the faint breezes now beginning to stir ever so slightly in the morning air. I motioned to my partner to position himself at a shooting rest I had used previously. I, in turn, placed myself in the shadows of a large spruce. The bull, now in sight, but out about 200 metres was moving away down an open draw. A low seductive pleading call brought him to a full stop and the massive head swung in our direction as he cast a searching eye. Where was she? No time for a careless movement. One more soft call from the birch bark horn pointing down and away from him. Here he comes! Slowly and with the unmistakable searching grunt and the swinging head he was closing the distance. For a moment, which seemed like an eternity, he was hidden by the tall phragmites which abruptly parted and he was at the water’s edge. He halted for a moment broad side - a perfect shot. A quick glance to my partner and a barely detectable up and down head motion and he had the signal. One well-placed shot and he had his first moose. This hunt is indelibly etched in my memory bank and is part of my video collection but also for two statements my partner made which made the hunt personally rewarding. On one frosty, quiet morning as we sat on a log after calling for a few hours he said “you know, I never realized the sound of nothing could sound so beautiful” - I had never put such a perspective on such silence in the past. During the hunt we saw bears, wolves, otter, marten, a myriad of waterfowl and other bird life and called in other bulls that we did not take but captured their antics on film. When driving home my partner said “it would have not have mattered if I had not shot that moose, what really made it for me was being there with you, seeing the bears, marten, hearing wolves and calling in other bulls. – this is what really made it for me”. Yes, it did choke me up. But all the years of patient instruction, and talking about wildlife had paid off. I felt immensely proud and satisfied to have it so vividly demonstrated that the hunting tradition was being passed to someone who recognized the values of wildlife, what mother nature’s playground has to offer and that there is so much more to hunting than just killing. The satisfaction was even more fulfilling as my partner in this case was my son Scott.

Now, please join me, the Manitoba Wildlife Federation and others in a “conservation now not later” conservation movement.