

Passing the torch



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Many of our outdoor passions are steeped in tradition, handed down from generation to generation. Most kids learn to hunt and fish from their parents and grandparents. In turn, these kids will hopefully, teach their kids about the sport.

I was raised by grandparents who were too old for hunting and fishing



Most kids learn to hunt and fish from their parents and grandparents. In turn, these kids will hopefully, teach their kids about the sport. (Courtesy photo)



Hunting is a sport for the entire Thompson family. These trips are building memories that will last a lifetime. (Courtesy photo)

and too old for a winey little kid, but because of a twist from the old fickle finger of fate, we were stuck with each other. I

could hunt and fish anytime I wanted if I stayed on our property. Unfortunately, fish and game were rather scarce on our little place.

My old man mentor of all things outdoor related was Mr. Caster, a longtime friend of the family, and his best friend Mr. Inkman. These two old gentlemen were not

the type of mentor my old grandmother wanted for her little grandson, as she considered them to be devilish examples for a child. These gentlemen smoked Chesterfield Kings, drank whiskey, didn't work, hunted and fished whenever they pleased, loved loose women, and knew all the swear words. Sounds perfect to me. They were the two men I was passed off to for the beginnings of my hunting and fishing career.

People hunt for various reasons, fresh meat in the freezer, family experience, love of game and outdoors, and tradition. A survey conducted by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), every five years, found that the number of hunters taking to the field is increasing. All told, the survey revealed that 46.2 million people aged six or over went target shooting, 39.9 million people fished and 148.3 million participated in at least one type of wildlife watching. The data also showed that 14.4 million people over aged six participated in hunting, a three million increase from the last survey.

The big boosts in hunting participation brought to light in the USFWS survey represent a big lift to the dollars that go not only to local economies but also back to the states to benefit their own wildlife management and conservation programs. With the increases in the numbers of hunters shown in the latest survey, Americans injected an eye-popping \$394.8 billion into the economy while participating in wildlife-related activities in the outdoors. That figure represents a nearly 250-percent increase from the \$156 billion reported by the last survey.

I decided to tell the story of a close friend, hunting buddy, and fellow gun nut, Travis Thompson. Besides being a serious rifleman and hunter, Travis is also the Police Chief in Olathe. In that position, he has opportunity to mentor young kids in the outdoor sports, but his favorite mentoring job is with his daughters

Emery and Avery. I asked Travis to tell me in his own words what hunting with his daughters means to him, and how he got there.

Travis said his father always told him, "You won't understand until you have kids of your own."

"I remember my first big game animal. I was 12 years old, and my dad promised me that if I had good grades, he might let me try for a pronghorn. Season found us in the Craig area of Colorado searching for pronghorn, when a dandy buck appeared. When dad asked me if I wanted to collect him, of course the answer was an excited yes. I borrowed dad's rifle and made the shot. Dad still uses that rifle today, and someday, he will probably pass it on to us."

Travis continued, "I settled in as I had learned to do with my .22 and touched the trigger. The gun went boom, tremendously louder than I expected. I remember the recoil being tremendous, but when I looked up the pronghorn was laying on the ground."

My Father grabbed me up off the ground with the rifle still in my hands and squeezed me as hard as I think he could. He just started crying and laughing all at the same time. I was worried about the goat getting up and running away, but he just held me and told me how proud he was and what a great shot I made. Dad held on to me for an entire minute, just kissing me on the head, laughing and crying all at the same

stand until you have kids of your own."

A year later found Travis sitting on a hill with his middle daughter, Emery, on her first hunt with a third season buck tag. The duo had spent several days in the field, looking for the right deer, but tonight was the last night. No deer, no meat in the freezer. Travis said, "Just before last light, a large fork-horn slipped into the field. Emery wanted to put meat in the freezer for the family, and decided he was the one she wanted. She got behind the gun and made a perfect 320-yard shot. Once again, I cried, laughed, and hugged her and said those immortal words of my dad. The antlers of that deer are mounted on the wall at home, and whenever the hunting stories begin to fly, Emery is certain to tell hers."

Travis Thompson is a shining example of how mentoring is supposed to work. He learned from his dad and now he is teaching his kids. I was fortunate enough to have an old man mentor, but many kids do not. There is an option for these kids.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife, CPW, offers extensive youth hunting and fishing programs, often free of charge. These programs offer free, educational opportunities for hunters aged 12 to 17. These programs include mentored hunts, extended seasons for big game, and youth-only seasons for small game, waterfowl, and turkey.



Many of our outdoor passions — hunting among them — are steeped in tradition, handed down from generation to generation. (Courtesy photo)

time. I'm sure I asked him several times why he was crying and his only answer was always, "you won't understand until you have kids of your own." I have a lot of great memories with my dad but I that's one I won't forget."

Some 32 years later, Travis now finds himself in the position of dad and mentor to his daughters. Three years ago, Travis was sitting in an alfalfa field with his oldest daughter Avery with a special rifle he had built for her, complete with her initials and birthdate as the serial number. Minutes later, a four-point buck came into the field, and Avery made a terrific shot, just as she had practiced with her dad all summer. Travis said, "The buck hit the ground, and I hugged her as tight as I could and laughed and cried at the same time. When she questioned why I was crying, all I could say was you won't under-

If you are an older person who loves the outdoor sports, but don't have anyone to mentor, CPW can use your help. They are actively seeking volunteers to assist with various youth and educational programs, so you can pass it on. Check their CPW Connect website at cpwconnect.state.co.us

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