



BOWHUNTING LEGACY

Three Generations & Counting

STORY AND PHOTOS BY PHIL FANCHER

The Bible in James, Chapter 4, Verse 14 says, "Life is like a vapour that appeareth for a little while and then vanishes away." Time flies. It seems like it was just yesterday I was blowing air into my old Larry Jones flute-like elk bugle. Now, forty years have passed. Where does the time go?

I often describe myself as a pharmacist by trade, a Baptist preacher by calling, and a hunter at heart. I've been blessed many times, but one of my fondest memories was when I was hunting elk in Colorado. That cool, crisp morning in the Aspens of Colorado changed me in ways I could not fathom. I remember vividly how he walked, like a tough teenager who just got his driver's license. With reckless abandon he came, testosterone pumping, pushing him forward. Soon, a small piece of metal and a shaft of aluminum, the broadhead, would stop him in his tracks.

It is truly impossible for me to convey the enjoyment the sport of archery has given me. From the early age of ten with my fiberglass bow, I was Fred Bear. Then a friend of mine, Curtis Pounds from Bellfontaine, Mississippi, built me my first real bow. From this point forward, the hours I spent with this bow were truly uncountable and I believe made me the man I am today, a lover of archery. I could be happy on the range or in the woods with any bow; a Mathews or a custom built hybrid from Acadian woods. What really fascinated me was the simple flight of the arrow whether made of fiberglass, aluminum, carbon or switch cane crafted by me. The one thing all had in common was each arrow was being pushed by a bow I was holding.

Now as three generations of Fanchers head west to hunt together, I feel myself slowing down. Actually, it is the pace that is slowing, not the enjoyment of each adventure. My son, Slade, and his son, Aiden, are now my

hunting partners and we love to go elk hunting. It wasn't that long ago my best friend of twenty years, Tim Smith, was always by my side. One never had to ask if he wanted to hunt. He was always ready to go and a faithful friend. I remember sitting around a campfire about thirty years ago in the mountains of Meeker, Colorado where we both agreed we should do this every year until we can't! It was a promise we both kept.

Just as memories fade, so do precious souvenirs. Three years ago an EF4 tornado hit Louisville, Mississippi. God spared our lives. As I look back on the experience, we may have lost all material belongings, but the priceless memories still remain. I remember countless hours creating our hunting picture albums. There were pictures of white-tailed deer, mule deer, turkey, hogs, pronghorn antelope, caribou, bear and elk, most of which are now gone. Many of the sixteen elk racks survived because they were at my son's house. The tornado may have taken my photographs but it couldn't take

away my love of archery!

A true hunter of any kind hunts as a way to help feed his family. While the sport is enjoyable, the hunter carries a huge responsibility of accountability to the resource and the sport. There are those who would prefer we not use the word kill in association with hunting. However, to hunt and be successful, one must kill. The Bible gives us many references to this. Read what it says about two brothers in Genesis 25:27. I hope you are like Esau and not Jacob. Why? The Bible tells us Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field, and that Jacob was a plain man. God also spoke to Peter once and told him, "Arise Peter, kill and eat". That is what hunters do. I can relate this to gardening. I am an avid gardener. I harvest the things for which I have cultivated, planted and worked. It is the same with hunting. I scout for the best place to hunt, set-up my stand and with any luck, I will harvest my prey.

A big bull is a majestic sight for sure. Yet the sounds they make seem to penetrate you like a splinter or thorn.



A bull's scream cuts deep into your senses like very few things. Have you ever watched water flow in a stream or creek? It flows over massive rocks and through deep valleys. Terrain and distance to water is simply irrelevant, just as travel is to elk. I once hunted a herd that was traveling 8-10 miles a day between their food source and bedding area. I relate it to a trip from my bed to the kitchen, although quite different, the comparison is quite similar. Elk can walk faster than you can run and steepness of the terrain is of no concern to them.

As I grow older, memories fade. Things I used to do for fun; hunting on a twelve or thirteen thousand foot mountain; sleeping in a one man tent

on un-level, rocky ground; being hungry, wet tired and cold; suffering through blisters, shortness of breath and pain; isn't what it used to be. I guess my sixty-eight years have softened me. I can remember a time when nothing was too far, too high, or too steep if I heard a bull elk. I'm reminded as I write of a hunt years ago in the Gila Wilderness Area. This area covered 1.5 million acres and 600,000 acres were accessible only by foot or horseback. I spent seven days deep in the Gila Wilderness only to emerge with nothing except great memories of close encounters with big bulls and lots of blisters.

Several years ago, Slade left me in New Mexico and drove to some really

rough country in southwest Colorado. He backpacked for a few days, while I tried to fill my New Mexico tag. A text from him read...battery about dead, hungry, sore, cold, wet, tired, and no bulls. And, so goes bowhunting elk out west. It was great fun!

Last year was very special for me in several ways. I called and watched as Slade killed a tremendous 6X6 bull on our first morning hunt. Then, I was blessed again. I shot and killed the bull of my dreams. Who could have imagined! It was a cool beautiful September morning like so many others. The early shivering cold had given way to a pleasant and perfect morning. The sun's warmth on my back was nice and the spotlight it threw in front of me was great. The wind was perfect. Earlier upon arriving, I had heard a very distant bugle at daybreak, but only once and nothing since. All was quiet now so I eased along an old logging road. It wasn't long before I saw her. Maybe it was the flick of an ear, or her head as she lowered it to feed that caught my attention. I am not sure. The Rockies were really wet this particular year and the grass was tall and thick under the tall pine and spruce. She was to my right front about sixty yards out. I stepped off the trail and next to a small tree to help camouflage myself. Where are the others? Then, from far down the mountain I heard him bugle. It was a deep, thick old man sound, more like a cough than a scream. Then, just as if I were reading a newspaper, it all began to unfold. Cows began to mew and although I couldn't see them, I knew they were calling for him. Then he bugled again, only much closer. My heart began to pound. A second bull bugled just past where I heard the first. The monster elk I was waiting on just ran the smaller bull away from his heard and was now on his way back! I pulled an Easton ACC 360 out with a slick trick viper on it, nocked it up and waited. I was ready! I joined the





conversation. With my diaphragm tight against the roof of my mouth, I said “remember me?” And he came. My first glimpse of him left me in awe! He was headed straight for me as if I were reeling him in. But about forty yards out, he stopped, spun and began destroying a small tree. As he pushed and tore it apart, I drew back and the muscle memory of simply thousands of shots took over. The arrow was on its way. The next visual I have is of the orange nock and vanes disappearing in this last rib on the left side headed for the front shoulder on the other. He spun, looking toward where I was. Stood there a few seconds and as I’ve seen so many times before, his tall majestic head began to lower. He then turned, took a few steps and fell. There is a tremendous crash when an 800 lb. animal falls. I walked to him, looked, started shaking, knelt, prayed and wept.

I wonder how many reading this will remember the true “old days” of the Mississippi Bowhunters Association (MBA). My first tournament was held at Haystack Landing just off Highway 49 on the shore of the Ross Barnett Reservoir. Many of the targets were simply hay bales with animal pictures on them. One great memory I have is of the “bonus target.” Most tournament participants needed the points if they could get them. The bonus target was a black hog with the 10 ring cutout. It stood in front of hay bales like all the others. Yet, it was made of steel. The ping we heard all day was made real by all the arrow carnage lying around the steel hog. For me, the MBA was my first true connection to competitive archery. A State Championship and Top Gun became a priority for me. With hard work and study, I began to win. I have fifteen championships

and seven top guns under my belt at last count. These competitions led to traveling and shooting in the Archery Shooting Association (ASA). Many in our state were more productive at these than I. Yet, I have never traveled as much as most. Most of my serious shooting was at home with the Mississippi Bowhunters Association. I have been blessed to win three national shoots and placed top ten multiple other times. The MBA has always been there for us as Mississippi bowhunters. We owe the older and more dedicated founding fathers of this organization for establishing an institute that promotes the sport of archery in Mississippi. For years on the sleeve of most all my shooting and even hunting shirts you can find a MBA patch. It is a proud symbol of our sport, and the many that are a part of it.