

# Opening Day Perspectives

## FROM MOTHER TO GRANDMOTHER

It's raining leaves again as far as the eye can see. Shades of red, gold, and brown seem to float like rainbows in the sky. There is a slight crispness in the air and you know it is almost time for hunting season to begin. The excitement begins to build. The illusive dream of getting the "big one" that has been just beyond your reach, may now become a reality. Your heart starts pounding with anticipation.

It's Friday night and like a scheduled train stop, here come all the children and grandchildren. The house roars with laughter as everyone clambers around bringing in all their hunting gear. Once settled for their weekend getaway, everyone gathers around the roaring fire eager to claim their "special spot" in the woods. Every one of them has a gleam of hope in their eye that this year will be "the year!"

Before we were blessed with grandchildren, our two boys were raised in the woods. If hunting season was open, they were hunting. As our children were growing up we made it a point to teach them about the outdoor world, how to hunt and fish, how much fun it is to camp and work in the

yard. Keep in mind the latter wasn't what they considered "fun," but they managed.

I believe deer camp is where our children learned more than how to hunt. They learned about friendship, a hunt isn't always about getting a deer, and probably what I consider to be the funniest, they learned how to be quick witted! They had to. As a lot of mothers can relate, the boys and their dads were usually shipped off to deer camp for the weekend and left to fend for themselves, a mom's weekend off! I know I took advantage of that many times. The guys at deer camp cut our boys no slack. They had to learn how to respond quickly and appropriately. To date, they can still hang with the best of them in a "gotcha" conversation.

Fast forward, I now look at their children. Time sure does fly. Most have girlfriends or boyfriends and the grandchildren are eager to include their friends in our hunting tradition. I am proud of what they have become and the way they lead. My job at the Mississippi Wildlife Federation (MWF) has made a huge impact on me. Before I started working for

MWF, I knew very little of our natural resources and the importance they serve or of wildlife. Because of this job, I've learned how important it is to conserve our natural resources and most importantly, how necessary it is we teach others to do the same.

My children and their children have had the opportunity to participate in most every program the Mississippi Wildlife Federation offers. They've had an "inside" view of why we do what we do. I remember one time my youngest son commented to me that his teacher was so impressed with him and his volunteer work. She noticed he volunteered almost all his free time to the Mississippi Wildlife Federation and asked why. He said, "You don't get it, do you? My mom works there. I have no choice!" Probably then, all the volunteering he was doing was what he really considered work. But now he sees and more importantly understands why the Federation does what it does to engage youth of all ages. Even the grandchildren understand. So, year after year at Granny's and Paw Paw's "hotel," reservations increase and so does the fun.



Photo by Wes Starnes



Photo by Wes Starnes



Photo by Brittany Starnes

# pective

BY MELANIE STARNES

Life at our house is much different than at most. Here we ride in wheelbarrows, feed the chickens, pick wild blackberries, hang snake skins around our necks, hunt, ride four-wheelers, visit our “redneck beach,” which is a sandbar on Bayou Pierre, swim in a cattle watering trough, lay around in hammocks, remove ticks frequently, and go on survival adventures. If you’ve not experienced a survival adventure, you are missing the time of your life. Here you have the opportunity to camp on the land, kill your food, cook it over an open flame, and fight mosquitoes all night or weekend long. Keep in mind, Granny has been around long enough to know that “kill your food” meant sneak food from the house when no one was looking and say you actually survived by providing your own food. Now, on occasion I have heard of a few worms and a few other creatures being eaten during



Photo by Wes Starnes

these survival adventures, but as I write my stomach weakens so moving on...

It's the memories we've made that inspire our children and grandchildren to continue our traditions knowing that by doing so, they too make a difference in a young person's life and the environment. I remember the saying I've heard many times, "It takes a village." Whether you are talking about raising a child or teaching them how to take care of this wonderful place we live, it takes all of us, united.

Soon it will be 4:30 a.m. and hunting season will officially kick off! Everyone in the house wakes to the smell of fresh coffee brewing, bacon, sausage, eggs and biscuits cooking and slowly but surely, starts the process of dragging themselves out of bed to get the day started. As we sit around the table, laughter fills the air and drowsiness

is soon replaced by eagerness to get going. One by one we all disappear into the woods, creeping ever so quietly as to not disturb the deer. The walk is long but the reward is great and it really doesn't matter if you shoot a deer or not. It's about the journey and what we learn along the way. It's about the same tall tales we share over and over around an open fire under the stars at night, exaggerating each detail so that even the story teller starts to believe it's true. It's about the adventure and what tomorrow brings. The adventure lies in common experiences and memories shared over the years. It is excitement to what a new day can bring, knowing that I have my "village" by my side.

Soon a new day dawns with the alarm sounding reveille loud and clear. Each hunter scrambles to get out of the door first. One after the other we slip

off into the woods wondering what new adventure this day will bring. As the sun creeps over the horizon, a shot rings out for all the woods to hear. Paces quicken eager to get to their final destination. No one can predict the day, just dream of what could be.

Tonight, as many others, there will be a roaring fire and tall tells will abound. Each hunter exhausted and exhilarated at the same time. The smell of smoked pork loin drifts through the air indicating supper won't be much longer. Three generations gather around the table giving thanks for the food and the day each were able to experience. It's not whether a deer was harvested, it's that we all enjoyed each other and the beautiful world God opened our eyes to see.