

On Wisconsin Outdoors

With the Dick Ellis Experts

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A Helping Hand

Hunters sometimes the only path to youth outdoors

By Dick Ellis

More than 20 years ago, my old truck rattled into a driveway in Waukesha Wisconsin in the wee hours. I couldn't tell you the exact time, but I know that there wasn't a hint of morning orange on the October sky as a tall, skinny 15 year old with hair hanging past the shoulders made his way from the house to take a place in the front seat.

Matt didn't know me. I worked with his mother and she had asked if there was a chance that I could take her son with no male influence in his life hunting. I was 29 years old, no gray, 6-foot-one and dressed in camo clothes from head to foot in the black of night. A certain tenseness hung under the dome light as Matt tossed away any opportunity of escape by closing the door behind him.

"Hi Matt," I said offering my hand, my name and one little suggestion before we headed on to the northern unit of the Kettle Moraine State Forest.. "It's going to be cold out there this morning. Do you have any boots?"

Matt looked down at the floorboards and his holey, high-top tennis shoes. He looked back at me and shook his head. His baptism to the world of Wisconsin bowhunting for deer would have to be done with cold feet.

The truck traveled north toward Kewaskum, like so many beginnings to so many hunts, time spent in quiet conversation and planning. Because Matt wasn't ready to place an arrow to ensure a quick kill, and had never entered any woods in the pre-dawn black, he would stick with me

and we would take a ground stand until the cold intruded. Then we would catch breakfast, practice with his bow on the farmer's tractor road, and take a stand again in late afternoon.

Just off the deer trail moving inside the barbwire fence running with the wood edge, I showed Matt how to kick leaves away so that he wouldn't make noise while adjusting position. With a quiet word not to become discouraged if we didn't see deer, in fact that we probably wouldn't see deer during this first vigil, we settled in to watch our world lighten. It wasn't 15 minutes after legal shooting hours that the two fawns came.

And came and came. The small deer moved with the fence, motherless and clueless that danger stood on the ground ahead. Matt was on inside, toward the fawns and I whispered not to move. They came on still, periodically alternating between a feeding posture and the instinctive snap-up of the head to "catch" any predator that might be lurking near. In minutes, the closest fawn stood literally three feet from Matt, closer than I have been to any wild deer before or since in 40 years in the field, stomping its front feet, twisting its head and "demanding" that this thing before it move.

After an eternity, the two fawns bounded off just 15 yards, stopped, looked back, and slowly burned away with the morning fog into a lifelong memory. Matt turned to me. "I...I...I...can't stop shaking," he whispered.

Matt and I have traveled some roads



Often, youth need mentors for an introduction to the outdoors and a lifetime of adventure. (Ellis)



Outdoor classrooms like this goose banding session near Green Bay allow youths to interact with wildlife on a very personal basis. (Ellis)



The statewide youth turkey hunt will take place this weekend, April 11 and 12. The season one week prior to the regular turkey season allows opportunity for close one on one mentoring of future hunters in a relaxed atmosphere without competition for hunting spots.

since, good and bad. I helped him buy his first rifle, watched him gut his first buck and many more. We dragged out critters together. And Matt told a brother standing in front of a cabin stove that he “would wait until the deer was dead a little while longer” before partaking in eggs and tenderloin for breakfast.

With an inner toughness even as a kid that was inborn in Matt, he stuck with me on a day-long track of a deer that ended up as a banner story on the cover of Deer & Deer Hunting magazine. Lori and I moved in with him for one year when he needed someone at age 16, and we found out in a hurry that there is a reason that parents stay up worrying into the early hours and clash with their kids. And I wouldn’t trade the memories for anything.

April 7th, I have a few hour ride to Mississippi River country and a date in Grant County. I will meet Miles, a 12 year old boy who has completed his hunter’s safety course and wants to hunt but who has no male role model in his life. He’s saving for his first shotgun, his mother

said. It’s evident that Pam is a good mother but can’t do it all. She is looking forward to someone who knows the woods and this game we all love stepping in, if just for a while, now and then.

Miles and I have one of my shotguns to sight-in. We have landowners to say hello to. We’re hoping for permission to hunt during the Statewide Youth Turkey Hunt April 11 and 12, and we’ll have a gift of appreciation to leave when we find it. We have calls to try, birds to locate, and some professional hanging-out to do together. It will be a few hour introduction and hopefully, years of hunting and fishing when we can make it happen. But it has to start with one day.

The two-day spring youth turkey hunt, initiated in 2007, occurs each year during the weekend preceding the opening of the regular season. The Youth Hunt, according to DNR releases, “allows opportunity for close one-on-one mentoring of future hunters in a relaxed atmosphere without competition for hunting spots from regular

season hunters.”

“Study after study has shown that it takes a hunter to make a hunter,” said DNR Upland Wildlife Ecologist Scott Hull. “With all the activities available today, getting out with a son, a daughter, a niece, a nephew or a family friend can mean a lot. Spending time with a youth, passing on your skills and passion for your sport can be a big step toward nurturing a lifelong commitment to conservation of our wildlife resources.”

May I add, your involvement can be a life-saver, period and if you’re just lucky, that street some day will run both ways. Matt now, has been my friend for more than two decades. He is a vice-president of a Waukesha Bank. He is married with a toddler and a baby. And when I need financial advice, I land in a chair across the desk from Matt in a Waukesha office. Those people in the lobby have no idea what kind of memories are spilling out of the door, with my friend’s laughter the exclamation point an affirmation that I did at least one thing very right in my life.

There are no special application procedures for the youth turkey hunt. Anyone interested can find additional details in the spring turkey hunting regulations, on the DNR website, or by calling Scott Hull at 608-267-7861 or Sharon Fandel at 608-261-8458.

Just a few more questions, please, just for you. What are you doing this weekend? What are you doing these upcoming hunting and fishing seasons? And what young boy or girl do you know, without an outdoor mentor anywhere in site? Oh, and one more.

What are you going to do about it? *ow*



Girls and boys alike enjoy the outdoors but often without mentors often miss the opportunity to be introduced to hunting or fishing



Study after study shows that it takes a hunter to make a hunter, and takes a fisherman to make a fisherman. Outdoor mentors often take the place of a family role model for kids seeking an introduction to the great outdoors.



With male role models too often missing from the family, the tradition of hunting and fishing must often be passed along to young people by outdoor mentors. Your involvement can open a whole new world to kids in need.