

# Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

## All in the Family

by Jim Picard

*Editor's note: Mentoring is an important element of the hunting tradition. In some families, learning to hunt is a rite of passage in which knowledge and skill are passed from one generation to the next, fostering a shared love and respect for our natural world. Here's one family's take on the importance of passing the tradition on to others.*

Growing up, I loved to camp and fish, and wanted to learn how to shoot and hunt as well. Luckily, I was born into a family with a deep hunting tradition. That's not always the case, and it may be even less so these days.

My grandfather, father, godfather, neighbors, and the landowners we hunted with taught me many things. I remember being told: "Step where I step. Careful now. Feel for branches under your feet. Don't break them. Hush boys, or the deer will hear us coming. Make sure you know where your arrow is pointed, and what's beyond."

Collectively, these folks were my mentors, my teachers. Over the decades, they taught me a lot about respect, responsibility, safety, ethics, camaraderie, and friendship.

When I was young, Dad would ask me: "How long did you practice today? How well did you do? Let's shoot together...you can show me. Are your broadheads sharp?"

I learned how to judge distance from an elevated location by shooting from our deck at an apple on the ground. I finally learned what kind of power

my little bow had when my arrow skipped across the ground and hit our swimming pool. This was my first taste of how important it was to know what lay beyond your target. Dad wasn't too happy, but he knew I had learned my lesson, so he let it go.

I worked hard at my craft, and one summer, I earned a Presidential Archery Award. After I shot my first rabbit, my best friend and I had to build the resolve to eat it. I was taught how to field dress and butcher other hunters' deer long before I was successful myself.

As an adult, father, and mentor myself, the shoe is now on the other foot. I now have the privilege of passing on my knowledge and traditions to my son, my daughter, and my students. What better way is there to honor your mentor?

You know you've done something right when your daughter asks you to pass up a shot at a healthy deer because there's another out in the field that is "limping along." You also know you've done something right when your son shoots his first "Straight 25" at the Empire State Amateur Trapshooting Association shoot.

Deciding I wanted to take it to the next level and share my knowledge with others as well, I became a sportsman education instructor. I am doing something I love, and hope to inspire my students as my mentors inspired me.

Today, my son Vincent is also an instructor, albeit an apprentice. He says he's learned a lot about hunters and their craft, about safety, and about

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The author (center) answering questions about deer biology.

preparedness. But I know his favorite part is the module on firearms. Being a trap shooter, he knows a lot about firearms, and he's in his element sharing that knowledge with others.

Since hunting doesn't always get passed down from generation to generation like it did in our family, being a sportsman education instructor is an important way to keep the sport alive. Teaching alongside my son, I will continue to share what was passed on to me with anyone who wants to learn to hunt.

At the end of a long day afield, I love sitting in front of the fireplace at camp with my feet up, hanging out with friends, and remembering the lessons taught by my mentors. No one can take away our memories, our stories, our lessons, or our friendships. We even manage to get a deer or a bear once in a while. I've learned however, that you don't have to harvest anything to have a great day outdoors.

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