

BECK'S BIG BUCK



By William Beck

I can vividly remember Sunday hunts with Dad. I was probably about six or seven years old when these outings began. Sunday afternoon was about the only leisure time he had, since his job as a mason required him to work six days a week. Attendance at church was a "must," and was followed by a quick lunch. Then we were out the back door; he with his Montgomery Ward double-barrel and me with a stick.

Photos provided by author

Dad emigrated from Germany, from a family of farmers. He told me he never would have been able to hunt in Germany, since only the affluent were afforded that privilege.

Game was plentiful near our home in Rensselaer County. Our dog, Jippy, would normally run rabbits past Dad. As I grew older, I swapped my stick for a BB gun. We would always traipse through the nearby orchard, grapevines and hedgerows in the late afternoon, to try to find grouse feeding. Occasionally, Dad would shoot a grouse, never an easy task. I can still recall a beautiful cock pheasant that our dog Jippy flushed. Dad missed with both barrels...and I couldn't believe it.

At the age of fourteen, I bought a 20-gauge Iver Johnson single-barrel shotgun. I soon discovered that, although it was easy to carry, it wasn't the ideal upland gun. I can still remember a sunny, warm, gorgeous October afternoon when Jippy's replacement, a beautiful female English Setter, pointed a cock pheasant. Dad slowly approached the bird, flushed it for me, and I killed it with that gun.

As I grew into an adult, Dad and I shared other outdoor experiences. On opening day in 1951, I took him to the Adirondacks to hunt deer. Before that time, he had never hunted outside of our Rensselaer County town. In those days, the trip north took between three and four hours. We left home in the morning, and when we got to our destination, we each went our own way. Dad found an abandoned pasture to watch over, fell asleep and awoke to find a big buck and doe feeding. He shot at the buck, which soon disappeared into the thick underbrush. Since it was almost dark, Dad marked the spot and told the story when he returned to camp.

The next morning, I quickly found a massive set of antlers and a huge deer lying on its side very near the pasture where Dad had been hunting. Word spread quickly after we returned to camp with his prize. A number of other hunters came to admire the deer, take pictures, and meet Dad. Boy, was he proud. And I was hooked on Adirondack deer hunting.

Today, Dad's trophy rack (a non-typical 17 points) is the centerpiece over the mantel in our Adirondack cabin, flanked by four of my best racks. The cabin is only about a mile from where Dad shot that deer. Unfortunately, we lost Dad in 1959 and he never saw the cabin.

Time passes, and now I'm the old man in this story. Unfortunately, my son and I don't have the time to share regular hunts. I taught him to fish and hunt and like his late grandfather, he shot a trophy buck which



Hunters from neighboring properties came to admire the 17-point buck. Dad was a proud hunter with this once-in-a-lifetime trophy buck.

is recorded in the New York State Big Buck Record Book. We still manage a couple of fall hunts together, but the bulk of his time is spent with family: skiing, horseback riding and motorcross racing.

Our daughter showed no interest in guns or shooting, although both her boys have learned to shoot skeet and upland birds. Perhaps because of the electronic age, they find it difficult to muster the patience required to sit on a deer stand or spend hours afield in search of game.

Today, my wife of 52 years, Evah, has become my hunting partner. For years, she organized family activities around my hunting schedule. Sometimes I wonder about the timing of our son's birth—three days before the opening day of deer season.

It was about 15 years ago that I encouraged Evah to take the New York State hunter safety course. I couldn't have predicted how serious a hunter she would become. This one-time city girl, who had never held a gun, now goes on hunts with me. (Or is it me with her?) I could call our story "The Old Lady and the Old Man" but I don't think that would be in my best interest. She is a good shot.

I have many fond memories of hunting with my dad, my son, my friends, and now my wife. They were all made possible by my father, Wilhelm Beck, who took the time to share his passion, and his leisure time, with me. Thanks, Dad.

William Beck is a lifelong resident of West Sand Lake, and spends as much time as possible with his wife Evah at their mountain camp near Schroon Lake.