

MY FAVORITE HUNTING MEMORIES

By Tyler Benedetti

2016 Hunting Heritage "Passing on the Tradition" Essay Contest
First Place Winner, Tyler Benedetti (age 17)

I started tagging along with Dad as soon as I could keep up with his pace. It was exciting at age five, dressing up in camouflage and face paint to hunt turkeys. It took a few years to grasp the fact my brother and I, were not supposed to sing as we hiked through the woods. Though unsuccessful, my dad spent those early years teaching us about blinds, decoys, turkey tracks, droppings, dusting, roosts and calling.

As soon as I was old enough to hunt turkeys, I took a Hunter's Safety Course. At 11, I was prepared to venture into the woods with my very own 20-gauge shotgun. The first few hunts resulted in some missed shots and opportunities. I quickly learned that a pump action shotgun needed to be cycled in order to be able to take a follow-up shot. A few lucky toms were saved, because the gun would not fire a second round.

As I got older, I had grown enough to be able to safely handle one of my Dad's semi-auto shotguns. My Dad took me out to shoot sporting clays, so that I could familiarize myself with the shotgun and the principals of leading, pointing and not aiming. There would be no more missed follow-up shots!

On my next few spring breaks, my Dad would take my friends and me out turkey hunting. We were all successful at bagging toms. The only thing Dad aimed was a camera.

My favorite hunt was father son's hunt two years ago. We got onto the ranch before sunrise and set up a blind not far from a turkey roost. The crisp early morning air was ruffled by the sound of the turkeys flying down from their roosts. Over the next few hours, my Dad played a game of tag, calling out to a tom as it gobbled in response. Then the tom went silent.

Minutes later, a hen came out of the brush and started pecking on our hen decoys. She dusted herself in the road and then started eating seeds from the grass. She continued to hang around our set-up for over an hour.

Suddenly, a tom gobbled from the nearby brush. The hen remained silent, so my Dad responded with a gentle purring. The sounds of footsteps and gobbling as the tom charged through the leaves and underbrush became deafening. Imagine my surprise when not one, but three toms appeared! After waiting for them to get within fifteen yards I could not wait any longer. (2 min. video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3NTpDP2bNY>)

I cannot remember when Dad last turkey hunted. In hindsight, he was always toting a camera, decoys, blinds and pockets of calls. Every trip he planned was for the kids. I'll always be grateful for the unselfish giving of his time, foregoing his own ability to hunt, so that I could develop skills and memories that will last me a lifetime. Thank you dad, I love you.

