

back cast



By Ron Wilson

Gimme. Bunny. Slam dunk. Can of corn.

Any of these sports euphemisms would accurately describe how I thought the youth-only deer season would shake out for my young hunter in 2008. I learned, however, that a freezer full of self-assurance makes for really thin stew.

I'm seated dead solid among those who believe there is more to hunting and fishing than killing. (This is one of those things that some nonhunters and nonanglers don't buy about us, and wonder how we can even say it with a straight face.) Yet, this was one of those times that shooting something really seemed crucial to the experience. Turns out, I was wrong like I am with a lot of things concerning teenagers, and I was really the only one moping at the end of the season.

The youth-only deer season kind of characterized our outdoor adventures in 2008. We had a blast, certainly, but more often than not, things didn't go as envisioned.

We spent the better part of fall trailing behind two dogs trying to shoot a bird over the greenest of the two. By doing so, we figured everything – all the running around in tall grass, down tree rows and through cattails – would come together and make perfect sense. He would finally understand that we weren't out for some glorified walk on the prairie that ended in a pretty good lunch in the shade.

By my count, our rookie retriever flushed nine roosters that he could call his own. Birds that his more experienced kennel mate had no hand in whatsoever; birds that he smelled, trailed and bumped into the air with confidence and a young dog's clumsiness.

By my count, we missed all nine. We couldn't buy a bird over that poor dog, but had no problems knocking them down over his smaller, but older running mate. After missing the first few, we started pressing and making it worse. And it's not like we're horrible. We simply got mired in a weird shooting funk that we couldn't pull ourselves out of.



I guess if shooting a bird over a dog his first year makes or breaks him, then we have some fixing to do in 2009.

Backtrack to summer 2008. Three of us are staying in an inexpensive cabin in Montana that offers electricity, but no running water. We're short one sleeping bag, but we beg a blanket from the cabin owners.

On the backside of the cabin is a fire pit and picnic table, both of which are situated on a high bank just feet from a gorgeous river. The water that seems in such a hurry to pass our campsite empties into the Yellowstone a couple miles downstream, hangs a right and makes its way to the Missouri River near Williston. Eventually, the same water we'll catch trout in the next five days will flow with little fanfare by our hometown on its way to South Dakota and beyond.

I don't know long it takes for the water that washes over our wading boots to get to Bismarck, but I do know that it will carry a teenager 25 yards downstream quicker than you might imagine.

My son's downstream ride was hairy, but easy to track by the green ball cap worn backwards on his head. Thankfully he drifted by his uncle who, while playing a fish on his fly rod in one hand, reached out and nonchalantly plucked his nephew from the river with the other. I applauded out of relief and laughed because he landed both the boy and the fish.

Later during the same trip, I hooked a rainbow in fast water, turned to chase the fish downstream and fell, slamming my right elbow and knee on some rocks. No one applauded, but a kindly husband and wife we met later on a bridge disagreed on whether I needed medical

treatment.

The decision was a gimme, I figured, a can of corn. I sided with the husband because we only had a couple of days left to fish, but ended up in the hospital a day later anyway, which is certainly not how I envisioned the trip shaking out.

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