

back cast

By Ron Wilson



I'm going back more than 30 years, but I remember one of my aunts shooting a nice mule deer buck that made the mistake of wandering through deer camp. It was field-dressed and cooling in the shade of a pine tree when we returned from an orchestrated "drive" through a timber thicket that looked so promising when it was initially drawn in the dirt with a stick.

Camp meat, one of my aunts modestly announced.

Unless I'm missing something, a recollection or two that has been misplaced in a 47-year-old memory bank that does remember that buck hanging in the shade like it was yesterday, that may be as close as I've come to

hunting with women, even though I was never around – or underfoot, as they used to scold me for – to see any one of my aunts shoulder a rifle or pull the trigger.

I got to thinking about this while writing for this issue about the applauded, and soon-to-turn 15-year-old Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program. Before really scratching my head, I knew my past wasn't littered with women hunting and fishing partners, but I expected more than I've come up with, which isn't much.

I grew up with sisters, one older and one younger, who didn't hunt or fish. One of them may argue today the reason why is because she was never encouraged to do so, while the other, I'm rock solid certain, had zero interest.

My mom didn't do any of these things when I was growing up, but it turns out that she took up fly-fishing after I moved to North Dakota. Consequently, we never

fished together, or even talked about it before she died too young, although there is a photograph somewhere that I need to unearth of her in chest waders, holding a fly rod and wearing a ball cap that now



RON WILSON

hangs from a nail in my closet.

My daughter, sandwiched in age between two brothers, started out with an interest in fishing, but dulled on the activity once she learned that I wasn't offended if she did something else. And it's been years since she's sat between my legs in the basement and shot our Daisy BB gun at dinosaur targets we drew with crayons. I questioned her recently about going through the Game and Fish Department's hunter education program, but she quickly declined.

Our relationship, like our interests, are different now than they once were, and I understand that. It wasn't that long ago that my daughter begged for her own tackle box, but more importantly, wanted *me* to help her stock it. Today, she's uncomfortable with me calling her name out in public, especially in front of friends her own age.

That, too, will change, as could her stance on hunting and fishing with her dad. I won't hold my breath, but I will continue to provide the opportunities.

I fished with my wife once, sometime in the late 1980s. After a short casting lesson, she caught a 15-inch rainbow trout, smiled for the camera and called it quits. With 8 miles of river to go, she propped her feet up on the cooler and enjoyed the lazy drift-boat ride down a pretty river without making another cast. I'm certain she hasn't picked up a fishing rod in the last 20-plus years with the idea of actually using it.

While I've never stopped and thought about it until now, I'm fine with the way things are. It's OK that the women in my life like to simply walk behind our two bird dogs to watch them work. It's OK that they both love venison, but choose not to hunt. It's OK that spending 8 hours on the river per day for several days doesn't sound like their idea of a great summer vacation.

North Dakota's BOW program will continue to inspire women to walk confidently into the outdoors, embracing what many of us – no matter the gender – find so beguiling about the prairies, woods and wetlands. And maybe one day one of those women will be my daughter. If so, I promise not to show up at the weekend event and call her name out in front of her newfound friends.

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.