

Generational hand-me-downs are a critical part of all our lives. Whether it is deer hunting or whether it is attending your first Browns tailgate with your dad or uncle down in the muni-lot, going to Columbus to watch the Buckeyes or any other endeavor, we learn to participate and appreciate by being shown the way. In this excellent piece, Brian McPeck shares the tale of an annual tradition in his life. I stepped out of the truck and onto the hillside Tuesday morning.



It was about 7:15 AM and I was leaving the relative safety, warmth and comfort of my Ford Explorer for the breezy, cold morning that Belmont County was offering up. The temperature was 40 degrees, the breeze wasn't unexpected, but Monday's soaking, cold rain was going to make Tuesday a bit of a muddy, wet sitting session on this second day of Ohio's deer-gun season. After 9 hours of standing in sideways falling rain on Monday, seeing nothing other than a couple very wet squirrels, I was ready to consider Tuesday a fresh start to the trip.

I had dropped my partner, Frank Parsons, off across the hollow and came to my present spot. Mr. P (as I've called him since I was 13 years old) was going to make his way into a ladder stand we had set up Sunday that overlooked some

deer trails and the creek bottom that divided his hill from mine. I was on the far side of that next hill.

I loaded my gun and began walking, eventually settling in to an area I thought would provide a natural funnel for deer moving through the area. I sat in the mud and the wet leaves with my back against the tree and waited. After about an hour and a half of waiting and convincing myself that no deer had probably ever walked this piece of land I was hunting, and that I was a stupid for ever assuming one would, I picked up some movement about 90 yards to my left and down at the bottom of the hill.

I watched the smallish doe make her way from my left to my right and she was careful not to leave the thickets and briars she was walking. She was likely a yearling and she was likely alone only because the doe that birthed her had likely already become a Belmont County check-in statistic.

I waited until the doe's head disappeared behind a couple of trees before I got myself into position to take a shot. I picked out an area where I would wait for the doe to get to and when she did I took aim and fired the .20gauge.

The Mossberg barked out its shot and when the smoke cleared that doe was still standing at the bottom of the wood line. I missed.

However, being a yearling and being without a more experienced deer to run her out of danger, the doe ran back up the hill to ward me, slightly to my left. This happens in those hills occasionally even with older deer because the bowls of woods and pasture make for a heck of an echo and the deer are often confused as to where the shot actually came from.

She stopped about 35 yards away from me but concealed behind a couple trees and some vines that hid all but her shoulder area from me. I set my sights on that

shoulder area and slowly squeezed the trigger again. The deer jumped and immediately took a couple steps around the side of the hill and out of my sight. I listened for the tell-tale sound of an animal falling in leaves or into some briars but the wind wouldn't allow me to benefit in that manner. After 10 minutes, convinced I had hit that deer where I was aiming, I got up to check for signs that I had.

Nothing.

Putting my orange BGSU cap on a stick where I had been sitting when I shot, I traced where the deer had been. I saw no blood, no hair, no sign or any indication at all that I had hit it. I walked down into the bottom where I would have run had I been fleeing something or someone. I walked the side of the hill where some well-worn trails existed and would provide easy access out of the area and out of danger.

Still nothing.

I knew I hit that deer. And I wasn't leaving it out there. After 20 minutes of looking, questioning my capacity to shoot straight and still not coming up with a trace of sign on the side or the bottom of that hill, I was ready to give Mr.P a call to come give me hand. Frank Parsons is 63 years old and was my father's best friend. When my dad died, 14 years ago, Mr. P introduced me to hunting. Small game hunting at first, then gradually into deer hunting. I knew he'd be able to either find that animal or justifiably bust my balls into pebbles about completely whiffing on the shot.

But just before I busted out the walkie-talkie, I decided to expand my little search circles up the hill instead of focusing solely down the hill and on the side. And damn if I didn't locate the trail. As it turned out, that young doe had run *up* the hill. That doesn't occur very often at all and it certainly wouldn't have been the option an older doe or a buck would have taken. Just as I came to the top of the hill where the sign was heavy I heard one shot from over on the other hill where Mr. P

would have been.

One shot is always the number you're listening for. It means, in all likelihood, the target was hit and is down. Two shots and three shots typically mean someone missed one and is now hoping rather than aiming at a running deer.

I found my doe and then my radio crackled. Frank isn't much into technology, so these radios are not only a communication device; they're also a source of enjoyment for me. Much like Mr. P gets a kick out of me shooting and missing, I enjoy watching him trying to work the walkie-talkie. He wasn't able to receive messages because he locked something on his radio, but I clearly heard him say he had shot and killed something and he needed help getting it out of the woods and back to the truck.

I finished cleaning my deer, put it on the trailer (it had graciously fallen less than 100 yards from my truck) and left to go see what the old guy had shot. Keep in mind, when I started hunting with him, it was clearly a novice-expert relationship. I didn't know anything and Mr. P seemingly knew it all. I had never before hunted and, to be honest, had no interest in ever doing so. But after my dad died it seemed like a way for a couple people who were really affected by the loss to hang out and do something to forget about it for a few hours per weekend.

The man was patient with me. He taught me not only how to carry a gun but also about respecting the animals you hunted as well as the land you hunted them on. He taught me that hunters are some of the world's greatest conservationists and that deer hunters are responsible for generating almost \$300 million into Ohio's economy each year. He instructed me on how to clean everything I shot as well as on the importance that you didn't kill it if you weren't going to eat it or donate it.

Frank cleaned my first squirrel, rabbit and deer. Then it was on me. He taught me about tracking animals and about how critical finding them and cleaning them was. He told me to work in expanding circles when I was searching for signs that

I'd hit my target and to never completely disregard any possible path an animal might take.

He taught me the value of the animal; whether it was a buck or a doe and that the value was in the meat and the memories and not necessarily in the horns.

"You can't eat horns, Brian. Not even good for making soup", he told me. Which is why, after 10 years of learning and hunting and appreciating the land and the animals, I haven't gone without venison. It's my family's traditional New Years Eve meal and it helps feed us all year long. God has blessed me with an animal in my path every year I've hunted.

Now that I'm 40+ and Mr.P is working toward his middle sixties, the roles are a bit reversed. Make no mistake, the man is in better shape than I am, is stronger than I am, is probably healthier and may be walking those hills down in southern Ohio for another 20 years, who knows.

But there are no guarantees. Things happen every day and every year that make the opportunities much more precious when they do come. Who knows if the landowner will be alive next year or even if he'll continue to sell off his timber for ridiculous amounts of cash, thus reducing our huntable land.

But it's for these reasons, and out of genuine appreciation for what he's taught, done and instilled in me that I root harder for Mr. P to get his deer than I root for me to get one. I want to see him knock down a nice buck or a big doe and experience it for himself again.

So when the radio crackled a dozen more times and a flustered (flustered by the radios, not by getting the animal out) 63 year old man asked again for some help, I knew he knocked one down.



Frank got himself a beautiful, big Belmont County 6-point buc. Within 40 minutes of each other I had employed all the skills and the reasoning he had passed on to me and he had been rewarded for doing so with another beautiful animal and year's worth of venison.

The thing about it all is that he would gladly have traded his deer for mine in order for me to harvest the buck. And because he would have done that and because of the value of all he has taught me, I wouldn't trade my little doe for his 6 point buck for anything. Nature, like it always does, took care of it perfectly.

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And we have an obligation to pass those customs and those traditions to those who come after us.