

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



Forget the turkey leftovers. Forget the shopping frenzy of the weekend.

Forget the limbs tossed down, the leaves still whipping around and those lingering outside chores complicated by Mother Nature's erratic mood swings and frequent moisture outburst tantrums.

Forget all the usual, mundane things of daily life as the Keystone State shuts down for that greatest hunter's holiday that dwarfs all

others. Even if you aren't an active participant, you could hardly miss the blitz of advertising for gear or the extended holiday observed by umpteen schools across the commonwealth.

Oh deer! The annual white-tail economic revival of remote areas is already underway, as legions of license-bearing hunters head for the hinterlands. While mass marketers eagerly awaited "black" Friday for its

traditional buying boost with cash and credit card swiping, many small mountain-region communities of our state get their year-end economic boost courtesy of buck season.

Legions of trophy tales — of those gotten and those that got away — will arise from the deep, dark depths of the forests. The accounts will resound, hashed and rehashed through multiple tellings, from walls of tiny, rough-built cabins to those of fancy lodges.

By week's end, the empty-handed may be wishing they had done their stalking someplace else. At least in the mountainous area with which we are most familiar, the deer "take" has steadily declined in recent years. Meanwhile, back down the valley a piece, on a large piece of ground held by a sprawling state institution, banned to hunting and bordered by homes, the deer herd grazes like a bunch of cows.

Deer did not come to their abundant population numbers by being

deaf, dumb, and blind. Like bear, foxes, coyotes, and other of the larger state predator species, they know a good thing when they find it.

And, a good thing for a deer is a lush stand of some farmer's alfalfa. Why nibble forest browse when you could be munching sweet, tasty forage? Which is why, increasingly, the "big bucks" may likely be those that hang out in less-stalked place. Like a patch of scrub growth along an interstate, behind an edge-of-town shopping mall, or a small backyard orchard bordering a housing development.

While we love to watch the few that hang out in our neighborhood, we sympathize with acquaintances who lament herds of 50 whitetails nibbling their way through prime hayfields, night after night. Many of them are happy to share access to that abundance to hunters who display common sense, courtesy, and respect of property.

Let's repeat that, hunters: common sense, courtesy, and respect of property are critical. And, we have several hunters who are year-round regulars here, almost like part of the family. But ...

During goose hunting season, we allowed a few new individuals to hunt a huge invasion of geese that descended into our rye and oats fall pasture seeding. Because of cows, machinery and beloved grandchildren roaming the place,

we set strict boundaries about where anyone can be with a gun.

So when I spied a camo-dressed young man strolling, gun in hand, right behind the lawn fence early one evening, with the grandchildren romping around the yard, I became "unglued." And downright unfriendly.

One night later I totally "freaked out" when what sounded like a series of shots erupted right outside the house. Panic stricken, I went flying out in search of the intruder, to find grandson Caleb stomping on a piece of that puffy-plastic packaging material that was popping with loud cracks.

Some of the best hunting trophies — and the best stories — come from the least likely places.

Like that of a neighbor, currently carrying around a stranger-than-fiction deer antler trophy. A buck crashed into his SUV and died beneath the vehicle. Once back on the road, a bumping sound from beneath sent our friend back to the side of the road to check the ominous sound.

Stuck in one of his tires was a four-inch antler spike, which had apparently impaled the tread on impact. In a stroke of good fortune, the antler point remained embedded in the tire until he reached a repair center.

Beat that story, all you hunters headed for the hills.

And don't forget your spare tire.

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