*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Learning lessons from hunting**

Life is measured by the passage of time and the season of deer hunting gives me plenty of moments to reflect on past memories.

This is my 47th year of gun deer hunting and there is no place I’d rather be on the opening morning than sitting in the woods with my back against a tree. I’m carrying on a tradition started by my grandfather and carried on by my father.

I dearly miss both of those hunting partners – Grandpa died in 1994 and Dad passed in 2020. But I feel their presence in the silence of the woods and learned hunting from both of them.

Grandpa taught me how to build a ground stand with logs and branches. He had a fantastic hunting spot that overlooked an open valley between the woods where deer always crossed.

I also copied Grandpa’s nod towards comfort by hunting over a wood fire to keep me warm. Grandpa actually had an old cook stove where I have adapted an old charcoal grill that I have buried in the ground.

Dad taught me patience – sitting in a good spot and waiting for the deer to come could be very productive. But it took me a few years to learn that lesson, as I would easily get cold or bored as a teenager.

That’s when I would take a walk to visit Grandpa, where I knew I could warm up by the fire or even share a piece of lefse. Grandpa had an old butter knife that he jabbed into a punky log on his deer stand. He’d pull that knife out from the log, wipe it on his pants and butter up the lefse.

When Grandpa was unable to hunt during his final years, I inherited his stand for a few years and continued to hunt over an open fire. The stand was destroyed in 1998 when the tree it was under blew down with many others during the straight-line wind storms that year.

Later that year I took a walk through that valley and was amazed at how the storm had altered the landscape. I sat down in the remains of the stand and thought about Grandpa, his stories and the old knife, which I had left in the stand as a tribute to him.

Something made me look down and right under my feet, there it was. The old butter knife, tarnished and bent. I smiled and carried it and its memory with me.

I still have the knife, as well as the Thermos that Grandpa used and one of his old flannel shirts. I wear the shirt the day before the hunting opener and carry the Thermos into the woods every year.

When Dad died, my mother gave my son and son-in-law some of his hunting items. They too can carry the memories and the stories with them.

Last year I had the good fortune of harvesting a big buck. Whether I pull the trigger this year is really not that important to me anymore.  Deer hunting is my opportunity to unplug -- if only for a few hours -- from the hectic pace of life. It’s a time of solitude and reflection.

Hunting has helped teach me some humility, the virtue of patience and a deep appreciation for creation, bundled with the value of tradition and family.

And I still have some lessons to learn.

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Cutline:

Hardie: Chris Hardie takes a sip from the top of his grandfather's Thermos during the opening day of the 2021 gun deer hunt.

Stand: Chris Hardie's deer stand with a stack of wood for burning in the old charcoal grill.

Thermos and knife: Chris Hardie still uses his grandfather's Thermos and has kept a special knife as well.

Thermos-knife-shirt: A Thermos, an old butter knife and a flannel shirt all belonged to Chris Hardie's grandfather.