

HUNTING STORY

By Matt Dulany

This story was told to me in 1983 by a man named Samuel Cavileer. Mr. Cavileer resides in Chatsworth, New Jersey—the center of the Pine Barrens. He has lived there all his life with his fellow ‘Pineys.’ The Cavileer family is the most well-known family of the area and has inhabited the pinelands since the seventeenth century.

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Now this was back in '52, long before they paved that old road out by Buzby's place. There wasn't hardly no towns as many as there is now and there was plenty of game around. My pop used to tell me that there was panthers and wolves around these woods in the olden times. But hell, I ain't that old. And there sure wasn't none around in 1952. No, sir. What I was hunting was deer—the best all-around hunting in the world. The hunting is fun and the eating is even better! You ever gone deer hunting? You ever eaten deer? You don't know what you're missing if you haven't. Delicious is the word for it. Deeelicious! I hear some people eat it raw, but not around this way. We always cook our deer.

But anyway, back then you could taste all you wanted and not get locked away for it. There wasn't no game wardens with laws saying you had to wait until the deer was in season to shoot them. Hell, you're not picking blues; the deer don't have to ripen. It ain't like they're a crop. We used to hunt because we needed the food! They didn't put no law down on us saying we could only hunt when they told us we could because if they did we'd have gone hungry . . . I'd like to have seen them even try to tell us something like that. We'd have blown their hats off and put peel-out marks in their underwears. We hunted because we needed the food. We didn't have no frozen TV dinners like they have now. We didn't have no supermarkets nor these malls. Not back this way. It seems that every town around here is getting malled these days. They're going to mall these woods right on out of here. It's a damn shame.

If we didn't hunt I don't know how we'd have lived. But nowadays I can see why they have hunting seasons: if they didn't, there'd be no more game left around here. There are so many gol-dern people around here; I can't even count that high! I don't even know how many of us Cavileers there are anymore. If we hunted deer year round they'd be all killed and eaten by next winter. Hell, some of these people don't even use the deer for food. They stick them up on their walls as souvenirs. It's a damn shame.

Well, like I was saying . . . what was I saying again? . . . oh yeah: there

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we just stared at each other, frozen with fear. The wind blew all the snow that had collected on him right into me, making his body like a silhouette for a few seconds. His antlers weren't no four feet across. These things had to be six or seven feet easy. I didn't know how powerful he was before from that faraway view. But I knew now when I stood this close to him.

This was the closest I had ever come to a live buck, especially one of his size. And this was the only



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time I had ever gotten buck fever. I haven't gotten it since. I tried to bring the gun up to my other hand but it wouldn't go. It was like my brain had lost touch. I had to bring my left hand down to get the gun because my right hand wouldn't do it. I cocked and brought it up. My hands were so shaky I dropped it and damn near blew my foot off. I had to bend down and bring it back up again. All this time the buck had the same lock in with my eyes and I couldn't get out of it. My eyes were about the only things that were steady—everything else was shaking with buck fever. Still looking into his eyes, I somehow found the trigger and, not even knowing which way the barrel was pointing, I pulled it. The gun went off and kicked back out of my hands. The buck staggered back a step as if I'd punched him in the face. He went all pop-eyed and gave me this look that seemed to ask me what I did to him. He was looking at me sort of like: "What was that?" Well, I didn't know what I had done for a moment, whether I had shot him or what. I was still in such shock that I wasn't sure what had happened. Then I saw it.

It was a large solid circle forming right in the middle of his chest. At first you could hardly make it out, but within seconds it was bright red, scarlet, and dripping down to his forelegs. That was the first time I took my eyes away from his.

He turned around, started off into the wind, only this time with not quite as much power and agility. I looked at the new fallen blood on the snow and knew that he wouldn't make it very far. I picked up my gun, hopped over the log, and followed the trail of blood. I knew this time I would find him.

After about a hundred feet or so I found him lying in the snow with his nose turned up. He was dead. The snow was falling on him, half burying his priceless antlers, sinking him deeper and deeper with every flake. His fur still ruffled in the wind, only now with little white crystals on the tip of each hair. His eyes were still and open, only they was looking off to some unknown place in the sky instead of into mine. The wound in his hind leg, which so delighted me before, was not nearly as grand as the one on his chest, which so disgusted me now with its warm blood melting all the snow on it. The wound bled into the snow, dissolving it like spit on cotton candy. This was the most beautiful thing I'd ever killed.

I wasted no time and gutted him, cleaned out his scent gland, and did all those other glorious things people don't know about deer hunting. I then hung him up on a tree to let him bleed out and went back to the shelter of the log where I managed to get a small fire going. I went back on over to the deer and cut out his liver which I cooked up and ate right there. It tasted pretty good, considering I had no lunch that day.

After a while it got dark and I couldn't keep the fire up so I went to go check on the deer. He still had some draining to do but I wasn't about to freeze out there in them woods. So I wrapped him up in a rag I brought along and started for home. I know these woods like I know my own living room—you had to back then—and I made it home without any trouble in about two hours. During the walk it kept snowing and the wind kept up just the same and nearly frostbit my fingers. My ring finger had broken when the gun kicked back out of my hands and, aside from the loss of my brother Robert to the war, caused some of the worst pain I ever felt. To this day I'm one of the few Pineys who hasn't hocked their wedding ring because I can't get it over the swollen knuckle.

When I got back home I hung him in my barn. My family was mighty pleased when they saw the size of this buck. On Saturday we butchered him up and that night we had us a feast. My brother Edward was over, he was a trader from over by Atsion, and he bought the antlers for twenty-six dollars. That was quite a tidy sum back in 1952. He told me he could have given me more if I'd have saved the head. He said he could have stuffed it and sold it to some fancy hotel down in Atlantic City. I told him that wouldn't have been right. This buck was such a great one that he deserved better than to be just some dumb old souvenir.