



Inspiration and the Journey

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I remember it very clearly. When I answered the phone, the voice on the other end was downright upset.

"I just saw all the big deer pictures you posted online; are you nuts?" exclaimed my friend!

I immediately knew what he was getting at, because I used to be the same way. Not that long ago, I used to check my trail cameras with one eye looking over my shoulder to make sure no one could see. Only my most trusted friends would get a privileged glimpse of the big bucks I had on camera and sometimes even my harvest photos would be treated with the same confidentiality. Every effort was made to ensure secrecy and thereby protect my deer and my area.

Then, one day when I visited a familiar online hunting forum, that all changed. Historically, I rarely shared anything of value for fear of letting my secrets out of the bag. On that particular day however, I noticed a number of visitors to the forum who were new to hunting; individuals who were legitimately looking for information on how to become a better hunter. Some were asking the most basic of questions about how to get started. Then and there, I realized the importance of sharing information. In fact, it was at that point that I realized the future of hunting literally depends on it!

As I browsed the various threads and read scores of eager comments, I was impressed with how many experienced hunters were willing to share a wealth of information. Some had posted photos, some were sharing details about sheds they had found, and still others were sharing trail camera photos. As I continued to scroll through the various comments, it dawned on me - it was this type of information that I had been guarding so closely; the very stuff that was encouraging these new hunters to get out there and experience the thrill and connection with the great outdoors that I held so dear! From that day forward, I have been sharing my hunting experiences with anyone and everyone who will listen.

My epiphany involved the realization that I wasn't acting in the best interest of the activity that I so dearly love. Instead of sharing, promoting and getting excited about moments in the field, I was hiding them for fear that someone might take them away. Instead of celebrating my passion for the outdoors and hunting, I was stressing about it. I'm glad to say, that is no longer the case, and I couldn't be happier.

Inspired to share my knowledge and scores of sensational encounters, it began slowly. Initially I would share a few photos. Believe it or not, I was actually nervous at first. I kept wondering if anyone would recog-

nize the deer and connect them to where I hunt.

I remember actually sitting at my computer after I posted a thread, questioning why I was doing it.

In hindsight, it seems a bit silly, but I really had to fight through it. Not long after, something happened that confirmed I was doing the right thing. The encounter occurred in a local grocery store of all places! A fellow ran up to me and emphatically began to explain how he had never thought of shed hunting until he saw my pictures on the forum; now he absolutely loves it! He went on to tell me how he takes his younger siblings out and they spend all day searching the fields and forests for shed antlers, and more importantly, they all have a great time doing it. As we talked, he pulled out an assortment of photos and we continued to discuss the best places to look and some of our most exciting finds. But here's the kicker - since I first began sharing my experiences, this has happened countless times, and that makes it all worthwhile.

Fast forward and here I am today, sharing my experiences with you, our readers, and most importantly promoting hunting and everything good that is associated with the outdoors. Big Game Illustrated (BGI) is a special publication, namely because it is designed to be a print forum for real hunters to share real stories. Now with our feet under us I can sincerely say that the most enjoyable part of my job as a publisher is listening to you all share your stories. The process of integrating those experiences into our publication while giving the hunters, animals and each and every story the credit they deserve is an ongoing challenge, but it is something we are committed to doing as we strive for excellence. We continue to welcome submissions and consider it a privilege to share as many of them as we are able. Ultimately one of our goals is to inspire others to hunt. My hope is that BGI will be but one tool that will continue to fuel the fire and maintain our hunting heritage now and long into the future. 🍷

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