



Article and photographs by Stanley H. Kirkland

Looking back, I now know I was luckier than most kids. Even most of the kids who grew up in two-parent homes in our rural area didn't get the lessons I did. Or, at least it didn't seem so.

My mom is now 80 years old and she has always loved me, but it was with my daddy, Hubert, I hunted and fished, cut down wild bee trees for their honey, planted a garden and a hundred other things. As I grew up, my school-teacher daddy taught me things that were important to him. I think he knew I'd be a better person for the experiences along the way.

These days, some people get bent out of shape at the very idea of giving young people a gun and teaching them how to hunt. My daddy believed it was unthinkable not to. He learned to hunt on his family's South Alabama farm in the 1930s. He later served in the U.S. Army Air Corps in World War II in India and could have been the poster child for the group Tom Brokaw called "The Greatest Generation."

I had just turned 7 years old when Santa Claus brought my first shotgun – a Stevens .410-gauge. It was Dec. 25, 1960. Daddy and I already had been hunting together for quail in Jackson County, but I was so little, I had a tough time keeping up. The briars were the worst part, though. I was so small they scratched my hands and, even though I wore two pairs of blue jeans, my knees and legs were terribly scratched at the end of a day's hunting.

Right after all the Christmas gifts were opened, Dad told me to get dressed, grab my gun and stick seven or eight shells in my pockets. We walked down to hardwood head behind the house and, lo and behold, a gray squirrel took off through the treetops.

"Shoot him," Daddy said, as the squirrel ran from oak treetop to treetop.

I fired and the squirrel ran. Again I fired and again the squirrel ran. When I fired my last shell and still missed, Daddy sent me running back 300 yards

to the house for more shells. He laughed at me and then turned to all smiles when I knocked the squirrel out of the 75- to 80-foot high treetop with my next shot.

During my teenage years, I graduated to bird hunting with a lightweight Browning semi-automatic. After learning to bird hunt with the .410, the 20-gauge



Hubert killed this monstrous 10-point while quail hunting in November 1968 in Jackson County. It scored 135-1/8.

was a huge step up. During those formative years, Dad, my younger brother and I quail hunted every Saturday and sometimes in the afternoons after school. As I learned how to handle our pointers, how to safely hold my shotgun and how to approach a briar patch or thicket without flushing the birds prematurely, Dad would say, "I sure do enjoy hunting with you."

One day Dad went quail hunting with a friend in the friend's truck. The guy didn't have a dog box. They just put our big male pointer, Sam, in the bed of the truck, along with the guy's two dogs. They drove for 25 to 30 minutes and, when they reached the hunting spot, Sam was gone. They back-tracked for several miles and finally found the spot where they'd turned off a paved road onto a dirt road and where Sam had either jumped, fallen or been slung out of the truck as they rounded the corner.

That was early on a Saturday morning and Dad and his friend spent the rest of that day riding and looking for Sam. That night we took Daddy's flannel shirt back to the spot where Sam hit the ground and I laid it in the edge of the woods, thinking he would stay there if he smelled Daddy's scent.

I don't know who slept less, Daddy or me, but at daylight we went back, but there was no sign of Sam. We loved that dog and weren't about to give up trying to find him.

Sunday afternoon after church, we went back to the area and I had an idea.

"Let's go over to the clubhouse and see if we see anything," I suggested to Daddy. Our clubhouse was actually an old farmhouse 1 1/2 to 2 miles through the woods where we occasionally spent the night during hunting trips. Our bird dogs had been there and I thought perhaps Sam would go there.

We hardly talked as we drove to the clubhouse. When we arrived we didn't see anything. For some reason we decided to walk out in a tall pine plantation next to the house. We hadn't walked far when I looked up, and there stood Sam.

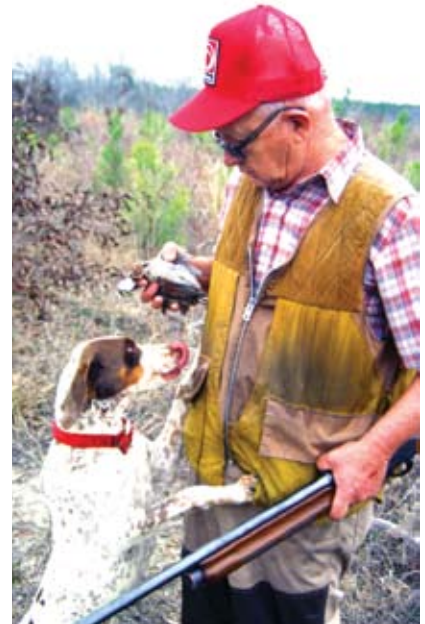
I suppose he was scared but he seemed to be frozen, staring at us. I yelled, "Sam," and at the sound of my voice he came running.

As we were reunited in the pines, all Daddy and I could do was cry and say, "We found him, we found him."

Sam stood there squealing, as if telling us all the terrible things he'd experienced. He rode home with us in the cab, squarely in the middle of the bench seat.

The fun things Daddy, my younger brother Gerald, and I did together involved more than hunting.

In the late 1960s, the three of us developed a knack for finding wild honey bee hives. These hives were always in hollow trees and marked by a parade of dark honey bees traveling to and from the hive. To get the honey, we used an ax to cut down the tree, then strategically chipped away the area protecting the hive. We



Hubert loved to quail hunt and, while he never owned a pedigreed bird dog, he always had good hunting dogs.

never owned any type of equipment you should have for such a job, such as smokers or even a chain saw.

Instead, we wore long-sleeved shirts and cotton gloves and put paper bags with eye-hole slits over our heads. Our smokers were nothing more than kerosene-soaked rags. We probably looked more like poorly dressed Klansmen than someone about to rob a bee tree.



Hubert (right) and friends share a laugh during a hunt in Gadsden County in the early 1990s.

Every time we robbed a bee tree, our improvised efforts left a lot to be desired. After the third or fourth bee tree when Daddy began showing some complications from bee stings, we decided to find things to do that were safer.

I had always envisioned Daddy and I doing things together for years to come, but by the early 90s he began to show the effects of diabetes. He lost stamina and things that were a breeze in the past now required major effort. He couldn't work in his garden; he got scared to hunt by himself; and loading and unloading his boat wore him out. I tried to help, but I couldn't always be with him.

Daddy drew a very coveted turkey permit for a spring hunt in April 1998, but his basic mo-

Hubert poses with one of the bigger flatheads at the 1996 Blountstown Flathead Fishing Tournament.



tor skills, such as walking, were slipping. Despite my best efforts over the two-day hunt, he didn't bag a bird.

It really hit me during the hunt how our roles had been reversed; Daddy was the one needing the help and I was the one more or less in charge. Even though Daddy loved to turkey hunt, he didn't get a chance at another bird.

After a short illness, Daddy passed away Oct. 8, 1998, leaving a vacuum in my life. I have my mother, my wife, and three great kids, but when you lose your best friend, things are different. **FW**

The author grew up hunting and fishing in Jackson County with his father and younger brother, Gerald. Stan has worked with the FWC and its predecessor, the GFC, for more than 30 years. He's passed along his love of the outdoors to his children.



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