

Changing of the Seasons

By Eric Turner
Feb. 2022

The frosty grass crunched with each step as I made my way to the edge of the familiar field. As the sky began to lighten with the early morning sunrise I took a deep breath of fresh cold air. The air burned as it filled my lungs bringing with it a rush of memories of my childhood. Mornings just like this one. My hunting partners were no longer with me, my Grandad having passed over 45 years ago, and most recently my Dad this past fall. Even though they were gone there was a sense of comfort and peace in hunting from the same fields and woods we hunted over 50 years ago.

I remember the excitement of those early mornings, as we hunted squirrels for a Thanksgiving meal, even though squirrel season opened earlier in the fall Grandad would never eat one before the first frost. We would hit the woods and thickets running rabbit with Grandad's beagles, sometimes with luck sometimes nothing, but always with a story to tell later over a meal. In those days it was rare for us to see a deer and never turkey so they were never a menu item. Maybe it was the lack of game population in our area or all of our dogs that kept them away, but we always enjoyed what we did have. Today we have deer and turkey but the coyote followed also, something we never saw as a kid and could do quite nicely without.

It was Granddad and Dad who taught my brother and I how to treat a live weapon, to respect it and understand both the joy and danger it could bring. It was they who taught what respect for God's creation meant. While we hunted for game and the enjoyment of the hunt, it was also food. It was they who taught us that if you shoot it, you eat it so be careful what you aim at. It was they who taught younger boys what patience meant as you sat squirming under a tree waiting for a squirrel to show. It was they who taught me how to walk quietly in the woods long before the Army got their hands on me. We were learning life lessons before we knew what that even meant, but we did know we loved every minute of it.

As I got older I began to realize that these days were more impactful than I thought. It was more than a love for the woods, or a love for the animals that lived there, it was also a love for family. It was a shared experience with those who loved us and it created memories that stay with us past the changes in life. As the seasons of the year here in the South change, so do the seasons of life. As the gentle, cool breezes of Fall blow through the woods pushing the summer humidity away, and the smell of musty, wet leaves reach our nostrils, we know that the season is changing. As Fall turns to Winter and leaves fall from the trees we too experience change and loss in our lives. But, as with the change in the seasons we know that spring will also come and the woods and nature will awake anew.

Like that spring season I am blessed to watch my oldest granddaughter running through the grass of these same fields and woods. At her age she is half running, half being carried, but fully amazed by life and creation. She is full of wonder and exploring the amazement of the outdoors. She sees turkey and deer and toddles up the creek in the

summer looking for tadpoles, minnows and rocks. She doesn't know or care that her Mom, Grandfather, Great Grandfather and Great-Great Grandfather also walked that same creek, but some day she will. She just knows she would rather be outside in her element. She may like hunting or she may not, it really does not matter, but what matters is that she walks and loves and explores with her Dad and Mom, making life memories and learning life lessons.

Age has a habit of causing you to look back and reflect on life, and I find one of the best places to do it is from a tree in the quiet silence nature gives us. Reflection is a good thing as long as we hang on to the good and let go of regrets and things we can't change. As we age we are given a grand opportunity to step into the role of the teacher like our parents and grandparents before us and pass on our love for the outdoors.

So, in the cool of fall I will reflect from my tree, reveling in the memories of those long gone who took the time to share this with me, counting my blessings and thanking God for the opportunity to pass this on to those I love.

Maybe, just maybe, in the wonder and beauty of this moment a deer will even pass by into bow range. But if they don't it's still been a successful hunt.

