

YES, I DO!

Food, friends, and a connection
with nature's pace make
hunting this woman's passion

by
Lorri **Menard**

“Do you hunt, too?” I hear that question a lot. My husband Al and I teach Hunter Education with the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, and we volunteer with the *Becoming an Outdoors-Woman* program (co-sponsored by Fish and Game and the New Hampshire Wildlife Federation), where we teach several hunting and firearms-related programs.

My answer is an enthusiastic, “Yes, I do!”



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That hasn't always been the case. I had never shot a firearm before I met my husband. On the other hand, Al was born with a shotgun in his hand. (Must have made for an interesting delivery!) While we were still blushing newlyweds, Al took me with him as he was hunting, and a second love affair was born.

The thing that I appreciate MOST about my time in the woods is being connected to nature and nature's pace. I work in an office, where my job is to interact with a computer screen all day. My mind is engaged and my fingers are flying. "New email" alerts sail across my screen every few minutes. Everything is fast paced. Everything requires immediate action.

In contrast, the very act of hunting requires that you be patient. Game animals show up when they show up. Hunting is a waiting game, slower paced, where your one job is to be aware of what is around you. You're watching to see game between the trees, and once you see something, looking very closely to make sure you identify it correctly. You tune in to the sounds of movement, again looking very closely to identify what was moving (usually a squirrel or another hunter, by the way). And, while your eyes and ears are tuned in, you become aware of other things, such as the smell of the woods and the feel of the breeze through the trees. It's true that sometimes that "breeze" is really a "squall" on the one day you have free to hunt, but even that has a primal charm, far removed from the recycled air in an office building.

Yes, it's possible to simply sit in the woods without carrying a firearm, but let's be honest about "self-motivation." Deer hunting season is marked off on our calendar every year and is not easily preempted by status reports, laundry, or other tasks. It's far too easy to procrastinate an open-ended plan to sit out in the woods, the same way it is easy to put off a well-intentioned plan to exercise more.

Secret Signals

Over the years, hunting with my husband has evolved. In the early days, we sat shoulder-to-shoulder against the same tree and could whisper in each other's ear. Now, "hunting together" means that we travel to our destination in the same truck, but sit a hundred yards apart in the same piece of woods. Communicating at such a distance is a challenge. Yelling across a football-field distance just isn't conducive to seeing wild game. For 20-plus years, we've used walkie-talkie radios. Or, maybe we should call them squawky-talkie radios, since even the good ones will issue static when the mic button is pressed. To counter that, we agreed on a Secret Signal in case there was game nearby. If the call goes through, but the person called simply click-clicks the mic button, it means there's a deer or turkey RIGHT HERE, and the caller should simply wait to be called back.

Not long ago, we got an opportunity to test the Secret Signal. It was during archery season for deer, a half-hour before the end of shooting time on the third day in a row we had been sitting on two different sides of the same field. Al called me on the walkie-talkie, suggesting that we call it an evening since it had been so quiet. Unbeknownst to him, four deer were milling around near my treestand. I was relieved we had the Secret Signal, and I

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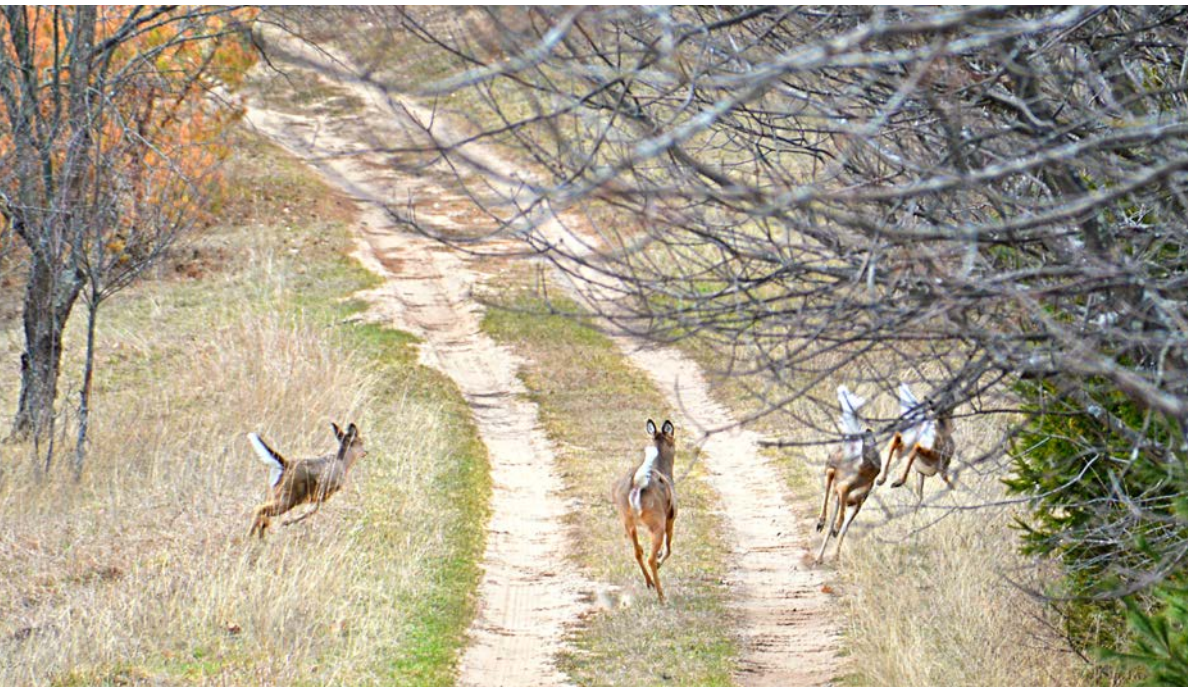
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responded with the click-click. A minute later, he called back, asking, "I didn't catch that, what did you say?" So I click-clicked again. In return, I heard him say, "I think your battery is getting low, all I hear is static. I'm coming out into the field now." I started madly click-click-clicking, because so far only one of the four deer had reacted at all to the squawk from the walkie-talkie. Too late though; a split second later all four heads – five if you include mine – swiveled to watch the hunter coming across the field. And then all four deer pivoted and ran back into the woods.

We use our cell phones to text now – with the ringers off.

Locally Sourced Food

When we are lucky enough to bag a deer (or moose or bear), Al and I do all the meat processing ourselves. Well, okay, we have some help. We are part of a small group of friends who pitch in together to process our game. We have it down to a science! We gather folding tables, putting them up on blocks so they are at a comfortable height and covering them with freezer paper for cleanliness. One friend has a hoist to lift the animal to a convenient height, so he and another can do the skinning and partitioning. A third friend is excellent at removing fat and tendons, and I do the final freezer prep. Oh, and I get to run the meat grinder for the "good parts" that are too small for steaks.



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It's true that butchering our own game is yet-another investment of our time in the food, and the cuts are rarely as pretty as in the supermarket, but it is a labor of love. When we bring that bag of ground venison out of the freezer, we feel a real sense of pride. I think this is akin to what you feel about a tomato you have grown yourself, compared with a tomato from the farmer's market. Both are delicious. Both are local. But one has your sweat and tears in its roots, and one does not.

It's not possible to have a discussion about food without mentioning the health benefits. Game meat is red meat, and we all know we should be limiting our consumption of red meat because of the saturated fat content. The great news? Game meat is quite low in saturated fat. Moreover, there are no added antibiotics in a wild animal's diet. And, of course, it's quite tasty!

Adrenaline Rush

Over the years, the attendees at Hunter Education classes have evolved. I was the only woman in the class I took to get my hunting license. When Al and I started teaching in the 1980s, most of the students were teenagers – usually boys – taking the class so they could get their licenses at 16 and hunt independent of their dads. Today, the students are mostly in the 25- to 35-year-old range and did not hunt with their parents when they were younger. They've decided

to explore hunting for a variety of reasons, including an interest in locally sourced, healthy food, a feeling of independence, and a desire to connect with nature. And, I'm happy to say, more and more of the students are women, usually 2 to 5 in a class of 25.

For me, even beyond all the health benefits and altruism of hunting, I do it because it's fun. It's amazing to sit in the woods and watch what nature does with her day. The adrenaline rush is incredible when a game animal is near and you might get a chance to harvest it. Those four deer that were under my treestand? I still feel a little smile when I think about how awesome it was, even though I never got a chance to pull my bow back. Working with our friends to process game is an evening of fun and camaraderie with a positive output. Spending time with my husband on a pastime we both enjoy is priceless.

So, yes, when someone asks "Do you hunt, too?" I always answer, "I sure do!"



Lorri Menard has taught Hunter Education for Fish and Game since 1989 and has been an instructor with the N.H. Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program since its inception in 1995. Her husband Al brought her hunting for the first time soon after they were married, and now they hope to pass that same enthusiasm on to their grandchildren.



A long-time Hunter Education instructor, Lorri Menard guides enthusiastic Becoming an Outdoors-Woman participants in the finer points of hitting a flying clay target with a shotgun at Fish and Game's Owl Brook Hunter Education Center.



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HUNTERS The Original Conservationists

It's not possible to talk about hunting without mentioning the role that hunters play in managing wildlife and providing a source of funding for conservation. Hunting is one




of the tools used by wildlife biologists to keep the game herds at a level that is appropriate for their food sources and habitat. Also, a federal program called Wildlife Restoration authorizes an excise tax to be collected from manufacturers of hunting and shooting equipment, such as firearms, ammunition, bows, and arrows. This money – over 95% of it – is then returned to the individual states to be used only for eligible wildlife-related activities, such as improving habitat, purchasing conservation land, conducting wildlife research, and providing hunter education. Yes, hunter education, because hunters are such an integral part of the overall health of many wildlife populations and contribute directly to the Wildlife Restoration Program through the excise taxes.

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