

Stories

Told in the sitting room after supper
Upstairs the kids are "supposed to be asleep"
But one cannot, he hears laughter and loud voices
"Do you remember that time?"
We were out along McKinney Creek."
The boy strains to hear—
yearning to take part in those adventures

Uncle Raymond has a little 410 shotgun
It's not as deadly, not as lethal as the 16s, 20s,
and Granddad's monster 12 gauge
Ray 'd lend it to the kid in hunting training
The gun's recoil not strong enough to knock the kid down
On his 'first hunt' when the rabbit runs the wrong way
Embarrassing tale, confused game, borrowed gun
One shot, hurry to reload, messy

Incidents can be worked in
Among the digressions of a good story
Like the time when there was plenty of game to share
with the family that owned the land
Or when cousin Don shot another hunter's hand
That he saw waving from behind a tree
The hand's owner had wanted Don to stop and be quiet, but
"It looked like a squirrel's tail."
Later, Dad said, "Your guitar playing will be weak
until the shotgun pellets work their way out."

There are ways of becoming the hero of a story
The trainee who becomes "Dead-eye"
The one who never misses
Gets done early and has to wait in the car
Emptying the coffee thermos
Jibes about missing coffee bring the reply,
"I'll bring more next time. And a book."
Or the one who hunts squirrels with a small rifle
so there will be no pellets to pick out at supper
Stories of stealth and skill

Old hunters lived through the Great Depression,
When the only meat was game and
it could be traded for other foods
Ammunition could be cheaper if hand-loaded
Dollar-a-day corn-hoeing could pay for gun-powder and pellets
Money could be made by training the rich peoples' dogs
"Don't pet the beagle. He's in training." ...



Old hunters seem to know where the game will be
As if they think like animals
The hillside or gully, the edge of that field
The fence-row, the bush along a railroad line
Always know—was a time when knowing meant survival

The Depression is history now
Factory salaries replacing hoeing
Home freezers are affordable
Deer meat in that freezer, pork hanging in the smoke house
Electric ranges for cooking
Root vegetables in the cold cellar
Home canning stacked on shelves
A pile of coal at the back of the shed

Forests slowly recovering, saplings becoming woods
We still hunt—habitual adventure
Granddad's gun compensates for weak sight, stay behind him
Like a tale by E. R. Burroughs
Elephants, loud trumpets, weak eyes, stay downwind
“Better you smell them instead of them smelling you.”
Granddad's loud noises foretell a lot of damage, too
So Grandma cooks stews and gravies, making it
Easier to pick out shotgun pellets and bone shards

Uncle Harold has a TV
Friday evenings we gather to watch it
Granddad can't see that very well either
Our excuse for an evening together
Swapping tales amid loud laughter into the night
—Aunt Jewel supplying the coffee—
Stories of prowess and charity
Making do, with what you've got
Resourcefulness, economy, identity¹

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1 Owen Flanagan, *The Problem of the Soul*, page 8. “...we are story-telling animals. We make sense of things through stories... We picture ourselves and our world through stories, grand stories.” [Perhaps the ancient cave drawings at Lascaux France signal the beginning of our grand narratives. What were the women doing while the hunters were doodling in caves? In our family, the women chatted as they percolated coffee. In another room the menfolk told tall tales—the taller the better. LVP 2011]