

The Deer Hunter

*A Report by the Always-Right reverend Doctor
Isaiah J. Trin (Doc Trin, for short)*

In the fall of the year, after all the blueberries were gone, the grass was brown, the snow was falling, and there was nothing else to do, man invented hunting season. He originally did this because he needed food to survive. Back when we needed food to survive all the time, there was no hunting season because people like to eat all year round. But now that hunting is not really necessary for most people to put food on the table, we confine such exploits to certain times of the year.

Where I was raised, it was convenient to have hunting season in November because you could leave the game outside (after it was dressed out) until at least May without having to worry about it thawing out. Refrigeration was not a problem.

Hunting season created some special sights and sounds around the little town. You didn't have to worry about what was in style. Everyone was wearing red – red hats, red coats, red pants (I knew a Reverend once who wore red pants in the pulpit and was asked to leave the assembly. If they had been hunting pants, he would have been OK), and even red socks. The red yarn industry was booming. All the vehicles had at least three lengths of manila line trailing out the back, so the driver would be prepared in case he was required to drape a deer over the hood of the car and tie it down. Pickup trucks were fitted with the appropriate gun rack, and those unfortunate enough not to have pickup trucks simply tossed their loaded firearms in the back seat of the family auto. One would not want to be embarrassed by not having the appropriate weaponry if a deer decided to prance across the road in front of the car.

Before opening day, deer were abundant. They were walking in the streets, drinking from the river, causing automobile accidents, and generally making a nuisance of themselves. They were even eating Uncle Clarence's apples from right under his bedroom window. Then came opening day. Thousands of hunters descended on our little town. Not a deer in sight.

What folks never seemed to figure out was that the deer knew the schedule. For weeks before the season began, the deer newspapers had been publishing warnings of the impending intrusion into their space. It was the primary topic of conversation at deer watering holes. Generally speaking, it was fun for the deer. They only got this much attention once a year.

Deer season was a boon for the local economy, right down to the family level. Dad was a hunting guide for some rich businessman from out of state. Every year, he would show up for hunting season. He was a nice family man, though. He always brought his wife, and then left her in the camp all to herself while he participated in the sport of gaming – for days. Her name was Rose – a very nice person with rocks on her fingers, but starved for conversation.

Anyway, leading Al (I think that was his name) around the woods provided some diversion for Dad, and gave him a couple of weeks off from plumbing. And the pay was probably better than plumbing, since Dad was self-employed in a town full of people as poor as we were. And so it was that, every fall, Dad would take Al into the woods.

Al fancied himself quite a navigator and woodsman, and always wanted to go his own way (rich people are like that). He would tell Dad to meet him back at the point of departure in two hours. Of course, just on the off chance that one of them couldn't find his way back, they had a signal. Two shots in the air (hopefully not in the foot) would give the other an idea of the lost individual's location. So Dad would go off and hunt for a couple of hours, return to the spot, and wait for Al to fire the shots as Dad's signal to come and rescue him. But, amazingly enough, it was always Dad that never got back to the right place – at least, to hear Al tell it.

And the visiting hunter always got the deer, if there was only one. Part of the job of the guide was to get a deer for the guidee, if at all possible. I remember Dad coming home several times during those years saying Al had gotten his deer. Ma would laugh and ask who really shot the deer, and Dad would get that little-boy smile on his face and say, "Well, he says he did." Enough said. For a boy my age, it was hard to imagine the visitor getting the deer. I still remembered the time we went up Downing Pond Stream by boat (Al's boat – we didn't have one). Al got so excited when he saw a deer on the shore that he let go of the tiller, grabbed for his rifle and, almost falling out of the boat, fired about six shots into various breeds of trees while the deer calmly watched a boat full of idiots go around in circles. Like I said, it was a great time for the deer. The stories they must have traded afterwards would make mine pale in comparison.

Being a guide was interesting work, but it was a job that always gave someone else the credit. Someone else got the deer. Someone else got the pat on the back. Someone else got his name in the paper.

No matter. The guide's satisfaction came from knowing that he had done a job well enough so that someone else could be satisfied, someone else could get some credit, and someone else could feel good. Come to think of it, being a guide is not so bad, after all.

*Act 8:26 - 35 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to [him], and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, **How can I, except some man should guide me?** And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And*

*the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and **preached unto him Jesus.***

Be a guide to someone. There's nothing quite like it. Do you hear those two shots?

Doc Trin