

# Nature loved with gun in hand

During these crisp fall months, the woods are full of musical melodies: twittering birds, crunching leaves, and the sweet staccato sound of rifle shots.

Past readers of my column know that nothing excites me more than rifles. After all, I carry around a little pearl-handled pistol wherever I go. When I carry it, I feel more powerful.

That's why I've taken up hunting. I used to commune with nature in the old-fashioned way. Walking in the woods was a spiritual experience. Friends called me a tree-hugger. I would walk beneath an oak tree and feel a sense of kinship. It seemed rude not to give a tree an affectionate little pat as I passed beneath its leafy boughs.

But no longer. Since I met some hunters a few weeks ago, I've realized that merely hugging a tree isn't enough to show my deep appreciation of the outdoors.

They helped me realize that nature just isn't nature unless it's hanging on the wall with an ounce of lead in it.

After all, what better way to show your appreciation of the great outdoors than to bring it into your living room?

Of course, I've met some hunters who haven't quite reached this profound depth of communion. They don't hunt to possess; they actually hunt and use what they kill. Some hunters actually have a fine sense of ecological balance and a sense of responsibility to themselves, the environment, and to fellow hunters.

However, these aren't the hunters that I'm attempting to emulate. The hunters I truly admire are the wild, he-man hunters who prove their strength and virility by shooting anything that moves, and then, upon finding that it really was a deer and not a human being, mount it on their



**Debra Cumberland**

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wall as a testament to their manliness.

People like that really turn me on.

I met a few such hunters on a bus a couple weeks ago as I journeyed from city campus to my quaint, deer-headless apartment.

One of these pimply but virile young men sat on my left. The other slightly less pimply but equally virile man sat on my right.

They talked over me, and it was all I could do to control myself during their insightful discussion of hunting.

For purposes of convenience, I will call them Billy Bob and Chuck.

"So Chuck," said Billy Bob, a little tobacco juice drooling out of the corners of his sensitive yet strong hunter lips, "ya go out and shoot anything this weekend?"

I felt my weak, feminine heart stir at these words. I turned to the

man on my right with growing interest.

"Yup," said Chuck, borrowing some snuff from Billy Bob. "I shot a deer in the butt." He laughed, loosening a bit of the tobacco.

"In the butt!" cried Billy Bob. He slapped his manly kneecaps.

"Yeah," said Chuck, warming up. "The shot went right through his butt, ricocheted against a tree, and then hit him in the head. He dropped dead."

Billy Bob offered Chuck some more tobacco, and both of them cackled in unison.

While I was offended that they didn't share any of their tobacco with me, I instinctively knew it was because I wasn't worthy.

After all, how had I ever shown my appreciation of nature? Simply by hugging trees. These two fine specimens of manhood showed it by actually reaching out and grabbing it.

They made it their own. They didn't commune, they conquered.

I obviously had it all wrong.

Some of my inner disgust with myself must have shown, because Billy Bob turned and glanced at me.

"Hey," he drawled, "did I ever beat you up in high school?"

After glancing at his muscles, I quickly assured him that he had not.

I got off the bus with shaking knees, glad that I had become enlightened. Fall was still in the air; rifle sounds were all around me.

There was still time to go out and get a Winchester repeater.

By the time you read this column, I will have become a real woman. I've talked to my landlord, and he feels that a deer head is all my apartment needs to make it a home.

No more pearl-handled pistol. I've got me a Winchester repeater.

*Cumberland is a graduate student of English and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.*

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# Graduation brings next step

As the end of the semester approaches, I am filled with a strange dread — a gut-wrenching sensation in the pit of my stomach. I never imagined that graduation would feel similar to heartburn.

It gives me the same feeling that I would get if I were walking through an unknown maze and the lights suddenly went out.

Every step could get me hopelessly lost.

But that's nothing new, all of life is like that — it could be the end of a novel, the end of a movie, or the last french fry left in the carton and I'd hem and haw because I hate endings.

I especially hate that something may be the last.

Every looming ending amplifies my apprehension and makes me acutely aware that "something" is about to alter forever and that "something" else is about to begin.

I'm afraid to contemplate the deed before it's done. The knowledge that every step must be carefully placed terrifies me.

I mean I've stepped out blindly many times before.

I began crying three months before high school actually started because I was certain that I was going to forget my locker combination, walk into the wrong classroom, or emit strange noises that would make everyone stare at me.

And when I moved away from home for the first time to go to college in Boulder, Colorado — in my mind I failed classes, ran out of money, and disappointed everyone ... two weeks before school even started.

Moving to Nebraska was a leap of faith. That fear was more justified than any of the others. In Nebraska, I had no home, no job, and no hopes of going to school until I established residency.

Besides that I'd been warned by my father that once I moved from Colorado to Nebraska I would be labeled a traitor, and a bug-eater and "an inbreeder" — nothing terrified me more.

In reality, each of those beginnings — though not as glorious as I would have liked them to be —



**Chaka Johnson**

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didn't end in death.

In high school, I managed to make it through four years without embarrassing myself too much — well, OK, once ... but I won't go into that here.

In Boulder, I failed my classes, ran out of money, and pretty much disappointed everyone around me — but at least nothing truly terrible happened to me.

And in Nebraska, I found a home, a job, and at present I'm quickly approaching the end of my undergraduate school career.

Much to my father's chagrin, Nebraska can probably be called the home of my salvation — the only place where I accomplished everything that I feared I would fail in.

It seems somehow that knowing the endings won't be so bad should make it easier to keep moving forward.

Though events sometimes turned out as bad as I thought they would, they seldom turned out worse.

At present, it is the endings that I'm having a hard time with...

It's the ending of late night antics

in the dorm with all of my Cather 5 friends.

It's the ending of crazy late night papers and early morning cram sessions — which I hate, but at least I'm very used to.

It's the ending of group study sessions with good friends in which we don't get anything accomplished, but boy do we create some memories.

It's the ending of seeing my friend Trevor wander onto campus in the very early morning looking like the hooded bandit.

It's the ending of having Chris call my dorm room at three in the morning because he accidentally fell asleep on campus and he wants someone to know that now he'll have to sleep in Architecture Hall.

It's the ending of having my friend Dave say "Hey, feel my muscles" — nevermind, scratch that, he'll probably keep that up.

It's the ending of alternating between stress days and lazy days because I never figured out how to budget my time appropriately.

It's the ending of sharing a room with my best friend Cindy and keeping her up all night with my snoring — guess what Cindy, I faked it the whole time.

It's the ending of getting away with many things because hey, I'm a college student and we're expected to do stupid things.

It's the ending of using school as an excuse to get money out of my parents — Mom, really, tuition has gone up to \$500 a credit hour.

It's the ending of the familiar buffer I've surrounded myself with and the beginning of something new.

That great abyss is yawning open like a widening chasm. It's dark in there and I can't really see if I'm going to step in anything.

I'm not sure if I should turn right or left, the only thing that is certain is that I must go forward.

There's butterflies in my stomach and I feel kind of queasy, but here goes the next step.

*Johnson is a senior criminal justice major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.*

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