



Remembering the Good Old Days

By Steven Bridges

There were two seasons when I was growing up in the 70s and 80s in Mills County — fishing season and hunting season.

I was born with an innate yearning to get out of the house and hunt and fish, and my parents were more than happy to oblige. As far as I'm concerned, I have the best parents in the world. They always sent me out of the house with a little bit of money in my pocket to buy worms, .22 shells, and whatever else that would help keep me occupied for the day.

In the summer, my day went like this. I would get up, put my fishing rod across my handlebars, go to the local drive-in gas station, buy worms, a Milky Way and an RC Cola, and go to what was then called "The Frog Pond" — a little pool of runoff water by the Goldthwaite City Park. I'd fish until lunch, then I'd come have a hamburger with my parents at the Wagon Wheel next door to The Eagle office, and entertain them with my stories of almost hooking "Myrtle the Turtle."

Myrtle's story is for another day.

Back then a kid could stay off by himself nearly all day. There were no concerns about kidnapping or any other nonsense, and as Georgie, my mom, used to say, "Who would keep him anyway?"

After lunch, I'd go to the swimming pool, park my bike on the fence, where I leaned my fishing pole, take my shirt off, walk in with my quarter, and swim in the same cut off jeans I wore fishing. When they closed the pool, I'd bike back home, and my buddies and I would stay out until dark fishing at nearby ponds and stock tanks. Georgie always kept a package of chicken livers defrosted on hand, so we could try to catch catfish.

As the sun would begin to set, we would maybe be fishing, maybe throwing rocks, or even swimming in the pond, depending on how hot it was and how the fish were biting. The night usually ended when one kid's head shot up, and he'd fearfully utter,

"That's my mom! I gotta go!"

At that point, all bets were off. Someone was almost certainly in

light out, I'd be out the door with my pellet gun and pocket full of pellets.

My pellet rifle, a Benjamin .22 caliber pump pellet rifle, was the envy of every kid in town. At that time, the maximum pressure for a pellet gun was 10 pumps; at 5 pumps, though, my rifle was faster and more accurate than anyone else's. I could shoot birds, rabbits, and could even kill armadillos and raccoons in the

into the elementary cafeteria where the ladies were making breakfast. I'd usually show up at about 7 a.m. even though school didn't start until 8:15 a.m.

I remember my parents telling me one day that Mr. Williams, our principal, stopped by the house after this had gone on awhile. He asked my parents to tell me not to go to school until 7:30 a.m. at least, and that I could only have one breakfast a day.

Eventually deer season would roll around. My parents had a lease place west of Goldthwaite in 1979, when I was nine years old or so. I hunted nearly every day of deer season. My dad, Frank, would take me to the "blind," which looking back was more like a box I imagine resembled a German concentration camp solitary confinement box for bad behavior. It didn't bother me then, though. I'd happily sit there as soon as school let out until dark looking out of that blind every day of deer season.

It's hard to imagine in this day and age, taking a 9-year-old to a deer blind, dropping him off with rifle, bologna sandwich, and an RC cola and saying, "Get a big one!" At the time, I know I couldn't imagine anything better.

Nowadays hunters take it for granted to see deer. At that time, there weren't as many whitetails roaming around in Mills County. I hunted nearly every day of the season of that year, and I only saw three deer the entire time.

But you can be sure I shot all three — two spikes and a doe.

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trouble, and the rest of us would scramble home for dinner before meeting a similar fate. Muddy, nasty, chigger bit, and stinking of pond muck, we would head home for supper. I remember stripping in the back yard, so Georgie could spray me off with water and check my nether regions for ticks and other vermin. She'd put a pair of tighty whiteys on me and smile while I devoured the chicken fried steak, corn, green beans, biscuits, and all the other delicious food she'd made for our family.

This went on over and over, day after day, until school started.

When school started, I would wake up at about 5 a.m., watch The Three Stooges and eat my cereal, before dressing and heading out for the day. There were about 25 acres between the back door of my house and the front door of the elementary school cafeteria. As soon as it was

right situation. I never considered whether it was hunting season or not. There was no such thing. I was just a kid, and that was my excuse for everything.

Nothing made me more happy than to show Edith Daniel a dead rabbit. Edith had a wonderful vegetable garden, and for that reason, as you can imagine, she hated rabbits. No matter how she tried to keep them out of her garden, they would always find a hole to get in and eat her vegetables. I considered myself her knight in shining armor.

I ruthlessly hunted rabbits to show her, and even tied the rabbits' tails to a necklace to show her. She never paid me, but I didn't care. I just wanted to have an excuse to hunt.

Eventually I'd get bored and hungry, however, so I'd walk to the main fence post at the boundary of the school property, lean my pellet gun against a fence post, and then go

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