

## **Getting Ready For the Hunt**

The August of 1958, the year after I got out of the air force, my old buddy Warren Williams and I began our usual August ritual, getting prepped for the fall hunting seasons coming on. The first chilly week of August always triggered in us, as it does in many creatures, the urge to prepare ourselves by laying up provisions for the Winter coming.

For Warren and I, that meant hand-loading lots of low based 8 shot field loads for the first seasons available: snipe, mourning doves, and partridge. We had caught the reloading bug by pouring over the huge Herters Catalog, which advertised every imaginable weapon any young Natty Bumpo might need to provided food for the camp. We also used those Herters reloads to shoot lots of clay pigeons to sharpen our eye for stalking the wiley Wilson's snipe, famous for for the craziest, most erratic flight pattern of any game bird.

Back then farmers all had cow pastures, and most had low spots where standing water created perfect habitat for snipe. Since the Williams' farm was geared for raising Hereford breeding bulls, they had a big 20 acre barnyard, which not only held snipe but lots of flicker tail gophers. We hunted these both with 22's and with bows and arrows. Warren had the uncanny ability to routinely knock of flicker tails with his bow; I was never archer enough to do that, so I contented myself with long shots with my 22. We justified their slaughter with the myth that a cow could break a leg stepping into their holes but really, it was the badgers' digging down after the gophers that left those dangerous holes.

Warren and I both became pretty good wing shooters, he with his Ithaca double barrel and I with my Winchester model 1200 pump. We got good by

playing a clay pigeon game called “see if you can hit this one!” One of us would take a hand thrower, have the other shut his eyes, and then sling the clay bird where the other might not be able to open his eyes, see clay bird and then break it before it hit the ground. That made us good snipe shots, because one never knew where those erratic little critters would fly.

The quality and variety of hunting opportunities back in the late 50’s early 60’s was so good around Fairmount, Hankinson and Lidgerwood, it was almost impossible for a high school kid not to get hooked on those soul- stirring, “wonder-wounding” sojourns out into the fields and marshes still undrained, many fenced with weed-choked, bird-holding borders. Many a young hunter lost sleep back then, dreaming about the shooting he would likely get, come the crack of dawn.

There are a few good hunting shows on TV now, one of the best is the Wentz Brothers show. But most are so elaborately outfitted, one finds himself cheering the birds to get away.

Some of the South Dakota pheasant hunting shows come a little closer to capturing the spirit of the upland hunt. Better yet, the shows covering sharp tail grouse and partridge hunting in the western Dakotas. But few are the same as when you read about it, prepared for it and did it all on foot with one or two buddies. Son, farm kids had it made back in those days and didn’t even know it. That accounts for the sadness one sometimes sees in the eyes of old hunters, day dreaming backwards.

Gene Pinkney for the Daily News 24-08-19-