

*How does one become a hunter? We are all born with the hunting and collecting instinct but it manifests itself in different ways in people born in the unnatural environment of a city. If you are born in the bush, and very poor, the education is natural and inevitable. The location provides you with access to wild food and hunger provides the incentive to harvest it.*

*I was born in 1949. Today, few, if any, inhabitants of any western country with our universal welfare and over population can experience the wild at their doorstep or real hunger in their bellies.*

*To become a hunter now requires our youth to recognize and understand their basic instincts to hunt and harvest and have access to a mentor(s) to assist them and provide opportunities to hunt and develop skills. Additionally there needs to be sufficient available countryside and game to pursue the activity.*

### **The Birth of a Hunter.**

I am in Central Arnhem Land, in the Northern Territory of Australia. It is November and the build up to the summer wet season rains is well underway. The sun is beating down with a physical force that burns through clothes and weighs heavy on my 67 year old shoulders. The relentless heat and humidity of the build up is not a place for the faint hearted.

Before the development of affordable box air conditioners to provide some relief to at least one room it was a season of suicide.

'Gone Troppo!' is an exclusively Australian slang for someone becoming mentally deranged which was spawned from the tropical heat of the northern parts of Australia driving people crazy.

I ask myself the question. How did I end up here and what makes me stay?

To seek the answer requires a journey back through my memories to other times and places. .

My early childhood was a happy and carefree world, living half in half out of the bush on a small, seven, acre block. Our mother, hand milking four cows, we children turning the manual separator to release the rich cream each morning and night to eventually fill the four gallon galvanised can that was picked up twice each week for its journey to the local butter factory. No refrigeration, that can just sat in the dairy for three or four days - with the lid on - to ensure no rats or mice ended up drowned in the cream.

Our father was a quiet and somewhat taciturn individual who earned a living as a Herd Tester employed part by the Government and part by levies on milk producers. This took him away from home for several nights at a time as he worked his way around the district with a horse and dray collecting and analysing each cow's milk and the quantity produced. Our time with him was limited to the odd play session of an evening but apart from that it was mother's job to bring up the five offspring.

Home was primitive with no water, other than a 2000 gallon rainwater tank with one tap through the wall of our three roomed shack, no electricity, a wood fired stove and, of course, no refrigeration. There was no bathroom, you shared the water in a portable baby's bath for the once per week scrub.

Our outside lavatory housed a four gallon drum with the top cut off, the contents, dosed with a little phenol to ameliorate the smell and provide some sanitation. A rude, 8 gauge, wire handle enabled father to empty it once each week into a rough dug hole - a task I was destined to inherit at a later date.

The one luxury was a telephone, a wooden box, mounted on the wall that housed the works together with a black, Bakelite, speaking cone that protruded from the front. At the side of this contraption there was a handle to crank the magneto and produce the electricity to convey a signal to the exchange where the operator would connect you to your desired correspondent.

A huge cabinet radio with glowing valves powered by a 12 volt car battery was our connection with the outside world.

In such an isolated environment it is natural that the first seeds of the essential ingredients that mould a hunter were planted – self reliance and empathy with the natural world.

It is hard to imagine that in this isolated spot in 1957 we all stood outside in the chill of a clear early October evening to view the sun reflecting off Sputnik 1, the first human device to break the shackles of gravity that binds us to our planet.

In itself this event ranks as one of the most significant in the 20th century. The success of Sputnik orbiting the world demonstrated to all mankind our potential to break free from the physical world and science has galloped forward, ever further and ever faster to the kaleidoscope of change we experience today.

Today not even the most isolated and under privileged populations of the third world are as removed from the engine room of civilization as we were in those times.

We now live in a time where there is almost universal internet, TV and “Mobile devices” with their inane and ever screeching “social media” constantly bitching and whining about virtually any decision made by any government that does not directly benefit the author’s social group.

Self reliance and an understanding of nature – sounds simple but few individuals born into western society today will ever achieve either state with universal basic welfare and smart phones the weapon of choice for communication, weapons that almost require surgery to remove from the gaze and grasp of many individuals.

It is the summer of 1959 in southern Australia and my first hunting attempt, my mother walks in front carrying a kerosene hurricane lantern, the thin, orange glow from its flickering flame barely illuminates a three metre circle. The warm night is filled with the delicious scents of mown hay from a paddock next door mixed with a rich spice of all sorts of unknown scents.

A curlew wails in the distance and the air hangs like a velvet curtain. We approach one of the objects of our walk, a rabbit warren nestled amongst the browning summer bracken.

The rattle and clink of metal being pulled and dragged erupts.

The light illuminates the wide round eyes of a fat bunny, its foreleg securely caught in the viscous jaws of the metal trap I had set earlier that day. Success! A quick grasp of the prey’s rear legs, a foot, depressing the spring and loosening the jaws, then a swift crack to the back of the neck, all struggles cease as life departs the unlucky rodent.

The hunter is born.