

A Hungry Man With a Hammer

Dozer

Boys and Thier Pocketknives

By Don Dillon



Dozer, this story is for you; I have been reading about you in *Western Mule*. You will understand a lot of my story and what I am saying, but there are a lot of old codgers about my age that will understand every word.

I sent you one of my “mule hooks” for you to hang your coat and hat on. You hang them there and the mule will watch out after them until you return. In the same package is a Kabar pocketknife; a good carbon steel knife made in the USA Kabar that is older than you. When I grew up everyone carried a knife; it was considered a necessary tool. We usually got one when we were thought to be old enough to have become somewhat responsible.

I was at a flea market many years ago and a fellow had four or five used but well preserved pocketknives on a table. “Those yours,” I asked?

“They were Grandpa’s,” he replied. “I am getting married and my wife doesn’t want any weapons in the house, so I am selling them.” I thought for a second but didn’t say it; “Don’t believe that she will have a man in the house either.” Crazy how things have changed, our pocketknife was a prize possession. A boy usually got one when he was thought by his parents to be old enough to be somewhat responsible. Sometimes they were right and at other times wrong. I used my first pocketknife to plug several watermelons; I wasn’t quite ready yet, nor were the melons.

It was before TV, we read, and enjoyed it. At school we got to go to the library, Billy Reynolds and I would race to see who could get to the *Field & Stream* first. We read about Robert Ruark’s adventures, hunting dangerous game in Africa with Harry Selby as his white hunter guide. When I squirrel hunted with my little Stevens 22, in my imaginary world I was hunting cape buffalo in Africa; Harry was at my elbow telling me just where to place the bullet, “Careful, relax, breathe, squeeze.” I would raise the little Stevens to my shoulder as if it were a

fine Wesley Richards 470 double rifle and squeeze ever so carefully, braced for the recoil. Instead of a mighty roar combined with recoil that would make lesser men flinch there was the small pop of a 22 short. I would go look at the squirrel, pick him up and wonder how he would look mounted above my fireplace. A lot of imagination but a lot of the same technique. Bob and Harry would have been proud of me. Reality then set in; the squirrel had to be skinned for mom to cook. This one wasn't quite trophy size.

We would read Havalah Habcock's stories of quail hunting in the South Carolina low country. He even sometimes rode a mule on the hunts, had a man along to work the dogs and hold the mule while he got off to shoot. I would walk along the edge of the woods with my little rat terrier, who once again in my imaginary world was a field trial champion pointer. My Daisy air rifle was really a fine high grade 20-gauge Parker Double. English Sparrows were nice fat quail, which fell before the Parker Daisy. Didn't have to clean the sparrows, mama had no plans on cooking them.

Lots of times when Grandpa came home from the store he would have a box of 22 shells and we would shoot; he'd shoot a little and I would shoot a lot. He was more concerned that I become a good shot.

Ben Smith and I shot some today. We are borderline old men but when we get a 22 in our hands we are boys again. I have a place to shoot right behind my shop; gotta practice a lot to keep up with Ben. Ben shoots a Remington model 12c that his grandfather bought for his father in the 1930s. For those who don't know a 12c is a classic octogan-barrell, crescent butt plate 22 pump that was discontinued almost 80 years ago.

We shot well today, our grandfathers would have been proud.

I just read about the results of your deer hunt, congratulations, you did great. That is one more fine looking deer, your target practice with Grandpa paid off. When it comes to shooting targets with a 22 I am tough but am no good at shooting larger game, I get excited.

Good luck until later,
Don Dillon



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