

Hunting for Tall Tales

A Collection of Tall Tales About Hunters, Dogs and Critters Who Outwit Them

Collected and adapted for telling by Chuck Larkin

Table of Contents

2. My First Job
4. Dogs: Frosty, BJ and Spot
6. My Mother's Brother Ike's Family
8. Aunt Irene

My First Job

Well folks I'm going to tell you about my first job. I think I was still nine years old when Mr. Jim Culliton hired me as his beeboy. Now I know that beeboying may be an unfamiliar occupation so I'll tell you something about it. I would go over to his farm in the morning and get his honey bees out of their hives. I would then herd them out into the clover pasture and during the day I'd walk around singing beeboy songs to the bees.

A beeboy song is a lot like a cowboy song. Not the songs that Hollywood made up for the cowboy movies, beeboy songs are like the songs the cowboys used to sing out on the range to the cows. Cowboys learned the songs from the beeboys who brought the songs over from the old country. Mr. Jim Culliton when I started work, also gave me an old rusty rifle with one bullet. I still remember his words. He said, "Chuck don't let any bears bother my honey bees. Your job is to keep the honey bees happy gathering nectar and protect them from bears. Don't let any bears get away if you see one bothering my bees!"

It was a good job until, well let's say I never will forget the day about three weeks after I started working. I was on the far side of the field from the woods. When two black bears broke from the woods and grabbed a little honey bee that had strayed to close to the tree line. Each grabbed one wing and turned to run back into the woods. You see bears like the nectar the bees carry. I tore across the pasture with only that old rusty rifle and one bullet. I was screaming like a wolverine. "You bears turn that honey bee loose!" When you are young, you do silly things like that. The bears entered the woods and ran down off the ridge into the holler. I was not more than thirty yards behind them. When the bears reached the creek, they suddenly turned the bee loose. Both bears went out side ways and turned back toward me. Now I had one bear on my left and one on my right charging me. That can flat out wake you up! There I stood with a rusty rifle and one bullet trying to make a decision. Today that would be easy. I would just appoint a committee.

I turned toward the bear on my left and made that direct eye contact that the books say will slow a wild animal. I learned that day that people who write books hardly ever go in the woods. They do not know what they are talking about. That bear never slowed down. The bear on my right, I watched him coming in at me with my peripheral vision. He was closer than I thought because suddenly he was next to me. I rammed my hand right down his throat! That surprised the bear. However, he still was coming up my arm. So I grabbed his tongue, pulled and turned him inside out. Now his momentum was carrying him away from me. That surprised me!

Let me tell you one thing I learned that day. When you turn a bear inside out you get on an "ego" trip. At that moment I believed I could do anything. I still had that rusty rifle and one bullet so I turned on the second bear. I was mean and ready. However, after the bear seen what I did to his buddy he turned around and skedaddled across the creek. I knew I had to follow him. Mr. Culliton had said that my job depended on not letting any bears bother his honey bee business.

I did not want to get my feet wet so I was using stepping stones to cross the creek. When I was almost across I suddenly seen a fox break from the bushes on my left and start to attack me. I am not scared of any fox. On the other hand if they get at you they can tear your breeches off your legs. I thought I'll just shoot this one bullet in the fox's direction and scare him off. First place I do not like to hunt and that's because I do not like to have to work to carry game out of the woods. I already had a bear to field dress and carry up the ridge and across the fields to Jim Culliton's house. You may not know this but bears do not live long turned inside out. I started to bring my rifle barrel around toward the fox when here comes the fox's mate attacking me from the right. If two foxes get you they can tear up your shoes too. OK, I thought, I'll shoot between the two of them.

All of a sudden I saw a shadow and I looked up. Flying over my left shoulder in a straight line were eight humongous Canada geese. They were so low I knew I could shoot one if I wanted to. They do taste good. They taste like chicken. Then I noticed a second shadow and here came over my right shoulder eight mallard ducks. Oh yes, they taste good too. They taste just like chicken. I was considering shooting one when I noticed the two foxes were getting close. I turned and fired the bullet from that rusty rifle down between the two of them. Things got confusing after that.

The best I could figure out later was that the bullet hit a sharp rock and split in half. The left half of the bullet passed through and killed the fox on the left. Hit a rock and ricocheted through a large bush. On the other side of the bush a nine-point buck deer jumped up and fell down dead with half a bullet in his head. I thought wow this is my lucky day! I did not even know the buck deer was there.

The right half of the bullet took out the fox on the right. Then that half bullet hit and bounce skipped off a stump, went through and split a branch of a tree over about thirty yards. When the half bullet passed through the branch and split it open, the branch snap popped back closed. What was unusual, there happened to be nine wild turkeys roosting on the branch. When it opened and snapped back closed it caught their toes. There they were flapping their

Traditional Story from the Website of Bluegrass Storyteller, Chuck Larkin

wings and going gobble, gobble, gobble. I thought, this is my lucky day!

The sharp edged rock, when the bullet hit, the rock busted up into hundreds of sharp shards of rock. The shards rose into the oak tree overhead, killed, skinned and field dressed seven squirrels. They came down like huge rain drops, plop, ploppity, plop.

You remember I mentioned that I had an old rusty rifle! That gun blew up, bawoom. The rifle barrel rose up into the air majestically and skewered all eight of the Canada geese. At the same time, the rifle's wooden shoulder stock rose, walloped, battered and killed all eight of the mallard ducks. The force of the explosion blew me back into the water. I landed on top of a school of native mountain trout fish. The fish got jammed up in my pockets, in my pants and under my shirt. A button popped off my shirt, into the air with such velocity, it killed a pheasant flying over. Now here is the part nobody believes! The pheasant fell down on and killed a rabbit. I looked around at all that carnage. I do not even like to hunt. I thought yes this is my lucky day but I surely do not want to carry all of that game up over the ridge to Mr. Culliton's house.

I took my baby jackknife, which Santa Clause had given me when I was three years old and field dressed the bear and the buck deer. When I got over to the deer, I also discovered a nine-foot diamond back rattle snake. One of the deer's antler tines had hit and killed him. That snake had eighteen rattlers on its tail. I still have a belt and wallet made from that snake's skin. And rattle snake meat is good too, it taste just like chicken.

With my knife I cut the deer hide into finger width strips that I tied end to end. This gave me a deerskin, rawhide rope about thirty-six feet long. Next I rolled up my deerskin rope and soaked it in the creek with a big rock on it so it would not float away. Next I walked about and picked up limbs of fallen trees about nine feet long. I made these into poles that I tied side by side with string I made from the fox skins and squirrel skins. This gave me a ground sledge that looked like a snow sled without runners. I loaded the bear meat, deer meat, eight Canada geese, eight mallard ducks, seven squirrels, two foxes, the pheasant, the rabbit and 23 trout fish. I can tell you I could hardly wait to get the fish out from under my clothes. They tickled something awful. I cut the rack of antlers off the buck deer and tied them tight to the front of my sledge. On a bottom tine I tied the eighteen rattlers of the snake. Last I cut off the branch that had the toes of the nine wild turkeys pinched and tied that branch tight to the top of the rack of antlers.

I fetched my wet deerskin rawhide rope out of the water. Then I tied one end of the rope to the front of my

sledge. With the other end over my shoulder I stretched that wet deerskin rawhide rope up over the ridge just like a giant rubber band. I pulled it through the clover pasture, past Mr. Culliton's front door about twenty yards. Last I tied the rope to one of his great oak trees.

I went back and found my little honey bee. She was happy to get back to the clover pasture. I sang a few bee-boy songs until they settled down. I herded the honey bees back to their hives and put them up for the night. Finely I went to Mr. Culliton's house and knocked on the door. He came out and I told Mr. Jim Culliton the same story I just finished telling you. "Yes sir Mr. Culliton, best I could figure I have caught for you all told about 62 fish, foul and animal varmints."

Mr. Culliton looked at me, "Chuck I do not hardly believe you. Do you have any evidence?" "Yes sir, here it comes now."

I had figured that the afternoon sun would have been up over the ridge. All afternoon the sun was drying out the wet, stretched, deerskin, rawhide rope. The rope would have been shrinking and pulling that sledge up over the ridge to Mr. Culliton's front door. Now I know there are some skeptics. Somebody always wants to know how a sledge can be pulled up over rough, bumpy terrain. Well, I had that planned. Whenever the sledge hit a rock or stump the rattles would shake and scare the wild turkeys. They would beat their wings and lift the sledge over the obstacle.

The sledge pulled up by the front door and stopped. "Aren't I lucky? This is my lucky day, there is enough meat, after it is smoked, well it aught to last you two years."

Mr. Culliton wanted to know where the second bear was. I told him that after the gun blew up the second bear got away.

"Chuck today is not your lucky day. I told you not to let any bears get away that was bothering my honey bees. No, this is your unlucky day. You are fired."

That is the story of my first job. What is strange though, about a week later Mr. Culliton came over to the house and asked me to come back to work for him. It seems that I had kilt the second bear after all. It was the half bullet that split and passed through the tree limb that caught the wild turkeys. That split bullet had killed the bear over about another nine yards in the bushes. I told him no, I'd only work where I could have some job security. Later on though, he did give me two bear skin rugs after he had cured the hides.

AND THAT'S A TRUE STORY

Dogs: Frosty, BJ And Spot

Frosty was an old Fox Hound that lived with my daughter Karla May. I guess I should say to be truthful, Frosty lived with Karla May, son-in-law Bret, and granddaughters Laurin and Sydney. Frosty, he was some fox hound. He was descended from a long line of unusual smart fox hounds. Frosty's great grandmother BJ, the name we used to call Bella Jane, would teach the pups to herd flies into a bottle, with one of the pups holding the cork. Soon as the bottle was full the pup with the cork would run in and plug up the bottle. BJ was a national champion fox hound and all her pups became champions but that's what training is all about.

I remember my mamma told me that when BJ was a year old, the family got some new furniture. They had to train BJ to stay off the couch. Well, in no time at all BJ stayed off the couch. That is, until Ms. Dorothy came in, sat on the couch, put her hand down and felt a warm spot. BJ had learned all right, she had learned that when she heard someone coming to get off the couch before she got caught. Well, Ms. Dorothy took up the training again. Every time she came into the living room, Ms. Dorothy would feel around on the couch until she felt the warm spot. Then she would call BJ over and do some more teaching. It did not take long for BJ to learn to stay off the couch. Ms. Dorothy said that in less than a week there were no more warm spots. Except about a month later there was a huge storm with thunder and lightning and heavy rain. BJ did not hear the family car come home and did not hear anybody come in the house until they closed the front door. Ms. Dorothy said she heard this thump from the living room, which sounded like a dog jumping off the couch. She peaked in through the door. There was BJ standing on the floor with her front legs on the couch blowing on that warm spot. Yes, BJ was one smart dog. No wonder Frosty was so smart having a great grand-mamma like that.

Frosty's daddy, Spot, was a clever dog too. He lived with my grandmother Addie. She used to tell stories about Spot when he was young and in his prime. She said you could pick up a fishing pole and Spot would go outside and dig up a mess of fishing worms. Pick up a shot gun, Spot would go get his orange hunting vest and the game bag. My grandmother told me that Spot could even drive the old John Deere tractor. I remember She told me that my grandpa taught Spot to drive the Model-T car but he failed his driver's license test when he kept parking at fire hydrants.

I did not know Spot until he was really old. In fact by the time I was old enough to visit with my grandmother Addie, Spot was deaf from old age. I do remember once asking why he was named Spot when he was black all over. She said she just liked to keep him confused, you have to do

that sometimes to stay ahead especially when you have a real sharp witted, debonair, brainy smart dog. When I knew Spot he was about 17 years old, really deaf and eyes so weak he could hardly see any more without his spectacles. Of course he could not talk but there were times I believed he got awful close to speech.

When I was about nine years old I was visiting Grandma Addie and while playing, I found my great grandad's old time hearing aide. I asked and got permission to fix it up and connect it to Spot. The way I worked it was to attach the hearing aide to Spot's ear and tie a bandanna around his head to hold the instrument in place. Now the old time hearing aide looked like one half of a thick pencil that curved around the back of your ear. A wire ran down from your ear to a battery that you carried in your shirt pocket. Well I did not have a proper battery so I wired up a big old time radio battery that looked like the size of nine of our modern "D" size batteries. I tied the big battery to Spot's tummy with another bandanna and turned that contraption on. That dog could hear! Spot ran around in circles and wiggled like happy dogs like to do. I called his name and he stood up on his back legs and did a little dance. He could hear! I opened the front door and he ran out into the yard and stopped and looked at a squirrel chattering in the oak tree. Spot ran round and round the barnyard several times fast like he was a young pup. Next he ran to his favorite stump and lifted up his back leg. Spot died that day. Some said it was my fault when the battery jolted and shocked poor Spot. To this day I think he died of old age from all that running. It was three years before Great Grandma Addie let me come back for a visit.

Frosty is my favorite old fox hound. He was given the name Frosty because his nose was cold, cold, cold. Now, I know a dog with a cold nose is a health dog. When I say Frosty had a cold nose I mean he could stir up a bowl of milk and Swiss Chocolate with his nose and turn it into the best ice cream you ever tasted, even on days when it was so hot the birds had to use pot holders to get worms out of the ground his nose could cool a room.

His nose was so icy when he was a puppy we had to bottle feed him. The poor little tyke. BJ, his mother, did not trust him to get in close enough for her to feed him. When Frosty was grown, whenever he went out into the barnyard to socialize, all of the other dogs would sit down. I mean he had a cold nose. That is why we called him Frosty.

I remember once when Karla May was late to school. She had missed the School Bus and had to ride her mule into school. The teacher asked her why she was so late? She said she had been helping her grand dad clean chickens, half the night and part of the morning.

“Why you were cleaning chickens at that time?”

As I recall, Karla May said, that about 2:00 A.M. Frosty had come in the bedroom, woke her up and started imitating a fox sneaking up on a chicken. Karla May woke up my dad. Jim grabbed his old double barreled, 12 gauge, shot gun. The three of them sneaked out in the moonlight after that fox. They were creeping across the barn yard toward the chicken coup. Karla’s grand dad Jim, with Frosty right behind him, suddenly stopped, leaned over in his nightshirt to peak into the shadows near the chicken coup. Frosty unfortunately cold nosed Grand Dad up under the nightshirt. Both barrels of the shotgun went off and they had been cleaning chickens until mid-morning.

One fond memory of Frosty was being over at Karla May and Bret’s farm when they tore down their old barn to make room for the new barn. The old barn had been built about 18 years earlier.

What happened that day was somewhat interesting. When they tore up the floor of that barn, Frosty picked up the fresh scent of a fox. Best we could puzzle out is this. A fox had crossed that piece of ground and left the scent, the night before the barn floor had been installed 18 years earlier. Now a good fox hound will follow a fox’s scent to the end and Frosty was one of the best. Why I’ve seen him track a fox through a low ground fog, so thick, he had to swim across the top, this a way and that a way, for more than a hundred yards to keep tracking a five-hour cold trail.

Frosty took off with his tracking bark following that scent. We watched him circle the farm yard then around the new, double decker, two sitter, outhouse a couple of times, over to the corn crib then out into the pasture and across the fence. Once or twice he came back into sight. He even swam the creek three times, under water, you see the creak

was not there 18 years ago. All we could see was a line of bubbles as he followed that fox’s track. Last we saw Frosty he was still track yelping and heading toward the woods. Bret got some reports back from the neighbors. Over the next few days people reported seeing Frosty crossing their land tracking a fox and baying up a storm. Then the reports stopped coming in.

It must have been about three months later, Karla May received a collect telephone call, concerning a dog with a phone number on his name tag, who had a really chilly nose. He accepted the call that came from a Goodwill Industries store manager out on Gandy Boulevard way down in St. Petersburg, Florida. That is near to nine hundred miles away. The manager told Karla May “...this morning when I opened the store, a fox hound cold nosed me sideways and ran into our Goodwill Industries’ Used Clothing store, into the back of the store, and into the storeroom. When I caught up with him, I found the dog yapping at a ragged old fox coat.”

Karla May said that surely sounded like Frosty. The manager said the dog was well named. He still had some frost bite on his hip where Frosty nudged him sideways but he knew a good fox hound when he saw one and thought Karla might want him back. The Goodwill man said Frosty could be crated up and shipped home by UPS for \$234. Karla May thought a while and mentioned that Ms. Sydney had always wanted a fox skin coat and asked how much could she buy the old coat for. Well to make a long story short they settled on \$15.00 including shipping UPS. Karla May asked the man to turn Frosty loose when he shipped the fox skin coat. I was over at Karla’s farm about eight days later when the UPS truck came driving up the road and delivered that fox skin coat. Frosty was only about a half mile behind.

AND THAT’S A TRUE STORY

My Mother's Brother Ike's Family

The summer after I visited my Uncle John and Aunt Irene in North Georgia I visited my Uncle Ike, Aunt Bert and cousin Guy in Carlisle County, Kentucky. My Aunt Bert and Uncle Ike lived on a small farm right on the Mississippi river.

Not soon after I arrived, I made the mistake of boasting on the shooting and hunting skills of my Aunt Irene from the other side of the family. You only do that once in life. To this day, I remember my Aunt Bert laughing and saying, "you mean your Aunt Irene has to use a gun to hunt with?" She told my uncle she was going to take me squirrel hunting for supper and maybe tomorrow he and Beaula could fetch a rabbit.

Aunt Bert, my first cousin Guy who was my age, and me, we all headed into the woods. Aunt Bert carried three small steel balls about the size of large marbles. We stopped under some tall Oak trees. Aunt Bert twisted her tongue in the side of her mouth. She forced air out and could mimic chatter just like a baby squirrel in trouble. Big old squirrels came out from hiding and ran around on the branches looking for the baby squirrel in trouble. To this day, when I remember this experience I try to duplicate that sound without success. Aunt Bert chuckled the three steel balls zip zip zip. Three of those scampering squirrels fell at our feet. She bent down and picked up the three steel balls. Guy put the squirrels into our game bag. I was stunned, astonished and flabbergasted. "Aunt Bert, wow there is not a left-handed pitcher on a major league ball team that can fling a base ball like that!" "Mercy Chuck, I'm not left-handed." I said, "I just seen you throw and hit those moving squirrels with your left hand." "Yes, that is true but that is cause I'm in so close. If I had of pitched with my right hand I would have torn up the meat too much." What could I say, no one would believe me. But I seen it, I was there.

Just after we cleared the trees Aunt Bert said, "look, here come some ducks flying over. Guy bring down one or two and we'll have squirrel and duck pot pie." He whispered, "come on Chuck" and we ran out into the field and laid down on our backs.

Guy looked up and began to grin at two ducks. I glanced over at his face, lucky for me it was from the side. He had twisted it up so ugly he reminded me of a bull dog chewing up a wasp. He had his mouth so big he could whisper in his own ear. He had made so many wrinkles in his forehead he could screw on his hat. Crows over in the next field started to bring back the corn they had stolen over the last six weeks. Mice ran out of the field and threw themselves off rocks. Roaches began flinging themselves off trees. I felt a little queasy to the stomach myself. Two ducks fell right out of that sky.

What can I say? After that delicious squirrel and duck pot pie supper, Guy and I went outside and I asked him how he had learned to grin like that. He did not know, it was just the fact he had come to realize his face was stretchy like rubber

and he started practicing making faces. Then one day his cat tried to cover him up and his dog Beaula tried to bury him, which is when he thought he was on to something.

Suddenly he grabbed my arm and pointed up into a young tree. In the moonlight, we could see a opossum hanging out on a limb. He said, "Chuck run back and get a kerosene lantern so I can light my face. I'll stay here and keep him in the tree. With light I can grin that opossum out of that tree, yummy they are good eating?" I ran back to the house and fetched the lantern and Guy started grinning. I got behind him so I wouldn't feel any of the shock waves. Nothing happened. He grinned until I thought his hart would break. He said, "Chuck nothing like this has ever happened to me. Run over to the barn and get the axe. I'm going to cut that sapling down." I said, "OK but do not feel bad maybe the possum is blind." I ran to the barn grabbed the axe. It was a little dull. Quickly, I sharpened it, fact is I got it too sharp, its shadow cut a half inch into the wall beams as I ran out. We cut down that small tree. In the lantern light we could see it was not a opossum. Guy was so relieved, he started laughing. It was a big old knot in the limb that looked like a opossum in the moonlight. I'll tell you something though. Guy had grinned all of the bark off that knot. And that's the truth because I saw it, I was there. I said "Guy I'm not keen on opossum and I'll tell you why. I heard of a family down in Albany, Georgia that caught a opossum trying to catch their only rooster. After skinning the opossum and putting him in the oven to cook, in a big pan with water for gravy, potatoes, onions, carrots and greens. Two hours later when they opened the oven, the opossum had eaten the vegetables and slurped up the gravy. He leaped out, knocked the table setting off the table, wrapped himself in the table cloth, ran through the barnyard and disappeared into the woods carrying their only rooster. Later that night he came back and got his skin off the stretching board. The strangest thing though he later returned the table cloth, washed, ironed and folded with a note thanking the family for their hospitality. Course I just heard about that I didn't see it. I wasn't there." Guy said, "It don't surprise me none. I've heard that old bull opossums can be awful rowdy but I didn't know they could scribe and cipher." "No I understand it wasn't scribble it had been typed."

The next day Uncle Ike asked if I were ready to go hunting for supper. Sure, I said and the next thing we were sitting on the back steps. Uncle Ike was holding a twenty two rifle. He called, "Beaula yo Beaula." Beaula came romping into the back barnyard.

Beaula was a bird dog. A beautiful Golden Retriever bird dog. If it had feathers Beaula could find it. The only thing unusual about Beaula was her wooden front right leg. Uncle Ike had gotten Beaula when she was a puppy down in Waycross, Georgia. She had been born near the Okefenokee Swamp. An alligator had almost caught her one night that is how she had

lost her leg just below the elbow. She had a disability but as a hunting dog she was not handicapped. Uncle Ike was an old country style whittler. He had whittled Beaula a wooden leg. It was color matched so you couldn't even tell except for a small limp that she had a wooden leg. And I mean she was not handicapped! I saw Beaula drive a black bear into the barnyard once she had whipped into submission with that wooden leg.

There was one other slight difference as a bird dog. When a regular trained bird dog spots a bird they will point their nose, pick up a front foot and stick their tail straight out behind them. That was not Beaula's style. She would point the wooden leg at the bird. Once we were fishing down on the Mississippi river when I hooked a fair sized catfish that measured 22 inches between the eyes. As I was reeling the catfish in, Beaula started pointing that wooden leg at the fish. I remember saying it looks like Beaula is confusing a fish for a bird. Uncle Ike laughed and declared he wouldn't make a bet on that. We got that fish landed high up on the bank. It was big enough for two frying pans the size of a snow shovel. Uncle Ike opened the fish and out flew three mallard ducks. Beaula had known!

Later as we walked back to the house we met two kids walking toward the river. Beaula started pointing that wooden leg first at the little girl then at the little boy, back and forth. I said Uncle Ike those are kids not birds why is Beaula pointing? Uncle Ike stopped and said young lady what is your name? Mary White. Mary are you carrying any feathers or egg shells? No sir. Have you been playing with any birds or chickens, feathers or egg shells? No sir. Have you eaten any birds, ducks or chicken in the last couple of days? No sir. Humm, Mary do you have a nick name? Yes sir Grandpa calls me his little chickadee. Uncle Ike turned to the little boy and said young man what is your name? Bob White, sir. That dog knew but I do not know how but that dog knew.

There we were sitting on that back steps when Beaula came trotting into the yard. Uncle Ike said Beaula fetch us a rabbit for supper. He fired the twenty-two rifle up into the air. Beaula watched the trajectory of the bullet going up. But to tell you the truth I do not know how she saw the bullet. I couldn't see it going up.

Beaula turned and ran out into the field. I do not know if you have ever seen a wild rabbit but they run every which way when you are chasing one. Beaula flushed up a wild rabbit and headed that rabbit right under that falling bullet. We had supper and I got to thinking what a family I have on both sides. It's no wonder I became a fair to middling storyteller.

Not long after that experience Guy and I were tossing our saildogs. I had one that year that would turn a figure eight both horizontal and vertical and land in your hand. I mean that is better than an Australian boomerang. Guy's would tumble around in a circle if you snapped your wrist right, his was awe-

some. I have found out since then that up north people call them sailcats and in Australia they are called muggies. The lady who invented the first Frisbee modeled it after a saildog. I wish I had of thought about doing that. Kids today do not even know what saildogs are. All you have to do is go up on a highway, find a road killed varmint that has been run over and flattened out well and of course dried out in the sun. Slowly peel the saildog up off the road and give it a toss to see if you lucked into a good one.

Where Guy and I made our mistake we started throwing a stick of wood and Beaula loved running and catching the stick and bringing it back. Sometimes she would bat it back with her wooden leg. You know like she did when we played stick ball. Beaula could hit a ball further than either of us. But we could pitch a ball faster. She never did figure out how to pitch. When it was her turn to pitch, we let her bat the ball over the plate with her wooden leg. It bothered Uncle Ike some. Every few months he had to whittle a new leg.

We surely wished later we had never taken up throwing the stick. You see we were called into supper. While we were in the house, Orville Outon and Frank Pagnini, neighbors of my uncle Ike, came down to the river to fish. There was a small cove off the Mississippi next to the house. The idea of illegal fishing was unknown in those days. Orville and Frank were into serious fishing. Orville told us later that he lit a stick of dynamite and tossed it out into the water. Beaula saw that pretty stick turning over and over, flying through the air, out into the water. Beaula was a Golden Retriever bird dog. She dove in, swam out and grabbed that stick. Frank said later that when Beaula turned around to swim back in, that is when he and Orville decided to go home.

When Beaula came out of the water that stick of lit dynamite did what dynamite is supposed to do. After the explosion, we ran out, there wasn't enough of Beaula to have a funeral. We went to bed that night broken hearted.

About midnight, we woke up listening to a dog bark. In the country everybody knows their own dog's bark. It was Beaula's bark, not only that it was Beaula's tree bark. We ran outdoors. In the full moon light we could see Beaula's ghost flitting all around a big Oak tree in the front yard. Beaula's ghost had something treed. We walked under the tree and looked up into the branches. There, high up was an angel. We think she was a special guardian angel sent down to take Beaula's spirit up to dog heaven. Poor Beaula had treed the angel. It was the feathers on the angel's wings that had gotten Beaula all confused. To this day I have at home a big feather that fell from that angel's wing. It looks really pretty somewhat like a Peacock feather.

AND THAT'S A TRUE STORY

Aunt Irene

This story started to be about my first visit to my Uncle John and Aunt Irene. I had turned eight the year before and my folks had said I could travel by myself on either bus or train to visit relatives. I had already rode the train into New York City and visited with my Irish Aunt, Kate Kenney. This time I headed south on the bus to visit Aunt Irene and Uncle John.

When I arrived, Aunt Irene asked me, "Chuck would you like to go deer hunting with me and Shorty?" Would I ever, wow, that was like being treated as a grown-up for the first time. Aunt Irene was the hunter in the family. She used an old muzzle loading rifle and I mean she could flat out shoot. I've seen her trim the toe nails off squirrels at 100 yards and then walk up and shake them out of the trees into her game bag. Without toe nails the squirrels couldn't hold on to the branches. Hunting squirrels that way she wouldn't tear up the meat. That summer, we ate so much squirrel meat, that every time a dog barked the whole family started running for trees. I shared that memory with a friend once and he recalled the time he ate so many Opossums he couldn't go near a highway. But you know food does things to you. I met an old Florida Cracker fiddler once who shared that back in '39 his Momma cooked up chicken every day. She started Sunday with fried chicken, next day parboiled, baked, steamed, fricasseed, roasted and smoked then Sunday start back with fried. Week in and week out nothing but chicken until they all had pin feathers growing on their ankles.

I remember one Thanksgiving Aunt Irene loaded up her rifle barrel with black powder, salt, pepper, spices, chunks of potatoes, onions, carrots, celery and I do not know what else. We were about 2 miles from the cabin. Suddenly she flushed a large, plump wild turkey with a seven-inch beard. Aunt Irene pulled the trigger and the hammer with the little piece of steel slammed down onto the flint and kicked up a spark in that old flintlock muzzle loader. The trouble was, walking under the trees some old rain drops had fallen and gotten her powder damp. The damp powder in that little flash pan did not flash but began to sparkle and fizz and slowly burn its way down the tiny hole into the back of the barrel where the main charge was. Aunt Irene did not flinch. She just closed her right eye and held that rifle on target. After about six seconds, wham bam that old blunderbuss fired off the charge, smoke and feathers, they were everywhere.

When the air cleared I couldn't see a turkey anywhere. "Aunt Irene you missed!" "Chuck you do not have any faith in your Auntie." Lets go home, dinner will be near ready by the time we get there. We were within a hundred yards of the cabin I started smelling our Thanksgiving, dinner cooking. We opened the kitchen door, I could not believe my eyes. Aunt Irene had not only shot that corpulent turkey but

had cleaned and stuffed the bird. Blown him the two miles back to the cabin through the air, down the chimney. There he was cooking on the fire rack in the fireplace. I mean my Aunt Irene could shoot and that is no lie.

The chance to go deer hunting with Aunt Irene and Shorty what can I say. It was a new stage in life. I was almost a grown-up. Aunt Irene whistled up Shorty. I do not know if you know this but mountain people name their dogs after their body characteristics. When Shorty was a puppy he had gotten to close to a swinging sickle and had his tail cut off right behind his head. There wasn't much to Shorty after that, fact is, he was really short.

First thing Aunt Irene did was to tape Shorty's left nostril closed. With the right nostril open and he tracked deer. Tape the right nostril closed and leave the left one open he became a raccoon tracker. Upper left open was for squirrels, upper right for rabbits, lower left open for ducks, lower right for doves or pheasants. Even in the old days Shorty was an unusual hunting dog.

The cabin sat on a small three acre pond with the ridge fields out the back door. We were about half way round the pond when Shorty flushed up a twelve-point buck deer. I thought we were going to follow them when Aunt Irene turned on me and said, "Chuck sit down on that log and hush up!" Now, hush up is an old mountain dialect word that means do not be seen twitching or heard breathing. If you have not yet known any mountain women let me give you some advice for what it's worth. Mountain women are different from flat land ladies. I've seen Aunt Irene put on her ear rings with staple guns. I've seen Aunt Irene and each of her neighbor ladies pick up a pair of crow bars and knit a barbed wire fence and use them for comforters. Mountain women are tougher then woodpecker lips. They even knit with steel wool. I hushed up! I did. I did. I did.

Shorty was trained to run that enormous buck deer around the lake path past the barn, the oak tree, the cabin and on around the lake. Aunt Irene just wanted me to have the experience of seeing a buck deer, with that great rack of antlers, go past me about eight feet away at a full run. It was an incredible sight and I can still remember the vision to this day. It was also a very sad day.

What happened is poor Shorty was chasing that deer and barking up a storm. He just wasn't looking where he was going. A thin, sharp, edged rock was sticking up in the dirt. Shorty did not see it. The razor sharp edge caught Shorty right on the edge of his nose and split him down through his tail. The two sides each fell sideways plop plop. Aunt Irene said, "Oh! Oh!, Golly gosh." She reached over to a pine tree and scratched some pine sap off the tree. She slopped that pine sap on the poor dog, took off her kerchief

bandanna, slapped the two sides together, and tied up that dog. Then she hollered, “Shorty, get going” and that dog took off. But you know what happens when you are in too much of a hurry and do not take time to plan out first what needs to be done. Aunt Irene had that poor dog upside down and wrong. Shorty was running with two legs up and two legs down. A dog doesn’t have any speed like that, of course on the other hand, he had a lot more stamina. When the two down legs were tired he would flip over and run on the other two and rest the first two. After that Shorty could bark from both ends too. He did learn to run faster. About two years later I was visiting and I watched Shorty climb up a hill. When a rabbit passed below him, Shorty cart wheeled down the hill after the rabbit. The rabbit ran around a tree and Shorty split himself and ran around both sides of the tree also and came together on the other side. Now I hope you realize I’m just kidding about that part. That part about Shorty splitting and going around the tree is made up. I’ll tell you when I’m teasing you.

Aunt Irene could see that Shorty was losing ground and the deer pulling away. She pored some black powder down that muzzle loading barrel, then from her black satchel she took a small box and pored in rock salt. Next was a box of long carpet tacks followed by a mess of broken barlow knife blades sharpened on all sides. I said, “Aunt Irene that gun is overloaded and is going to blow up and kill us!” “Hush Chuck!” This time I got behind the oak tree to hush up but I did peak I did. The last thing I seen Aunt Irene do was to

take out her pocket knife and cut a wedge into the right side of a round mini ball which she pushed down the rifle barrel. She picked up the long rifle barrel and aimed it out to the left. I thought she was going to wait until the buck deer came around to our side of the lake again. But all of a sudden wham bam that muzzle loader went off. That mess was so thick coming out of the barrel I could watch it. That is when I got my first lesson in physics. The notch in the side of that mini ball made that ball slice to the right and follow the curvature of the lake. The wind drag off the mini ball sucked the rest of that mess along behind. One thing I saw that Aunt Irene missed was the ball passed over the water where there was a little leg off the pond. A huge bass happened to leap into the air and the mini ball, it passed right through and killed the fish without losing its trajectory. I waded out later and retrieved the fish. Meanwhile Aunt Irene never looked, she watched the deer. When the deer got to the oak tree where she had some rope hanging off a limb, Aunt Irene let out a shout that could curdle your blood. The sound scared the deer, he leaped into the air and got his rack of antlers caught in the rope. The mini ball came on around and hit him in the forehead and killed him deaden than a doornail. The barlow knife blades floated in skinned and field dressed the buck. The long carpet tacks put the hide right up along side of the barn and the rock salt started curing the meat and the hide. To tell you the truth, I was impressed. And from that day to this, I have been a feminist.

AND THAT’S A TRUE STORY