

2015 MCC Creative Writing Contest

Essay Category

Second Place: “*All That I Owe to a Squirrel,*” by Andrea Gallagher

It all starts with a twitch of a finger on a trigger. This releases the hammer which sends the firing pin in to the middle of the primer. The primer sends a tiny spark up the breach and ignites the powder that is formed into two black cylinders called Pyrodex pellets. Together these pellets equal 100 grains of black powder. The powder explodes, causing the .45 caliber bullet to rocket out of the rifled barrel, through the crisp, cold, winter air and straight into the chest of a four point buck. This all happened because a squirrel decided to slyly duck a bullet and continue to eat corn that the combine had spilled a month earlier.

It was the morning of December 14, 2014 and I had to shoot a buck. I had won a \$100 processing coupon at the Fish Creek Sportsman’s Club 19th Annual Rabbit Hunt that previous January, and my dad was determined that I use it. Today was my last chance, and I was determined to succeed even though my chances appeared to be slim. We had hunted every morning and every night for the past week and only saw one doe and two fawns, but today was the last day of muzzleloader season and that changes everything. Every buck I have gotten over years has shown up on 69 sIB very 19 sas69 s m9 si9 snu69 sB of 69 sIB very 19 sas69 s day of 69 sIB seas

were scampering to and fro and making all kinds of noise. They would chase each other across clearings, through the canopy of barren branches, back down to the nice dry leaves chattering and squealing all the way. They were like a bunch of toddlers in pairs playing tag. It was fun to watch, especially when my dad would tell me stories about his uncles.

“Uncle Dan always made Uncle Steve go squirrel hunting with him, ya know” he whispered.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because he didn’t want to shoot any momma squirrels, so he would make Steve sit there with binoculars to make sure that the squirrels had nuts before he shot them.”

“Wow, they really only shot the boy squirrels?” I said.

“Yup, Dan was serious about saving the mommas so that he could still hunt the next year.”

By 8:45 we had given up on deer hunting, and were going to pluck off some squirrels. There

Now we had to get the buck out of the woods to gut it. We dragged all 175 pounds of it up a steep hill, through a prickly briar patch, and on to the grassy lane that leads to our cabin. My dad gave me his knife and walked me through gutting the deer beginning with, “Just grab the whole rig” and ending with “pulling the butthole out is the hardest part, so put some muscle into it.”

After gutting the buck, we walked to the house, dropped off our gear and hopped into my dad’s truck. We drove down the lane to our cabin until we were almost to the buck, and then we turned around in the corn stubble and backed up the rest of the way to it. We loaded it into the back of the truck and went back to the house to show my mom and little sister. My mom insisted on taking about a thousand pictures before we could take the buck to town and get it processed using my certificate. It might not have been the biggest buck, but it tasted good, and it gave me one great story to tell.

JUDGE’S COMMENTS

This essay is a strong piece, in which the writer makes full use of his/her knowledge and love of guns, hunting, and the November farm landscape. It’s a pleasure to read. The first paragraph, though, doesn’t work well, with the jump to the squirrel at the end. I’d begin with the second paragraph, which has a great first sentence. Use the gun detail from the first paragraph later in the essay, where it fits.

Catherine Frerichs is retired after many years of teaching writing, literature, and other humanities courses at Glen Oaks Community College, Albion College, and, most recently, Grand