

SECOND PLACE—SENIOR ESSAY

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Age 16

A SLEEPLESS NIGHT; A MEMORABLE MORNING

I spent the whole night waiting for the special morning. I'd been looking forward to going squirrel hunting since my dad's co-worker brought his dog down. I missed the first hunt and was determined to be up for this one. I got up at 6 a.m., and pulled on my camo shirt and jeans. Grabbing my camo booksack, filling it with a water bottle and shells, I ran out the door just as my brother came to hand me my 20 gauge.

Then, I stood out on the carport and waited with my brother, dad, cousin and another one of my dad's co-workers. We heard a Dodge pull up on the gravel driveway and cross the cattle guards. Our dogs started barking like crazy at the big white crate in the back of the big, white truck. I was told to load up the truck, so I put in the guns and ammo.

After introductions, we all piled in the trucks and headed to the back of our property. Next thing I knew, Mr. Myron Tyler opened the crate and let out his squirrel dog, "Buster." He was brown and white and had black striped resembling a tiger. As soon as he jumped out the back of the truck, his nose was in the air sniffing. Mr. Myron's son, Mr. Wade, started to set up the remote to Buster's collar. It tracked him by telling how far away he was and in what direction.

Soon we were off, headed to the woods. My dad and I knew where there were loads of squirrels from deer hunting in the woods for years. We trekked through the thick woods, leaves rustling and twigs snapping. After sliding under barbed-wire fences, jumping over small streams and crawling through creeks for what seemed like hours running after Buster, we finally heard a glorious noise. It was the sound of howling from Buster. My heart instantly started pounding.

I loaded my gun as they started circling a tree. We all looked up in search of a flash of fur.

"Got 'em!" yelled my cousin from the opposite side of the tree. Then the smell of gun smoke filled the air as the squirrel dropped on the ground from fifteen feet up. It landed with a thud, and Buster skidded over as fast as his legs could carry him to throw it in the air and catch it again in his mouth.

Mr. Myron had to prove to Buster that every squirrel was dead by saying, "Dead Buster! Dead!" Then, Buster would drop the squirrel and whoever shot it would put it in his sack.

My dad nudged me as I was clicking my gun back on safety. "You have to be quick, get to where you can see as much of the tree as you can and shoot as soon as you see a squirrel."

The next time we heard the sweet barking of Buster I got the first sight of it. I put the bead of my gun on its head, put the gun on fire, then yelled out, "Got 'em!" Then I squeezed the trigger.

I watched the squirrel falling out of the fork of the tree in slow motion. It finally hit the ground and along came Buster, snatching it up. My brother gave me a pat on the back. "Congratulations Couyon!" He's been calling me that nickname since I was a little kid.

Mr. Wade handed me the rodent, and pointed out my bullet hole. "Right in the head, girl!"

More congratulations came from all the guys, then Mr. Myron pulled out a camera and told me to hold Buster and the squirrel. So I posed with my squirrel and the dog as he snapped a picture.

"I like taking pictures of people's first squirrels," Mr. Myron explained to me as I slipped the tree rat into my dad's sack.

We went on for about four more hours, walking about three miles and shot seventeen squirrels. I put lead in about eleven of those seventeen, due to the fact some would get stuck in forks, and we'd have to blow them out. Other squirrels, we just all got so excited to see, we all shot at.

There was one fox squirrel in particular we came across as we came out the woods that everyone shot at at least twice, but it seemed like he just would not go down. But finally he came tumbling down out of the tree. My dad, Mr. Myron, Mr. Wade, my cousin Brennon, brother Matt, Mr. Brandon and I gathered around the big squirrel and admired all the shot we put in it.

The very last squirrel was a huge fox squirrel. As we were about to drive off, my brother spotted him sitting on a limb. He told my dad to stop and pulled out his gun, loaded it, and shot it out the limb.

After the hunt, all the guys spent time making fun of me for being the only girl there, but complimenting me on my shooting. Mr. Myron, Mr. Wade and Mr. Brandon left, along with Buster and a couple squirrels. We were left with about ten to skin. My brother and cousin taught me how while my dad was inside prepping to make squirrel stew.

I'll never forget my first squirrel hunt, because it was then that I realized it is my favorite type of hunting, since it's so much fun with lots of action and moving around.