

The Elk Hunt Spring 2000

The time: December, 1999; Elk Season. The place: The Pigeon River State Forest. The recon teams were in place. The vehicles were ready. The airwaves were crackling with excitement. "Red Dog 1 this is Red Dog 2, come quick, come quick!" "Red Dog 2 this is Red Dog 1, where are you, where are you Red Dog 2.....repeat your message, where are you Red Dog 21.....". Red Dog 2 didn't answer. The airwaves were silent. Operation Desert Storm? No, it was Spike's first elk hunt.....

Lets go back to September, 1999. The setting is the living room of Big Jake, patriarch of the Rogers family. Big Jake and his son-in-law, "Shock" Sellers, were discussing the up coming December Elk Season. In the corner was mild mannered and very attentive Spike, also a son-in-law. Nobody knows Spike's last name as he is married to Big Jake's Black Sheep daughter, Sweet Amy. (Since Spike is "Sweets" 4th or 5th husband, no one in the family bothers with a last name.) "Shock", who works for the local electric utility (I mention this only because it is pertinent to how "Shock" received his nickname), and Big Jake are determined that this year they are going to be lucky winners in the Elk permit lottery drawing and are making plans on how to attack the Pigeon River Forest elk hunting grounds. In 15 years of trying Big Jake has never gotten a permit and the same for Shock in 10 years of trying. Spike listens attentively eager to be a part of the family.

Now lets jump forward to November. There were over 40,000 elk permit applicants and 350 received permits. As fate would have it, Spike got a permit on his first try; Big Jake and Shock were skunked again. This was rather ironic because Spike didn't even own a rifle. In a rare moment of compassion and kindness, Sweet Amy went to the local gun dealer and purchased the proper elk rifle for her husband Spike, taught him how to use it and declared "Go. Be my man".

The stage is now set for our return to the Pigeon River Forest.

Even though Spike probably wouldn't be in the Family long, Big Jake decided Spike should be given every chance to shoot an elk and thus salvage the family pride. Everybody from the 210 Tavern was involved. Spike, Big Jake, Shock, Foster Fenster, DQ, and anyone else who had a pick-up truck headed for the Pigeon River Forest all bent on scouting out an Elk for Spike to shoot. Big Jake's plan was simple. Get enough men in the woods and surround the elk herd for Spike to get a good shot at the whole herd, figuring he might hit one. For three weeks Big Jake's Pigeon River Task Force took off from their normal jobs and crisscrossed the forest looking for elk with Big Jake in the lead. The Northwoodsmen's philosophy is "To heck with supporting our families, that's what we have wives for." This elk hunt was serious northwoods business; community & family pride were at stake. Trucks roared and kicked up dust; radio's crackled with excited chatter and the woods were alive with excited Task Force hunters. Which probably explained the absence of any elk sightings in 3 weeks of trying.

Now Big Jake is a natural in the north woods. His philosophy is "If you know where your beer is, then you ain't lost", Big Jake is never lost because his beer is always in the back of his pick-up.

However, he does get bored. After three weeks of serious driving through the Pigeon River Forest, Big Jake finally decided it was Miller Time. Big Jake (code name Red Dog 2) gave his fateful call, which opened our story, to Spike (Red Dog 1) over the radio to "come quickly". (He didn't want to announce over the airwaves that it was Miller Time, just in case the enemy or other hunters were listening.) Red Dog 1 (Spike) and the rest of "Big Jakes Task Force" figured maybe Big Jake had finally spotted an elk and didn't want to frighten it by using his radio any more than absolutely necessary. So they all hurried to the last known position of Red Dog 2. Big Jake was nowhere to be found.

Further up the trail, after giving his call to come quick, Big Jake got out of the truck, pulled out a suds and popped the top. Then something happened that even a woodsy fellow like Jake hadn't counted on. The first shot fired in the American Revolution has become known as "the shot heard 'round the world". When Big Jaked popped his beer top, it became the "POP" heard 'round the world or more precisely, 'round the forest. Dozens of bored hunters & strangers all, wearing their camouflaged suits, walked out of the woods from around Big Jake's truck and showed up for Miller Time, surprising Big Jake. Now Big Jake has never been one to miss a chance to socialize and happy to have a different audience, he got to story telling and didn't hear the call of Red Dog 1. Now there is nothing Big Jake likes more than story telling.....but I digress.

You're probably wondering "Wade, did Spike ever get an elk?" Spike didn't own a rifle, didn't hunt, and received an elk permit on his first try. Of course he got an elk. The exact details are a little fuzzy, but rumor has it that in the traffic rush to find Red Dog 2, the elk were confused by all the traffic, got spooked and one ran out in front of a truck. Kismet again. It was Spike's truck!

Spike nailed him good. When he looked down at the dead elk, Spike naturally asked "How can I take this to the DNR; I hit him with my truck! The elk is all banged up for Gosh Sakes!" Sweet Amy, unruffled and being rather practical, went and got Spike's rifle and shot the elk in the heart. Then said "Tag it. We'll have a few brews and tell the DNR it fell out of the truck while driving it to the inspection station. If we've had enough to drink, they'll believe us." When the rest of the Task Force finally found Big Jake, they woke him up and all toasted the first successful elk hunt in Rogers family history. Caught up in the moment, Foster Fenster, in a rare show of excitement, declared "Free beer at the 210 Tavern", which led to another round of toasts to Foster. Not to be out done by Foster, DQ declared, "Free Dilly Bars at the Dairy Quonset for everybody!" It didn't matter that the Dairy Quonset was closed for the season, everybody appreciated the gesture, which led to another round of toasts for DQ. After all the toasting, just as Sweet Amy predicted, the DNR believed the story. Not only did they believe the story, the head DNR guy even commented "helluva shot, got'im right through the heart. "

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This story has an even happier ending. Sweet Amy is no longer the Black Sheep in the Rogers Family. Big Jake proudly proclaimed "After 4, 5, or is it 6 tries, my daughter finally married right! Got herself a real woodsman!", as he proudly hung the bent and twisted bumper from Spike's truck on the wall in his living room. As tears welled up in Big Jakes eyes he said "Hey Spike, what the heck is your last name....."