

Another Look  
AT Life  
FROM A  
Deer Stand

*Going Deeper into the Woods*

Steve Chapman



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## **ANOTHER LOOK AT LIFE FROM A DEER STAND**

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## *Good Waiting*

After a season closes, deer hunters wait on average eight long months for the opening day of the next season. With so many days on the calendar to put our x's through, it's no wonder that those of us who cherish the hunt have a lot of trouble leaving the woods at the end of that first day. But the reluctance to exit a stand doesn't stop on opening day for me. Throughout the season leaving the woods is rarely something I want to do. A meeting that can't be postponed, a flight to catch, looming darkness, lightning bolts, loggers taking the tree I'm sitting in, a son or daughter getting married, and another season closing are just a few reasons to have to wrap up the day and head to the house. Though I am very much aware that I can easily make trouble for myself if I don't go home when I need to, I am very often guilty of trying to squeeze as many minutes in the deer stand as I possibly can.

This "short" in my wiring has been sparking for a long time. I recall when I was 16 years old and deer hunting in the McClintic Wildlife Station north of Point Pleasant, West Virginia. I stayed on a ground stand until I couldn't see the sights at the end of my .30-30 barrel, which was a short

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carbine, hardly 20 inches long. I unwillingly stood up and, because I didn't have a light, I began the stumble back to the gravel road where my folks' car was parked.

As I neared the Chevy that was light green in color and sort of softly glowed in the evening blackness, I thought I saw the dark form of a human standing next to it. I halted. The form didn't move...I didn't move. The silhouette and I were in a standoff. I gripped my rifle tightly and very slowly began to raise it to my hip. My heart rate shot up, and I gasped for breath as I searched for the hammer with my thumb. I pressed on it gently and waited in full alert.

Suddenly the silhouette spoke.

"Gettin' back to your vehicle a little late, aren't you, Mister?"

Obviously the title "mister" that I was given revealed the stranger didn't know he was facing down a kid who was trembling from head to toe like a nervous Barney Fife. I swallowed hard and offered as confident a reply as I could muster.

"Yep."

Any more words than one and the tremble in my voice would have been easily detected.

"Is there a reason you're so late?"

"Is there a reason you're asking?" I shot back.

That's when the flashlight abruptly came on. Little did I know, as I stood there totally blinded by the light he must have taken from the front end of a locomotive, I had just challenged the integrity and authority of a game warden.

When he got a good look at me and my stance with the rifle he must have seen that I was tense and needed a bit of calming.

"Young man, I'm an officer with the West Virginia

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Department of Natural Resources, and I must ask you, Is that rifle still loaded?”

“Yes, Sir.” (Somehow my manners returned!)

“Then please unload it right there where you’re standing.”

“Yes, Sir.”

As I put the four cartridges in my jacket and dug through my pants pockets for my license, I explained to the officer that the reason I was so late getting to the car was that I really liked to wait as long as I could before leaving the stand. He was very kind to listen to my excuse, but he showed no sympathy as he offered a brief but stern lecture about the dangers of being alone in the woods after dark. Thankfully he sent me on my way without further consequences.

I’d like to report that his warning did some good, but quite honestly it didn’t connect. To this day I’m still likely to wait until the last possible millisecond before leaving a deer stand. But the good news is I think I finally figured out the main reason I’m wired in such a weird way. It’s because I enjoy “good” *waiting*.

Like most Americans these days, I do enough waiting that is tedious. You know, the kind that yields little in the way of delight. For example, I frequently get in airport security checkpoint lines where the only happy people present are those who have never flown or haven’t flown since September 11, 2001 (rare birds they are!). They seem to be totally oblivious to the fact that their waiting might result in being randomly chosen for a complete body cavity search. They appear ignorantly blissful, not realizing that when they finally reach the TSA agent’s control that all their personal belongings might be removed from their bags and strewn around the area for

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the disgustingly curious to see and for sticky-fingered thieves to assess. That kind of waiting I can do without.

Or how about the unfortunate and frustrating standstills that many of us have driven up to on interstate highways? Isn't that some of the worst waiting we have to endure? We're driving along, getting somewhere at a high rate of speed, when all of a sudden the red brake lights come on ahead of us and remain illuminated, warning us that the world up there is coming to a stop. That's when the sinking feeling hits us, and we whisper a hopeless, "Oh, no! How long is this gonna take?" And you know it's really bad when you pull up behind the last car and the people who were total strangers prior to the standstill are out playing rummy on the hoods of their vehicles, cooking hamburgers on their tailgates, and exchanging addresses because friendships have developed. That's not good waiting either.

And there is nothing pleasant when sitting in a doctor's holding room. After tolerating the delay in the main lobby and dreading the possible probing, poking, and pinching that is inevitable, then having to sit alone in a smaller room for who knows how long and look at disgustingly ugly pictures of the insides of sick people—that's lousy waiting. (And to think we pay big bucks for the privilege too!) Then there's the lab test results. With all the technology available, why must we wait two weeks after a biopsy to find out if that lump is cancer? That's one I've yet to figure out. I'm sure some lab person will seek me out now to explain it to me, but whatever he or she says, it won't make the drawn-out, nail-biting vigil by the phone any more fun.

But there is a *good* kind of waiting. It's when there's something positive at the end. Thankfully, there's plenty of lines in

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which to linger that has better rewards—enough of them at least to balance out most of the bad waiting. One of my more memorable experiences in regard to voluntarily getting in a waiting line because of the thrill on the far end took place in Ohio around 1979.

I was in a band that was invited to perform during “Christian Day” at King’s Island near Cincinnati. We arrived plenty early in the day because part of the benefit for the band members was a free pass to the amusement park. I was especially excited because I knew about...The Beast.

Back then I was a roller coaster junkie, and The Beast was one of the most famous rides of the times. For a full six minutes or so a person could enjoy a neck-popping, vocal cord-stripping, hip-bruising ride on a state-of-the-art machine that boasted some of the highest peaks and lowest valleys known to those who thirsted for a violent, near-death experience. But to enjoy those six precious minutes the riders had to stand in a line that resembled the winding path bowels take through the human abdomen.

Packed with people bunched together tightly and moving slower than a snail with a limp, the line snaked around the parallel metal pipes for what seemed hundreds of yards. It’s the kind of line that allows people to pass each other over and over—so many times that faces are memorized down to the moles and stray hairs, T-shirt messages become absolute truth, and conversations overheard come in bits and pieces, some being so interesting (or appalling) that it is hard to wait until you get close enough to hear again.

For a good 40-plus minutes I shuffled through that line. And I did it six times that day! Why? Because there was something on the other end of it that I found exhilarating. It was

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something I wanted, a challenge I dreamed about. And once I did it the first time and the ride lived up to the expectations I had placed on it, I couldn't get enough. I was finally forced to leave The Beast because there was a concert to do.

To balance out the other waits in life that are not so enjoyable, there are more places besides amusement parks where waiting has its sweet spoils. On the high-end of life there are glorious places like maternity waiting rooms, where family members excitedly anticipate the announcement that a new little one has arrived. I went to one of those rooms as a first-time grandfather not too long ago. That was some really great waiting! (Her name is Lily Anne, by the way, the latest fawn in the Chapman herd.)

In the everyday category of places where waiting can be enjoyable are locations such as movie theaters, concert halls, NASCAR events, a favorite restaurant, and check-out counters at Bass Pro or Cabelas. The lines at these places are not at all toilsome. I gladly bear them because of what I expect to find in the distance. But of all the places that involve waiting, the deer stand is definitely my favorite.

I can confidently say that as far as I'm concerned sitting alone on a deer stand has not once felt like drudgery. Even when I head home empty-handed I still feel refreshed for having been out there. This view of how pleasurable even a shot-less hunt can be reminds me of what the granddad of the late singer Harry Chapin said to his grandson. He said something to the effect of

“Harry, there's two kinds of tired. There's a bad tired and a good tired. When you come to the end of the day exhausted because you've labored throughout all of it

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in order to help someone else fulfill their dreams, that's a bad tired. But when your day ends and the hard work you did was for the sake of your own dream, even if you didn't make any money, that's a good tired.

Good deer-stand waiting, like a good tired, means that even if the critters don't show up there is always something about it that makes the waiting worth the effort. One reason most hunters agree this is true is because going hunting is something we *want* to do. And just because we might go home with an unpunched tag doesn't mean we're leaving the woods empty-handed. There have been times when I've left the stand with the memory of a sunrise that genuinely melted my emotions, a sight so lovely that I was reminded to say a quiet "thank You!" to the Creator. Is that a trophy? You bet!

On more than one occasion I have unloaded my bow or gun and headed to the truck with the refreshment of a few hours of blessed solitude. During these valuable breaks from the rest of the world I am often able to concentrate on praying for those I love. Or I get to go through some things I need to think about. Is that a good use of time? Yes, Sir!

If you and I redeem the time on a hunt in this way, we're doing the kind of waiting mentioned in the Old Testament book of Psalms: "Wait for the LORD; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the LORD" (27:14). On the surface this passage seems to imply that when it comes to waiting for God, all we need to do is find a park bench and sit there quietly with folded hands and sooner or later He will come strolling by. That is not the meaning at all. To *wait* in this verse has a proactive meaning. The original word (*qavah*) means to "bind together by twisting." Essentially, those of us

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who effectively wait for God will redeem the time by “wrapping ourselves around” Him. To get that tightly intertwined with God requires a very active approach to a relationship with Him. Conversing with Him in prayer, listening to Him through His Word, studying and worshiping Him, allowing Him to influence every aspect of our lives is good waiting.

Deer hunters, for the most part, don't have a problem grasping this scriptural insight. We rarely sit on a deer stand thoughtless and brain dead. We “wrap ourselves around the hunt” by constantly watching the woods, carefully looking for the slightest movement. We mentally rehearse our shooting methods, and we take note of weather and wind. Our minds are busy. This active approach creates pure excitement from the first moment of a hunt to the last. And, more importantly, it tutors us about how to wait on the Lord. What a deal!

While there are some unquestionably wonderful by-products of keeping a vigil on a deer stand, such as learning how and why to redeem the time, seeing deer is the ultimate reason I gladly linger there. The anticipation of sighting the subtle movement of brownish-colored fur amid the thicket or catching the flicker of a white-tipped tail in the distance—pure heaven. And it's this unique aspect of deer hunting that has taught me more about how to enjoy the rest of life than nearly anything else.

Life is very similar to a deer hunt. It's a wait. The question to ask is, What will be the reward of my waiting? Whatever that expectation is will dictate whether or not my waiting is bad or good. If I believe the wait will yield something dreadful or even nothing at all, then life will surely be void of true joy. However, if I expect the wait to result in something wonderful—something even better than a huge trophy

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buck—then the sweetness of anticipation makes life much more enjoyable.

I will be forever grateful that I have something wonderful to look forward to as I wait on the “deer stand” of this life. The very thought of the divine sighting that I fully expect makes living feel like one uninterrupted day in the hunter’s woods, where every moment is filled with the hope of seeing the prize I search for!

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, *for we shall see Him as He is*. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 John 3:1-3 NKJV).

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us (Titus 2:11-14 NKJV).

If these passages describe your expectations as they do mine; then, my friend, we are enjoying some really great waiting!