



A HUNTER'S
gratitude

*reconnecting with
human nature*

Words and Photos by Shawn Mihalik



In December of 1999, Bruce McGlenn, who had been hunting since he was three years old, came to a realization: While the verb “hunt” means to chase game or other wild animals for the purpose of catching or killing, and the noun “trip” implies a journey or a voyage, a “hunting trip” is far more than a combination of the two definitions. At the close of a weekend hunt with his father John, his brother Andrew, and two treasured family friends, McGlenn jotted the following in his journal:

HUNTING TRIP - n. a journey with friends away from the comfort of shelter to reclaim one's natural roots, to engage in the larger circle of life, and to be close to wild things for the purpose of setting one's mind and body free from unnatural processes.

It's this concept that forms the philosophical basis for Bruce's company, Human Nature Hunting School, and the several hunting-focused courses it offers throughout the year. Recently, I had the opportunity to attend one of these courses, called “Awaken the Hunter.” This three-day (two full days and two half days) experience was one of the most enlightening of my life.

“Our mission is to help heal the connection between humans and nature.”

—BRUCE MCGLENN

Awaken the Hunter began on a Friday afternoon with a lunch of soup and a grilled “bread” made entirely of various nuts and seeds. Unfortunately, I experienced car trouble during my seven-and-a-half-hour drive from Bend, Oregon, to Kettle Falls, Washington, where Bruce has lived since 2003 in a cabin built with his own hands over the course of five months, so I arrived a couple hours late, missing introductions.



By the time I'd finished my bowl of soup and two slices of nut-and-seed bread, McGlenn was leading the course's students (seven of us in all), through a situational awareness exercise, the goal of which is to put the student in the mind of both the hunter and the hunted. Participants split into two groups. The first group, the hunters, venture deep into the woods surrounding McGlenn's property, where they find a place to sit quietly and record some observations in a journal: What are they seeing, smelling, hearing, feeling? What activity is going on around them? Notice the weather, the presence of insects, bird calls, plants, and wild mushrooms. Just as importantly, students should take notice of their own movements, of the sounds *they* are producing. If the student had to guess the general location of the closest deer, which direction would it be? And remember, while you're sitting there, vulnerable, striving to be aware of so much, another group is out there, searching for you with the aid of high-powered binoculars and their own hunter instincts. This is just a taste of what it's like to be a part of the arboreal circle of life. Once the hunters find the hunted, the two groups switch places.

After this exercise, we began a process that would prove to be the narrative thread for the entire experience, tying each of the four days together and reminding us of the presence of life and death in every human experience: A local farmer brought to the cabin a freshly slaughtered lamb, which McGlenn hid in the woods.

The Awaken the Hunter course includes all the lessons one would expect in a beginner's hunting course—equipment overviews, regulations walkthroughs, conservation lessons, firearm safety, marksmanship instruction (during which students fire rifles and shotguns and bows), a couple simulated hunts—but it was the experience of working with this lamb that imparted the course's most important lessons.

We were tasked with locating the animal by tracking a simulated trail of blood and disturbed foliage. Once we found the lamb, we laid our hands on it for a few moments, reflecting on what we felt (I felt grief, gratitude), and then we set about field-dressing the animal, removing the intestines, stomach, anus, and other gut organs, using knives McGlenn provided and taught us how to use. When we were done, we transported what was left, with our own strength, back to camp.

Once we had the lamb back at the cabin and hanging from a gambrel, we skinned it and left it overnight to cool in the chill air. Over dinner that evening (elk, grilled cauliflower and asparagus, cottage cheese with cracked pepper) we discussed death. We talked about death a lot during the course, for there is no hunting without death. There is no being human without death.

The next morning, we butchered the lamb. Its meat would provide the basis for several of the meals that followed.



"What we do in our courses goes beyond hunting. We've put a lot of thought into how we present the hunt to folks who are new to the field, eliciting emotions and sensations that most people didn't know existed."

—Bruce McGlenn



“The hunt is complicated, challenging, and unpredictable—and yet there is something very grounding in it. In a sense, it’s a metaphor for the rest of life and finding our own path and connection to something beyond ourselves.”

—Bruce McGlenn

Food is a crucial part of the Human Nature Hunting experience. Denmark native and Awaken the Hunter head chef Taus Schumacher, an adept hunter himself, lends his 20-plus years of restaurant-industry experience to the course, cooking three square meals a day for the active students. It was Taus who took the lamb we butchered and turned it into lunches and dinners. Taus prepared roasted lamb shoulder with roasted onions,

ground lamb patties with homemade tzatziki (we ground the meat that formed those patties ourselves, as part of the educational experience), and even, for lunch on the course’s third day, lettuce wraps of the lamb’s heart, liver, and kidneys.

During the butchering lesson, we sawed off the ribs and spinal cord, and Taus used these to make perhaps the most nutritious, delicious, and satisfying broth I’ve ever had; there’s

something profoundly rewarding about sipping broth made from bones you’ve harvested yourself, reflecting while you drink on the deep connection you have with your food and the whole of our planet’s ecosystem. In a way, you hold a mug of life in your hands.

Of course, we didn’t eat only protein during the four days of the Awaken the Hunter course. Each meal was accompanied by a bevy of vegetables, many of which were grown in a large garden on McGlenn’s property (he has plans to expand this garden in the near future). Desserts included a Paleo rhubarb parfait made with banana flour and a (not Paleo, but delectable) applesauce cake, McGlenn’s mother’s recipe, made from apples grown by McGlenn’s father, John, topped with freshly whipped cream.

Before the course’s final dinner, Taus gave the group a brief lesson in cooking wild game, walking us through the process of grilling a tenderloin to the perfect temperature. This tenderloin served as an appetizer: The dinner’s main component was the lamb’s two shoulders, seared on the grill and then braised alongside whole onions for six hours in the bone broth, and served with the largest number of morels I’ve ever seen in one place.

When most people, especially those who have never hunted before, think about hunting, they think killing. They picture weapons and death and slaughter. They’re not wrong—these are all necessary components of







"I have always had a holistic approach to cooking. An avid angler and forager since I was a kid, I have always been interested in providing for myself and my family and showing the food the respect it deserves by using a nose-to-tail approach."

—Taus Schumacher

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a successful hunt. But they're also components of *not hunting*, of feedlots and factory farms and meat neatly stacked on styrofoam trays and wrapped in cellophane. Even plant-based diets necessitate the taking of life; combine harvesters kill, according to some estimates, 40 mice per acre of grain. Other mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians are either displaced or killed directly due to industrial farming.

Even gardeners must take lives. I watched McGlenn trap and, regret lining his face, kill a gopher that had been eating his produce. Again, I felt grief. But I also understood that, for the balance of a delicate ecosystem, the action was necessary.

The difference between hunting and other forms of food production is that the latter have a way of sheltering the consumer, bestowing a false sense of innocence, the fictive virtue of bearing no responsibility for the inherent impact our existence has on other life.

Does this mean we should all pick up weapons and hunt our own food, or give up meat entirely? While I do think all meat-eaters should at least once engage in the deliberate act of procuring their own food, there's more to it than that. McGlenn puts it best:

Hunting by itself is not the answer. The connection that can be found in hunting is unique and offers a chance [for a hunter] to become a direct participant in our ecosystem, our circle of life and death, and to get a sense of who we are and how we are connected to this planet, and to everything in it.

Humans and our ancestors have been hunting and gathering for some two million years, by archeologists' best guesses. It's only in the last 5,000 to 10,000 years that agriculture and the written language has arrived. We evolved as hunters, as part of the ecosystem. Hunting taps into our innate and primal senses and offers us the freedom to listen to and follow our instincts. When I'm out hunting in the backcountry, every step is a decision—and the wilderness in front of me is uncharted territory in which I can get lost, finding my way back to my roots.

To learn more about the courses offered by Human Nature Hunting School, visit HumanNatureHunting.com.

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check out some of
Taus' recipes on the
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Nordic Stone Age Bread

PREP TIME: 30 MINUTES

COOK TIME: 1 HOUR

SERVINGS: 1 LOAF

LIST of INGREDIENTS

- 4 oz **butter**, melted, divided use
- 1-1/2 oz **bacon**, chopped
- 2 **medium onions**, chopped
- 5 **large eggs**, whisked
- 7 oz **flaxseeds**
- 1-1/2 oz **raw sesame seeds**
- 3-1/2 oz **raw sunflower seed kernels**
- 3-1/2 oz **raw cashews**
- 5 oz **raw almonds**
- 5 oz **raw pecans**
- 5 oz **raw walnuts**
- 6-8 **thyme sprigs**, leaves only, stems discarded
- 6-8 **juniper berries**, finely chopped
- 2 tsp **sea salt**

the METHOD

- 1** Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a 4-by-13-inch loaf pan with parchment paper.
- 2** Add 1 tablespoon of the butter to a medium skillet set over medium heat. Add the bacon and cook, stirring occasionally, until browned and crispy. Remove bacon to a paper-towel-lined plate.
- 3** To the same pan, add the onions and cook, stirring only occasionally, until soft, browned, and caramelized, 8-10 minutes. Remove to a plate to cool.
- 4** In a large bowl, combine the cooked bacon and onions along with the remaining butter, eggs, flaxseeds, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, cashews, almonds, pecans, walnuts, thyme leaves, juniper berries, and salt. Stir until fully combined. Pour batter into the prepared loaf pan, smoothing the top with the back of a spoon. Bake 35-45 minutes, or until golden brown on top and the center is set (if using a thermometer, center of bread should register 165°F). Let cool 5 minutes in the pan, then carefully remove to a cooling rack to cool completely before slicing and serving.

notes

Raw nuts work great for this recipe, or you can soak the nuts overnight and then allow them to dry completely before using, resulting in a softer bread that is easier to slice.

The type of seeds and nuts used in the recipe can be adjusted to your taste, just keep in mind that you must use a final amount of approximately 30 oz.



storage

This bread can be kept in a zip-top bag or airtight container for up to 5-6 days in the refrigerator. If preferred, you can cut it into slices and wrap individually and then freeze. That way you only have to take out the one you need and heat it in a toaster (it is absolutely delicious!).

Paleo Rhubarb Trifle

PREP TIME: 45 MINUTES
 COOK TIME: 13 MINUTES
 SERVINGS: 4

LIST of INGREDIENTS

For the rhubarb compote

- 1 lb rhubarb, leaves removed, ends trimmed, stalks cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 1/2 vanilla bean
- 2 oz raw honey
- 1/2 oz lemon juice

For the banana flour crumble

- 1 cup banana flour
- 1 tsp raw honey
- 1 oz butter, melted
- 1/2 oz raw walnuts, chopped
- 1/2 oz raw almonds, chopped

For the vanilla whipped cream

- 1/2 vanilla bean
- 3-1/2 oz heavy cream, cold

the METHOD

1 Make the rhubarb compote: Place the rhubarb in a large saucepan. Slice the vanilla bean down the middle and scrape out all the seeds. Place the pod and the seeds in the pot with the rhubarb. Add the honey and lemon juice, stirring to combine. Place the pan over medium heat and bring just to a boil. Simmer gently for 2-3 minutes or until rhubarb is tender. Remove and discard the vanilla pod. Transfer rhubarb (discard the cooking liquid) to a shallow bowl and refrigerate until cool, about 30 minutes.

2 Meanwhile, make the crumble: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. In a medium bowl, combine the banana flour, honey, butter, walnuts, and almonds until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Spread in the center of the prepared baking sheet (it won't cover the entire pan) to about 1/4-inch thickness. Bake until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Allow to cool on the pan, and then break the crumble into small pieces. Set aside.

3 Make the whipped cream: Slice the vanilla bean down the middle and scrape out all the seeds. Discard the pod and place the seeds in a medium bowl along with the cream. Whisk by hand or with an electric mixer until soft peaks form. Do not over-whip!

4 To assemble the trifles: Alternate layers of crumble, rhubarb compote, and whipped cream in four 8-oz serving glasses until full. Top with a small dollop of whipped cream to finish, and then serve. Trifles can be assembled up to 24 hours in advance, except for the whipped cream on top. Add that just before serving.



Wild Turkey Rillette

PREP TIME: 35 MINUTES, PLUS CHILL TIME

COOK TIME: 5 HOURS

SERVINGS: 15

LIST of INGREDIENTS

For the turkey legs

- 2-1/2 oz **bacon, chopped**
- 2 **wild turkey legs (2-3 lb total)**
- 2 **medium-size yellow onions, roughly chopped**
- 2 **medium carrots, cut into 1/2-inch thick rounds**
- 2 **cloves garlic**
- 25 oz **chicken broth**
- 1 cup **red wine**
- 8 **black peppercorns**
- 2 **bay leaves**
- 2 **rosemary stems**
- 8 **thyme sprigs**

For the rilette

- 8 oz **butter**
- 2 tsp **sea salt**
- 2 tsp **freshly ground black pepper**
- 6-8 **thyme sprigs, leaves only, stems discarded**

the METHOD

- 1** Preheat the oven to 270°F. Line a 4-by-13-inch loaf pan with plastic wrap, leaving a 4-inch overhang on all sides. Set aside.
- 2** Place a 4- to 6-quart Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the bacon and cook, stirring frequently, until just crispy. Remove bacon to a plate. Keep the cooking fat in the pot and add the turkey legs. Cook until golden brown, then turn and continue to cook and rotate until browned on all sides. Remove to a plate and cover to keep warm.
- 3** To the Dutch oven, add the onions, carrots, and garlic. Cook, stirring occasionally, until garlic is fragrant and onions start to soften, 1-2 minutes.
- 4** Add the bacon back to the pot, along with the broth, wine, peppercorns, bay leaves, rosemary, and thyme sprigs. Stir once to combine.
- 5** Place the turkey legs back into the pot and cover with the lid. Place in the oven and cook for 4-5 hours, or until turkey meat falls off the bone. Start checking for doneness at 4 hours.
- 6** Once done, remove turkey the legs to a plate to cool. Strain the sauce into a small saucepan. Place over medium heat and simmer until the sauce is reduced by and least half and is thick and sticky.
- 7** Meanwhile, pull all the meat from the turkey legs, leaving any ligaments attached to the bone. You want only the meat. Place meat in a medium bowl.
- 8** To the bowl, add the butter, salt, pepper, thyme leaves, and thickened sauce. Stir and mash the ingredients together, really pressing the seasonings into the turkey meat. Once fully incorporated, spoon the mixture into the prepared loaf pan, smoothing the top with the back of the spoon. Fold the edges of the plastic wrap over the top to tightly cover. Refrigerate for 12 hours or until firm. Cut rilette into slices and serve. ↩



serving suggestions

Serve rilette with finely sliced shallots, small pickled cucumbers, finely chopped fresh herbs, stone-ground mustard, and toasted Nordic Stone Age Bread.

notes

This recipe can also be made using rabbit, hare, pheasant, or other big game birds.

storage

Wrap slices in plastic wrap and freeze in an airtight container. Slices can be removed one at a time or as many as needed. Thaw in the refrigerator before serving.