

**Game On**  
**Article from Mar - Apr 2009 Buckeye Trapper**  
**by Aleta (Reed) Blackstone**

“Hon,” whispered my husband in the dark as he stuck his head into the bedroom where I was sleeping, “I need you to do me a favor. I need to leave for work now, but I think I have something in one of my traps this morning and I need you to go check it for me.”

“Sure, which one?” I croaked in my sleepy voice.

“The one we had the two ‘coons in,” he answered. “Thanks! You don’t have to go till daylight. I’ll call you later from work.”

I listened as the car pulled out of the driveway and attempted to go back to sleep. I knew what to do when we had something in a trap, so I was calm. We’ve talked about it a hundred times - how to shoot the ‘coon, where and how to hang it up, etc., but I’d never actually had to do it.

Patrick has trapped for over twenty-five years, but it has always been his thing, not mine. Sitting in a plastic lawn chair, I would visit with him while he worked in the trapping shed, trying to understand as he talked about night-latching, four-coiling, and base plating. I knew it smelled funky when he dyed the traps and it was messy when he waxed them. There were usually body parts and skinned carcasses somewhere to be seen and lots of metal hooks hanging everywhere. (Apparently, you can never have too many metal hooks.) I just didn’t get it.

I was used to him bringing back his catch for the day and hanging it on the wisteria pergola outside the patio doors for me and the dogs to see from the kitchen. My part was to take pictures and download them to the computer. I would applaud and give a thumbs up from the kitchen if he had something or sympathize if it had been a dry run.

I lay there thinking about all of this and decided to go ahead and get up and get ready even though it wasn’t daylight yet. The least I could do was help him out this one time. So, I fed the dogs their breakfast and began to collect the things I thought I needed to take with me. The butterflies began to move in my stomach as I ran through what I was about to do. Patrick had bought me a pink Marlin .22 caliber for my birthday a few months ago because I enjoy target shooting (I got that from my mother). So I strapped it over my shoulder, pulled on his gumboots, camo hat, jacket, and brown jersey gloves, grabbed the camera and stepped out into the quiet pre-dawn. I had stuffed a large garbage bag in my pocket and the dog’s choke chain to carry the animal home with. Now, I was really beginning to get nervous. I had never killed anything and I didn’t know if I could.

I knew about where the set was, but things looked different this morning. It was frosty, wet and cold and I didn’t want to slip and fall. I was heading down the hill along the fencerow where we had caught the other raccoons. It was brushy and briary, so I stopped before I could see the set to get the camera out and get ready to take pictures just in case I startled the animal and it pulled loose. I crept quietly past the last clump of briars and came face to face with a coyote. That wasn’t supposed to happen. This was a 1½ Victor set for a raccoon. We had not really discussed this possibility. My heart was in my throat as I started snapping pictures.

It was right about then when I felt something begin to change on the inside of me. There was something so raw and surreal about standing there, just feet away from this animal. I couldn’t quite process what I was feeling. There was something in me that had never been tapped before. I raised my rifle, took the safety off, and fired. The coyote died quietly. Not at all what I had expected. I had to rethink how to get her home. I couldn’t carry her like I planned, so I freed her from the trap and slid her into the oversized trash bag. I started dragging her back up the hill toward the house. I was kind of glad I had made that choice since I had about fifty yards of county road to walk by. I just didn’t think I was ready for the neighbor ladies, bus drivers, and

school children to see me dragging a large dead animal along the road. I wasn't that cool yet.

Once we were in the back yard, I hoisted her with a rope over the pergola and tied it off until Patrick would get home. He called a little later and I told him the news. In my opinion, he was way too calm - didn't he know this was major for me? I looked out that door roughly a hundred times throughout the day. I just couldn't believe I had done this thing.

After this, we had a little discussion and Patrick shortened his line. I would be checking it each morning as long as he was on day-turn at the plant. I would stay in bed until I heard him leave in the morning. I'd wiggle my toes under the covers until I couldn't stand it anymore, jump up, feed the dogs, and head out. We had a few raccoons, but nothing I was excited about - not like before.

Finally, the day dawned again when I rediscovered why I was loving this. As I topped the hill behind the house I could see him. He was huge and dark. I pulled out the camera while I was still far away and took pictures every twenty feet or so. I wanted Patrick to experience the same sense of anticipation I was. When I reached the set, it was incredible. This coyote was beautiful and elegant. He was a noisy one, too. I hadn't witnessed that before. My insides got all jumbled up again. I was frightened, yet at the same time I was so excited I couldn't stop giggling. I think it's a girl thing.

I pulled the rifle up to shoot and my gun jammed. I hadn't planned for this. I emptied the bullets out and lost them in the frosty grass. At this point, I was pretty shaken and the coyote wasn't a happy camper. I had only brought three shells with me. Who brings only three shells? What was I thinking? So with shaking hands in clumsy jersey gloves, I combed through the grass for those bullets. I found two and reloaded, trying to remember if your gun blows up when you put wet bullets in it. It jammed again, so I repeated the process. This time I blew on the bullets in my hand to dry them off in case that would make a difference. The gun fired and again the coyote died quietly- very dignified actually.

I sat down in the grass near him and watched as he expired. The line was blurring again between my very orderly life and this wildness. Once again I had stepped over into a world I was previously unaware of and it made me more alive than I had ever been. There is a bit of a twilight zone that exists on the trap line. Raw nature dominated by you, life and death, and a glimpse of the wild. I'm hooked.

Patrick bought me a dozen Sleepy Creek traps, a dozen snares, lure and bait for Christmas this year. Game on.  
###Aleta (Reed) Blackstone, 45192 Hanson Ridge Road, Lewisville, Ohio 43754.