

**Partners**  
**Article from Mar - Apr 2010 Buckeye Trapper**  
**by Aleta (Reed) Blackstone**

When two people have been together for a very long time they inevitably develop their own dictionary of words and phrases, most of which mean absolutely nothing to anyone else. Being rural people, ours tend to be a bit descriptive. We generally identify locations on our farm this way. It just saves time. There are the standards like the locust grove, the walnut thicket, the water gate, and the ridge field. Then they get a bit more specific with the well road, the well in the woods, and back at the persimmon tree.

As trappers, however, it has been necessary to craft several more. For instance we have “where we caught that big ‘coon,” and “near that good set I made.” My favorite is probably, “You know, down that trail we cut.” We have quite possibly cut two miles of trails on this farm by now, so at times that one needs some clarification.

I have run into yet another language as I have stepped into this world of trapping. And, more times than not, since I am the “newbie,” everyone knows what they are talking about except me. The fact that I am picking up on some of the jargon hasn’t moved me beyond, on most occasions, just observing and listening. I am certain that as I navigate my way through the technicalities, I’ll become more fluent. I’m a pretty sharp cookie.

When I remember how uninvolved I was with Patrick’s trapping activities in the past, I experience great regret. For years he has enjoyed the sport alone or at best with me as a spectator. I hope things are different for him now that I have caught the bug too. Perhaps I was a bit impatient back then. I was aware of what he was doing, but I honestly didn’t understand. I could always tell when the season was approaching by the musky odors wafting across the back yard. The UPS truck would deliver packages which he would open with such enthusiasm. I don’t think I hid my displeasure well as he unpacked small glass jars of lure at the kitchen table. The packaging did little to contain the smells and I dreaded the day one would break or leak in the house.

Before Patrick ran a gas line to the trap shed, he used to simmer kettles of dye for hours and melt batches of wax in his home-made double boiler on my kitchen stove. I hated that. It seemed to take so long and the house smelled for days, or at least I thought it did. I noticed that when he was involved in projects like that, he seemed immune to the odors he was generating. Oddly, the smells don’t seem nearly as offensive to me now either.

I tried to take seriously how particular one needed to be about keeping free of human scent as he would prepare each year for the trap line. He would ask me if I could wash his clothes in a scent free detergent and use no fabric softener. We would hang them outside for a few days as well before they were deemed ready for use. Sometimes I would slip up and throw a dryer sheet in and mess up the whole process, only to have to start again. I have really tried to be diligent about this, perhaps to redeem myself for an earlier mistake. When we were first dating, he invited me to accompany him as he checked his traps. This was all new to me and, in complete ignorance, I doused myself in WindSong perfume and hit the line with him one morning. He didn’t say anything to me about that until years later. It seems he didn’t want to hurt my feelings then and was willing, for romance’s sake, to take the hit on the trapping that year.

I’ve had to step back into the spectator role again this winter. It was necessary for me to have surgery this past November, so that pretty much curtailed my trap line for the year. To tell the truth, it has been a bit difficult to only watch as Patrick pulls in with a coyote or raccoon on the bike, but I have dutifully photographed and listened to his stories of the line. He has matched wits with what we have determined is one very large, educated coyote all season long and neither of us want to close the season without putting him on a

board. He studied his travel patterns, watched for new signs and collected droppings. His work schedule has limited his time this year, so we treasure every opportunity he gets to go out and try new sets.

To increase my ability to be involved this season, Patrick has put out some snares for me to check from the kitchen window, or on my more adventurous days, from the edge of the back yard. I can see down across the pastures to the brushy areas and can easily spot any wildlife. I usually try to go out early in the morning to replenish my wild bird feeders and put shelled corn out for the wild turkeys, whom I have been able to entice, over time, to come all the way from the woods to my back yard. I love it when they silently pour in - one minute they aren't there and the next they are. Then just as smoothly, they all decide to leave at the same time.

One particular morning, Patrick wasn't home from his midnight shift yet. I wasn't even sure he was going to make it home since we had an unexpected snowfall in the night. I was feeding the turkeys and taking that opportunity to glass the snares when I spotted a huge, dark canine pacing back and forth at the woods edge. We had one! I was so excited! I ran back to the house to get the camera and video him from a distance in case he got away before Patrick made it home. It was so cold and I knew I couldn't get him back to the house alone this time. Time just seemed to crawl as I watched out the road for our car to show up with the cavalry.

Fortunately, Patrick made it home and I met him at the car with the news. He did really well with the enthusiasm act. Familiar with shift work, I knew that after his fourth midnight, there usually isn't a lot of extra energy to expend on emotion, so I was pleased with the effort. I wasn't going to be left out of this recovery though, so we got me bundled up (face mask and all) and headed over the hill with the camera, catch pole, and tools. I followed in his tracks for easier walking.

We were sort of hoping for some shenanigans from the coyote to get on film to show others, but, wouldn't you know it, when we got close, he just laid down and waited. He really was a beautiful old male - dark all over and wide in the face. I know I didn't get to participate with hanging the snares or setting the traps this time, but sharing in the rewards was so enjoyable. I was happy for Patrick's success, but mostly because I knew he took the time to prepare this batch with this very result in mind. He did it for me. ###Aleta (Reed) Blackstone, 45192 Hanson Ridge Road, Lewisville, Ohio 43754.