

J.R. & Sons

During the fall trapping season of 1968, 14 year old Jeff Robinson decided to cut the glands from a fox he was skinning for a local fur buyer, where he worked part time. He placed the glands in a coffee can and put it up on a shelf, out of sight and out of mind! He had heard that lure could be made from such things and wondered how he might do it. He didn't think too much more about it until several days later when he and the buyer again entered the heated room.

"What is that smell?" asked his boss, in a not too pleasant voice. Jeff suddenly remembered the can and quickly retrieved it and carried it outside. While the fur buyer smelled something rotten, which you don't want to find in a skinning shed, young Jeff smelled his future.

"I started trapping when I was about 8 years old", said Jeff. "I grew up in town but was always exploring and wanted to catch animals. I didn't have any family member to help me so I learned by doing. The first few seasons I caught mostly possum, muskrats and an occasional coon. I got traps from wherever I could find them. When I sold my catch to one of the local fur dealers, I would go to the hardware store and buy more traps! When I got my first conibears, I was too small to set them. Dad would set them for me at home, and then I would carefully carry them to the creek and set them in place. When I caught a rat, or accidentally set off the trap, it would mean another trip back to the house! One day I caught three muskrats and a raccoon! I thought I was the Trapper King!" Jeff swept the floor of the local barbershop, collected pop bottles and washed dishes to make a few dollars, all so he could buy more traps.

"My Dad was a musician who played the guitar and banjo," said Jeff. "When I was 9 years old, I got my first guitar. By the time I was in the 7th grade, I was in a band. We were pretty good and a guy we knew wanted to be our manager. He asked what it would take for us to do that. I said 'TRAPS'. A couple of weeks later, there was a big box of used traps on my porch. That's how I entered the music business and expanded my trap inventory at the same time. When I wasn't at school, I could trap during the day and play music at night!"

After his experience with the coffee can lure, Jeff started experimenting with more gland lure procedures. He always asked the question, "What makes them come to the smell?" At first, all lures were made for his own use. All testing was done on his line. The early formulas were simple, but as time went on, different ingredients were tried and more lures were developed. Jeff continued with his music, too, and then one night in 1975 everything changed in his life. "I was playing in this bar, and I looked up and saw the most beautiful girl in the world", exclaimed Jeff. "That's how I met my wife!"

"That was the first time I was ever in a bar," said Cindy. "I was a good Catholic girl! We didn't do those kinds of things! But I was with a bunch of friends at a Sadie Hawkins dance. I'm glad I went! I saw this good looking guy in the band!" Two years later they were married.

Jeff continued to make more lures and to experiment with formulas. He worked at the railroad for a while and was on the road a lot with his music. And of course he trapped. A few years later, things changed once more. They started a family! "When Cindy got pregnant, I decided it was time to quit the music business. There was just too much time away from home, and family is important to me," said Jeff. "I went to work for Whirlpool for 5 years. I still had time to make lures and trap. But all during that time, I kept thinking about doing that full time. When I talked to Cindy about that, she said 'OK', but, only on three conditions! Number one, the house had to be paid for. Number two, she needed a new car. And number three, she insisted on a nest egg in case the business didn't do well. At the end of a year, I had met all of her requirements! We both decided it was time."

It was the spring of 1988. The fur business was in a decline. But that didn't stop them. "We were fans of the TV show 'Dallas' which featured the Ewing family and their son, JR. Since those were my initials as well, and we now had two sons, and this was a family venture, we decided to call the business 'JR and Sons'. My first inventory was stored on an eight foot 2x6 on the garage wall! We lived in town at the time." Two years later, a 16' by 20' two story shop was built to hold the growing business and three years after that an addition was added.

In 1992, Jeff purchased Nick Wyshinsky's line of lure making ingredients. "I've always believed that to produce a good lure, you have to be consistent," said Jeff. "That means you need consistent ingredients. I was afraid that I would lose my source if Nick went out of business, so I bought him out." Now JR and Sons sell not only their own line of lures, but ingredients to many other lure makers as well. "We probably have the largest, most diversified line of lure ingredients in the country. And for every commercial lure maker out there, there are 100, maybe 200 guys that just make lure for their own use. That's a huge market for us, too", claimed Jeff.

Every lure marketed by JR and Sons is tested on Jeff's trapline. "I've trapped all over the country," said Jeff. "One year I started in the fall in New York for canines, came home for a week, went to Utah for cats, came back for three weeks, and then went to Arkansas for beaver. Cindy and the boys keep the business going while I'm gone."

The boys, Aaron and Brandon, started trapping at a young age. Cindy would drop them off to run their lines and help to skin. As the boys grew up, they learned to help with every aspect of the business. Aaron has married and now works for the Huron County Soil and Water Conservation District while Brandon still lives at home and works part time at the Pickerel Creek Wildlife Area. The boys plan to continue with the business.

After several years of operating the business from the building in the back yard of their home in town, Jeff found out that the house in the country they had looked at after they were first married and could not afford was now on the market. Cindy called about the property and ended up buying it over the phone, sight unseen. For six weeks, during the 2000 trapping season, they remodeled the house and moved to their dream home. Jeff then added a 46' by 70' barn over the existing old one, and that now houses the business and fur shed.

"The most important thing to me is family," said Jeff. "Without their support, I couldn't do what I do. They say that behind every successful man, there is a good woman, and I know that it is true in my case! The second most important thing is pride in what I do. We produce a consistent, quality product. I go to seven or eight conventions a year and talk to hundreds of customers and always try to help the kids. That's our future. I've met a bunch of great people over the years."

JR and Sons carries a small line of trapping supplies and videos that Jeff has produced as well as their complete line of lures. You can find him at every OSTA convention talking to people all day, and some nights, around the campfire, playing his banjo.

"I'm so grateful for the family support that I have and the great friends I've met," said Jeff. "It makes me the luckiest man in the world, because I get to do what I love."