

**The Satisfaction of Making Memories**  
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**by John Zachrich**

It has been said, "Greet the dawn with enthusiasm, and you may expect satisfaction at sunset." At 5:30 a.m. one can hardly blame me for not being overly enthusiastic. But the constant rapping on my bedroom door told me that my two young trapping partners were ready to go. They seemed to have more than enough enthusiasm for all of us, either that or their mother forgot to hide the soda pop from them again. "Is it time to check traps yet dad?" came a whisper through the small crack in the now slightly ajar door. Knowing full well that asking them to go back to bed would only fall on deaf ears, I groggily answered; "Yes, go get your trapping clothes on." With a scream of delight they rushed back to their own bedroom.

I have always felt blessed to have grown up with the outdoors being a big part of my life. My dad and my grandfather painstakingly taught me how to trap at a young age, and now I consider it a privilege to pass this tradition on to my sons.

The morning sun was just starting to light the eastern sky in overwhelming displays of indigo, cadmium and lavender as we made our way to the first set. A colony trap guarded a well-used muskrat run under a concrete road culvert, and it was here that we made the first catch of the day. Using my Yo-Ho trapping stick, I broke the thin skim of ice over the trap. I was able to fish it out, exposing in the beam of my flash light two well-furred prime muskrats. My sons, Caleb and Levi, were both excitedly dancing around on the bank, giving each other high fives as I removed our catch, and reset the trap.

Rhythmic swishing of the frost-laden grass followed our footsteps as we continued further along the ditch to the next trap. This set held particular interest for my youngest partner, Levi. It was here, on the previous day, that he had noticed a rather large raccoon print in the mud at the entrance of a fourteen-inch metal drainage tile. It was here as well, that I was more than obliging when he suggested that we set one of our snares.

As the flashlight beam played across the mouth of the tile, one would think that a bomb had gone off. It was obvious that we had indeed made a catch, and the two burning embers glaring back at me from further in the mouth of the tile confirmed my suspicion. Again using my trapping stick, I slowly hooked the snare and pulled the snarling raccoon from the tile. Keeping safety in mind, with a well-placed shot thanks to William Ruger, the raccoon was quickly and humanly dispatched.

It was only then, as I removed the snare from around the raccoon, that I noticed the sheer size of the animal. As I held our prize up for the boys to inspect, Levi, borrowing a phrase from his favorite movie, *Where The Red Fern Grows*, jokingly commented "Looks like the boss raccoon, dad." (Our boss raccoon later tipped the bathroom scales at 24 1/2 pounds.) Taking a new snare from my pack, I remade the set.

No longer needing the flashlight to illuminate our path, my two sons eagerly raced each other to the next trap. In the meantime, I took the opportunity to enjoy the solitude of the moment. Breathing deeply, my nostrils filled with the pleasant aroma of decaying leaves lying about the ditch bank, intertwined with the wood smoke from nearby farm houses, just then I was entertained by a small flock of sandhill cranes as they noisily flew overhead.

Hoisting the backpack over my shoulders, I noticed how its straps dug in a little deeper and I felt a new sense of pride. Not just for the pelts, although for them I was truly grateful, but more for the interest that my sons were showing in an outdoor sport that I so richly enjoy.

I feel that in a world of Nintendo and other such video games, trapping gives me a way of connecting with my kids. I also feel strongly that any time spent with my boys while they are young is precious. I know the time

will come, all too soon, when being with mom and dad will no longer be considered "cool." I want to make a bond with them now while I can. Trapping gives me that opportunity. My grandfather had once told me, "You never know when you are making a memory." I can only hope that these memories will some day give my sons as much joy as they have given me in making them.

My short reprieve was soon interrupted by Caleb's excited shout from farther down the trap line as he exclaimed: "We got another one dad." Picking up the pace, I was soon rewarded by the sight of a beautifully furred muskrat held tightly in the jaws of a #110 bodygrip trap.

The trap was set at the mouth of yet another drainage tile that emptied into the ditch. The toothy rodents had the tile stuffed so full of cattail stalks, corncobs and twigs that they was no way for the tile to do its job. I removed some of the debris, exposing what I believe was the inner chamber of a muskrat's den. Placing the trap in front of the tile and using two pencil sized sticks to form an X through the trap jaws had stabilized the trap enough to make this set connect. (Always check you game laws before setting bodygrip traps on dry land.)

As we later sat in the warming cab of my pick-up, sharing a thermos of hot chocolate, I could not help but notice the smiles of contentment and satisfaction on my son's faces. I Guess that it is true, and worth repeating. "Greet the dawn with enthusiasm, and you may expect satisfaction at sunset." At least I know it is true for two young trapped and their proud father.