

## The Parting Shot

Thom Jorgensen



It was a pretty typical Friday night when I showed up for a all weekend archery shoot recently. I was late leaving from work, frazzled from "up North" congestion and construction traffic, and right at the edge of daylight. All of which made it even more typical.

Just as I'm about to stake out my tent in the fading daylight, a young man walks up and offers to help. I was glad to accept the offer and the two of us talked as we got the tent put together. I found out that he was 16 years old, and this was his very first time to an archery shoot ever! His folks weren't into archery, but his uncle shoots trad so he got started right a few months ago. I was absolutely pleased to meet him, and thankful for the extra pair of hands getting camp setup. I was also very thankful to his uncle for getting a young man equipped and shooting, and bringing him to one of these events.

The next night I was in my camp when the sky opened up and started to rain. I saw a few people huddling underneath my neighbor's camper awning. I made my way over and took a quiet corner next to a number of MLA folks and started talking. As time passed more and more people showed up, and it became a "standing room only" event under that little piece of canvas as the rain fell harder and harder. I listened to a well-accomplished outdoorsman I know talk about how his family never camped because weather like this might happen. Another man spoke about his father only doing day trips fishing and never taking him camping or hunting. One by one the stories went around, and I was shocked to find out that many of these folks weren't exposed to camping or hunting as children! I considered the young man who helped me setup camp the night before and how excited he was just to be at his first shoot.



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This is when I was overcome with gratitude for my family taking me into the woods at a very young age. For letting me get rained on, and letting the sun dry me out afterwards. For letting me discover the natural world and find my own place in it. I reflected on that first little fiberglass longbow that they gave me and the sit down talk about the responsibilities that came with it. I also thought about some MLA members I shoot with from time to time and their elementary age daughter shooting her own hickory longbow along with us. Good for them to make the effort to get her out there! I've watched her confidence and marksmanship improve steadily over the last several months.

Since that shoot I've been thinking about all of the kids I saw at the Spring Shoot, and the GLLI, and all of the other shoots around the state. I've considered how many adults there are out there making the decision to get these young people to these events and sharing these experi-



ences with them. I recalled a few wonderful mentors putting youth bows into the eager hands of some young archers and their excitement to receive them. Then there were all of the volunteers at the GLLI that provided a safe and fun shooting range for the kids. I've thought about it all for a few months now, and I feel I need to say this:

Thank you to all of the parents, guardians, mentors, and volunteers.

Thank you to everyone who is willing to take kids camping and to introduce them to the outdoors.

Thank you to everyone who helps to put a longbow into kids' hands, and to those who teach them how to use them safely and effectively.



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