

## A great Oct. afternoon in January

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It is a superb October afternoon. The temperature is in the lower 80's with a light breeze from the south. Earlier, I caught a basket full of bass in the 1-2 pound range. Now, a turtle rests on the log in the small dove pond behind me. I guess he is sunning. I am sitting in my favorite shooting house overlooking the hay field. I watch the beautiful, silver/grey, white bellied squirrel out in the field. I have lost count of the number of does I have shot from this house overlooking a finger of the hayfield. They come here in bunches. Often the bucks follow.

The problem is, it is January 10 and it should be cold. I should be watching bucks chasing does, not squirrels and turtles. In a way, this sucks. A few minutes earlier, I had a sneezing fit so severe I could not catch my breath. Now, my nose does not work at all. So I am sucking air through my mouth.

To make matters worse, seven does just broke from cover and ran across the field so quick I could not get a shot. I have no idea what spooked them. I know with does in a small herd, that there will be no buck behind them. Does in a bunch signal none of them is in heat. Speaking of heat, I wish I were in shorts instead of my hunting pants.

As always happens, the sun begins to sink. I casually look behind me. Two does are working their way across the pond dam. The lead one is less than 50-yards away. Even with a runny, malfunctioning nose, I can make that shot.

I am back at White Oak outside Tuskegee, AL. I do not go there to kill things anymore. At least, that is not primary on the list. Therefore, when everybody gets up to go out the next morning, I stretch in the 70-degree, pre-dawn dark and go back to bed. It is the sensible thing to do. Later, if I feel like it, I will go fishing and maybe I will hunt in the afternoon. I have signed no contract that mandates anything. Maybe I will try to shoot another doe.

Or maybe not.

So much has changed in the last seven years or so. In just that short time, we have gone from talk and plans of the bright future to fear of what is happening. We dread what will be ahead for our children and grandchildren. Robert, Hilda and I are a little glad we probably won't be around to see it. We talk of that at length.

They like the fluke, the bass. I continue to offer it to them and they continue to be fooled. It is a pleasant way to spend a little time before heading to the shooting house in what was a swamp. Much of it has been recently logged. It is ugly but in a few years, it will be superb wildlife habitat. Open the canopy and the groceries abound.

I settle in and prepare to nap until deer time. If all else fails, the owls will wake me at 4:15. That will give me the prime hour before dark to look for a buck. It is 85, partially sunny and windy. I am not optimistic. I cannot breathe well, my head hurts and it is hard to nap even stretched out on the shooting house floor. I have had some great naps on shooting house floors.

They stay away by the hundreds, the deer. At dark, not a single deer has entered the lush Greenfield. I think of the skull and rack Mathew found when they cleared the swamp. I shot a nice 8-point in October of 2009. We did not find him then because a hard rain washed away the trail. I am glad to see the shot was as fatal as I thought. Matt found him less than 200 yards from where I had my stand. Nice buck.

It is dawn again. Attis is glad to see me. I slept well following a huge supper of stuff that is good to eat. I eat well at W.O. At home, I struggle to down one meal a day. Down here, I eat three and sometimes four. Atiss is now the size of a Shetland pony, a big Shetland pony. He loves me almost as much as he loves Robert and Hilda. He likes to lick my beard for crumbs and bite my ass when I get tired of playing chase. He is a great big, lovable dog who has everyone fooled. Everyone should have one...if they can afford to feed one.

I won't hunt today. It is Saturday, a good day to watch football and go through the giant scrapbooks. Somehow, somehow, we have gotten older. There is a picture of me with the big deer I killed. Not a lot of grey in my hair back then. There is another of me with a big stringer of big bass. That was before I got so sick. I look healthy and fit. Many pictures of the Does and Bows hunts for women only. Plenty of memories in those books. I am afraid those good days, days full of laughter and hope for our country and the future are gone.

As always, the road home is longer than the one there. The highway spins out before me and vanishes under the car. I will be back in a month or so. Robert and I have a date to go fishing. We will do some of that and a lot of just visiting and resting. October weather would be nice then.

That is why I go to White Oak.

**JOHN L. SLOAN /**      **This e-mail address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it**

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