

A Gentleman's Fireside Diary



A wonderful compilation of short stories, essays,
poems and journal entries dealing with
individual pursuits afield.

WITH FOREWORD BY DEZ YOUNG

A Gentleman's
Fireside Diary

Dedication and a Very Special Thanks

This book is dedicated to the many individuals who submitted a story to *A Gentleman's Fireside Diary*. Their willingness to share their special moment, an experience, or simply a creative story has made this book possible.

Finally, Doubles and Dogs would like to sincerely thank our friends Dez Young of television fame for a wonderfully written foreword and the imaginative illustrations of Bob White. Gentlemen both, in every sense of the word, their contributions cannot be overlooked.

Welcome to *A Gentleman's Fireside Diary*. Whether you have written one of the fine works on these pages or are just looking to relax, reminisce, and recall one of your own special moments – we welcome you.

It has been a great pleasure for me to collect the submissions that fill this book and to talk with the many authors of these heartwarming stories. I realized long ago that everyone who enjoys spending time afield has at least one moment that is irreplaceable to them. Recalling these moments is essential to dealing with the stresses of life.

So sit back and enjoy yourself. I hope you return to these pages often to transport yourself into the stories and visit with the authors that have made this book so special.



R. Doughty
Doubles and Dogs



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Foreword

People like you and me are fortunate to have memories of days spent in the outdoors; memories that can bring a smile or a tear, each one cherished as part of a life well lived.

Those memories can be as simple as recalling an adventure and sharing it with a friend, or as visually permanent as recording it on video. Regardless of how they're preserved, those memories take us back to times, places, and events that have helped to shape each of us as individuals.

You remember that near perfect cast; the one that dropped your fly just upstream from the largest cutthroat trout you'd ever seen. And when it finally slid exhausted into your net, you quickly looked around to see if anyone was admiring your prowess with a fly rod. Then, after reviving that proud warrior, you gently released it back into the crystal clear water, saying to no one in particular, "Thank you."

Or perhaps in your mind's eye you picture a prairie in the Dakotas. You and your four-legged hunting partner roamed mile after mile together looking for sharptail grouse. Just when you were sure there weren't any birds anywhere, your dog screeched into a heart-stopping point 40 yards ahead. As you stepped past

your dog, several birds leaped into the air with their familiar “cluck, cluck” alarm. Two shots from your side-by-side and a moment later you were admiring the birds, your own shooting, and most of all, the work of your great companion.

Whatever form your memory takes, you have one thing in common with all of us. You want to tell your story.

The authors of the stories you are about to read have been given a unique opportunity to share their memories with us, to immortalize them if you will. In the following pages you will read memories told in poem, short stories, and journal entries. They will be everything from memorable hunts, to dogs, to fine shotguns, and even fly fishing.

The stories are told by people just like you and me. They come from all walks of life, but share a common desire to step out of the daily routine, if just for a brief time, and step into the outdoors.

For them, the outdoors is an avocation. For eleven years, the outdoors was a vocation for me. So, let me take this opportunity to share some of my memories with you. I’m a very fortunate man. I have memories of many of my bird hunting adventures immortalized on video. Any time I want to recall a special moment or hunt, all I have to do is play one of the 135 television shows I produced and hosted from 1997 through 2007. You see, I had the privilege of presenting *Hunting with Hank*, *Dash in the Uplands*,

and *Dez Young's Wingshooter's Journal* to viewers across America on the OLN/VERSUS cable television network.

My memories of *Hunting with Hank* center around my handsome Llewellyn setter, Hank. When he came into my life I had no plans to make him a “star” of his own television series. But by the time he was three years old, the idea came to me of producing a television series featuring him. The first episodes of the series aired on OLN in January of 1997. Sixty-seven shows and six years later, I retired Hank from in front of the cameras so that his fans wouldn't see him get old.

All through his life Hank was a beloved member of our family. He slept on his own bed in the bedroom, and on my bed with me when we traveled. When he became well known, we attended outdoor events where he was the featured “celebrity” and was mobbed by his fans. Of course his first love was bird hunting. His desire was infectious, his instincts were nearly flawless, and his points were beautiful to see. But when I think of Hank, I picture him curled up on the couch with his head in my lap, sound asleep.

When I think of the five seasons and sixty-two shows I've produced with Hank's son, Dash, I remember the places I took Dash that I never got to take Hank. Together, we hunted exotic pheasants on the island of Lanai, Hawaii. Following Dash across the fields with the Pacific Ocean off my right shoulder is a vision

I'll never forget. The most beautiful quail I have ever seen is the Elegant Quail of Mexico. Dash and I only found a few before a torrential downpour ended our day, but I still recall the spectacular tawny crest and white spotting on its lower chest. Trip after trip, Dash carried on the legacy of his dad's legend in fine style, including always finding his spot next to me, on every motel bed in our travels.

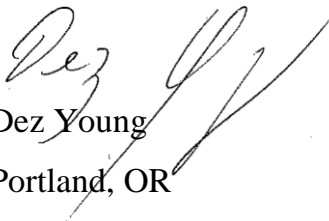
My two "boys" have given me great memories and great trips, even when they weren't included! Because of the success of each of their television series, I have been invited on outstanding wingshooting trips that also have provided great memories. *Dez Young's Wingshooter's Journal* specials I produced in Scotland and Uruguay were a direct result of the work I did with Hank and Dash. Each trip was special to me, but my fondest memory from those specials occurred in Scotland.

Grits Gresham had been an idol of mine ever since I first saw the great outdoor series *American Sportsman* on the ABC television network. He was a member of the shooting party I joined in Scotland. When we met, he told me that he had been a big fan of the *Hunting with Hank* series (this was before Dash). I couldn't believe it, so I blurted out, "Would you consider being a guest on these shows we're taping here in Scotland?" To my great surprise he said, "I'd love to." So on each of the two shows we

taped in Scotland, Grits Gresham hunted with me. It was an honor, and a memory I'll never forget.

As you read the following stories, I'm sure you'll think of your own that you'd like others to know about. My suggestion is simple: share your stories, as these authors have shared theirs. Keep alive your memories by telling your friends and family of your adventures. And when you and I meet, tell them to me, because I love a great adventure.

I'll see you somewhere in the uplands.



Dez Young
Portland, OR



Bobwhite

In Search of Burton Spiller

The days of the big bags are forever past; and yet there is unmeasured joy in store for the countless thousands who will tread the gold and crimson forests for untold years to come.

-Burton Spiller, 1886-1973

Let me first say that I have yet to kill a grouse. In fact, only eight to ten months ago I would scarcely even recognize one, even if he were to jump up on my lap, look me squarely in the eyes, and introduce himself. In 1998, my professional life brought me to the New Jersey suburbs of New York City, but I originally hail from Texas, wherein those Western environs my game vests carried ample shares of dove, quail, and pheasant. To hunt wild upland birds in the East, however, a transplant must shift his focus to the more curious grouse and woodcock. There will be no more standing under trees adjacent to milo fields waiting for doves to flutter past, or walking vast expanses under a big sky searching for the next covey of quail. In this part of the country one must take to the woods. So not too long ago, having had my share of guided preserve hunts and excursions on stocked local wildlife areas, and finding an annual Texas quail hunt leaving my desire yet

unfulfilled, I took it upon myself to acquire my own dog and seek the offerings of the forests.

Looking back on it, trying to locate the turning point in my transition from being a “Texas hunter,” finding beauty in open dry grasslands sprinkled with cactus and scrubby mesquite, to being an “Eastern man” seeking the soft carpeted forest floors under canopies of evergreens alongside swamps lined with cattails, I think I can look to something I received in the mail. It was simple enough – a card alerting me to a special sale to be held by the clothing and accessories arm of a European gun manufacturer.

This sale was housed on the second floor of a somewhat rundown warehouse building near Penn Station in New York City, a location and its accompanying décor hardly befitting the reputation and normal marketing objectives of this brand. I browsed among long rows of folding tables and clothing racks offering items from hunting coats, ties, and women’s boots, to bronzes of animals, books, and gun cleaning equipment. It was toward the back of the room where I noticed a table stacked with books – large coffee table books on safaris, dog training, gun history, and the like. While sifting through them my eyes were drawn to a book with some nice upland artistry on the cover; it was called *Grouse Feathers*, by Burton Spiller. I reached for it to give it a quick review. The book jacket described it as a masterpiece on grouse hunting, or something to that effect equally lauding. Had I

only known that these pages written more than seven decades ago would be so immensely enjoyable I might have exhibited more reverence towards them; instead I merely dropped the book in the paper shopping bag I was carrying and went about my business. I began to read the book that night and in other segments of time here and there – on the train, just before bed, etc. As is the case with so many people these days, my daily life is structured as an aggregation of compartments of activities with little room for more, such that I increasingly find I must “steal” time in bits and pieces to indulge and fuel my daydreams, where I am not a finance guy sitting in a Midtown Manhattan office, but a man of the earth – a land conservationist, habitat manager, dog trainer, perhaps a master class clays shooter, hunter, sportsman, gentleman. These are the dreams resurrected of a man marching into middle age, who long ago put them aside while raising little ones and chasing promotions instead of chasing game.

Finding myself only a third of the way through *Grouse Feathers*, I went online to order two more of Spiller’s books: *Grouse Feathers Again* and *More Grouse Feathers*. I already knew I would want more – more of losing myself in these stories of yesteryear, simpler times, and ample game. Burton Spiller’s books were entertaining, extremely well written, and full of information concerning all things grouse, information that emerged in great detail throughout his work, yet not presented academically or in a

way that wasn't enjoyable to read. He had opinions about dogs and how to train them, selecting shotguns, where to find the best grouse covers and at what time of day. He even contemplated the psyche of the grouse in a story written from the grouse's point of view. I soon began to understand how he had achieved his status as the consummate grouse hunter, as he had likely lived the sum total of the grouse hunting experience. And I discovered that Spiller was a Renaissance man, a man who eventually rejected industry to take up growing flowers and engage in the gentle and solitary craft of violin making. It was even rumored that he never swore and never hunted on the Sabbath in all of his years. I wondered if such a person could exist today! If only there was a time machine, I would turn the dial to an October in the 1930s, destination New Hampshire, and knock on the door of this gentleman's home and ask if I might go hunting with him that day, to not only learn more about this person who spent a significant amount of his life in the woods, but also to further inquire as to the allure of the ruffed grouse.

Sadly, no time machine existed that I was aware of – not that I would have been privy to such an invention anyway – so I determined I would have to use other methods to satisfy my inquisitiveness. To me, Spiller's writings had become an elixir of sorts to the exhaustion of navigating New York City on a daily basis, where concrete and asphalt replace ground, rows of

buildings replace fields and forests, and where one feels a continued disconnect with *things natural* – the great outdoors. As I worked my way through Spiller’s stories my curiosity began to lean more towards obsession, and I began to conspire in thought as to how best to get a real taste of what I had I read, and perhaps walk in the footsteps of the author. I rationalized that New Hampshire was a mere five-hour drive away, and that my wife would enjoy the mountains. Furthermore, my birthday was in mid-October – nicely aligned with grouse season – and this would serve to preempt any familial resistance. Finally I decided I would forgo my annual Texas quail hunt. Who could argue now that this adventure wouldn’t make perfect sense? I began to spend countless hours on the Internet, examining satellite images of the forest regions, looking for the proverbial abandoned apple orchard. Spiller’s books made me feel knowledgeable about how to seek my quarry, and I began to feel that I knew and understood grouse – or rather I realized that to know and understand these elusive and unpredictable birds meant you really could not know and understand them. So I booked a cabin in the far reaches of New Hampshire and began to count down the days until I could walk in the footsteps of Spiller.

In the coming months I researched Spiller, finding out where he lived, looking at maps, wondering where he hunted. I saw that his Parker double gun was up for sale at an auction the

weekend I would be in New Hampshire, at an auction house not too far away from where we would be staying. I even called the auction house, inquiring about how much they thought it would go for. Had Wall Street been kinder to me the past year (or more likely had I, as a structured finance professional, been kinder to Wall Street), I might have considered acquiring this treasure. But as I found my profession situated distinctly in the eye of the financial storm of 2007, I determined that a dose of self-administered humility was in order, and that an extravagance of this nature would create bad financial karma for me, and I envisioned I would be destined to sell it only months later to make a mortgage payment, only another month or two before moving my contents into a beat-up rental truck headed for a cheap rental house in a modern-day dust bowl. So let it go on record that Spiller's Parker would not adorn my home office wall or be interned to my gun safe.

This trip would be the first real hunting trip for my little Brittany pup. I had spent much of the prior year training her at the English Setter Club in Medford, NJ, a spread of three hundred-odd acres about seventy miles away, stocked with quail for training purposes. I learned quickly that this leggy pup could at times be a real screamer in the field, quickly getting out of sight. She is of field trial stock, and the daughter of a recent National Gun Dog Champion (a fact I cannot resist sharing, my rationale being that I

had absolutely nothing to do with her pedigree or the accomplishments of her forebears). I cannot always predict when her “run switch” will be “on,” so as a result my grouse hunting daydreams sometimes turned nightmarish as I envisioned her running off forever in the northern woods of New Hampshire, perhaps even to Canada. As this was my first bird dog (that coming with its own set of fears), and given the fact that hunting in the woods was new to me, the fear of losing her continued to nag at me, so I broke down and bought a GPS collar for her – the latest gadgetry I had determined would allow me to sleep at night. For whatever mistakes I may have made as a dog trainer, what I knew I had done right was having bonded immensely with her in a process – starting the day I got her at seven and a half weeks, from the moment after some period of observation when I reached down to the litter of puppies, picked her up and stated, “This one.” With this to comfort me, I decided I would trust that her desire to be with me coupled with the GPS device would mean that when the trip was over, she would be safely tucked away in her crate in the back of the SUV.

We arrived at our cabin in the Connecticut Lakes region of New Hampshire sometime after midnight and found the key was indeed where the cabin operators said it would be. It was a beautiful night, cold, crisp, and damp. I reflected that only that afternoon I had been in midtown Manhattan, working through the

daily grind, fighting the throngs of people that are always a mere pace away, and always situated between you and where you want to be. I always find delight in contrasting between *here* and *there* – how different two places can be – when often the only thing between them is some initiative, a few hours, and perhaps a tank of gasoline. I have distinctly noticed that the more time I spend in crowds, day in and day out on the trains, subways, and sidewalks of Manhattan, the more I yearn for solitude at a factor larger in measure than might be justified. This relationship is certainly not a linear one, but geometric in nature. In fact, I believe that the constant exposure to masses of people and sights and sounds and car horns and yelling is cumulative, like exposure to radiation.

So as far as I was concerned, to stand for a moment and take in the moonlight reflecting from the lake below on this frosty October night was part of a mental decontamination process, the equivalent to those scenes in movies where individuals are rushed into chambers, stripped down and hosed off. After having this moment to acknowledge our new surroundings, my wife and I unpacked and got the kids, the dog, and ourselves to bed.

I enjoy those mornings in new surroundings after you have arrived in the darkness of the night before, when the scenery of your new locale has not yet fully revealed itself, daybreak providing an unveiling of the curtain as to either delight or disappointment in your chosen destination. And having awoken

this new day, I pushed open the cabin door and looked down to a glorious dense fog nestled over the lake. The trees around us were bursting with color. In short, it was simply beautiful. Soon everyone was up and we were measuring our new surroundings and the contents of the cabin. I went out with our pup, Ginger, to let her do her morning business and I chuckled at the sight of the cabin in the daylight. It was a simple affair, basically a shack with a porch. The porch sloped down towards the left, yet the cabin itself seemed to slope towards the right. It was as if Godzilla or some other perilous monster had just started to crush it with his foot, only to decide suddenly that he had better things to do, so he moved on, leaving what loosely resembled a theme park funhouse where a marble on a table might appear to roll uphill. After calling in the dog I went to a local store to buy some groceries for breakfast, and by the time the bacon was sizzling, the cabin had taken on a charm all its own – the face only a mother could love – and we were having fun.

We are a family of five, but only two of us have any interest in the gun. My middle child, a twelve-year-old son, is all for the sport and quite a decent clay shooter with his youth model pump. My older boy, at fourteen, has little use for such trivial affairs, especially when he could be reading about marsupials, ancient Rome, or poring over a Dutch-English dictionary looking for shared cognates. (In fact, if this young man had spent the amount

of time on actual schoolwork as he had attaining knowledge far outside his stated curriculum, he would have had a PhD by now...)

in something.) My third child, a daughter, is just five and brings much joy to the family. She naturally likes what her mother likes and tries to do what she does, always shadowing her closely.

Rounding out the non-shooters is my wife, who lacks any interest in shooting or hunting, but luckily for me has nothing against these activities. She merely tolerates this aspect of me as something that is just there – there before she met me long ago and likely to remain there in our twilight years to come. In light of this familial division in the will to pursue game, my wife, daughter, and older son conspired to spend the coming days spotting moose, adventuring to waterfalls we had read about, and generally exploring the area. As this was billed as a “birthday trip” for me, I had free reign to take to the woods all day. I was determined to see what Burton Spiller saw and experience what he had, for I had three books worth of his advice, musings, and reflections stored in my mind. And that, together with a box of shells, a trusted double gun, my dog, my son, and a splash of hunter orange, was what I set off to do that very morning.

We had gotten a later start this first day of hunting than I had anticipated, given we had arrived so late the night before and needed to spend the morning getting settled in. I decided to hunt along a logging road that ran alongside Perry Stream, which

meandered for many miles not far from our cabin. I knew it could provide a whole afternoon of hunting and we would never be too