



A New Breed of Hunter Shoots, Eats and Tells

By **DWIGHT GARNER** OCT. 1, 2012

Who is the most famous hunter in America? If you're over 30, the first names that come to mind are probably Sarah Palin, Ted Nugent or Dick Cheney. If you're under 30, the answer is easier. The most famous hunter in America is Mark Zuckerberg, the billionaire founder of Facebook.

In May 2011 Mr. Zuckerberg made a pledge to consume, for one year, only meat he had hunted or slaughtered himself. He got a hunting license and shot a bison. "My personal challenge," he explained, is "being thankful for the food I have to eat."

If four new books are any indication, Mr. Zuckerberg is the decidedly nonmacho, non-pickup-driving embodiment of a new breed of American hunter. These young memoirists have loaded their rifles and shotguns for complicated reasons, including culinary one-upmanship. Nothing wows jaded dinner guests like a braised shank of calf moose that you've recently "harvested" and "dressed" — hunting euphemisms for killed, skinned and disemboweled — before bringing it to the table.

What feels counterintuitive and new here though is this: These writers have largely taken to hunting, they say, for ethical reasons. They've read their Michael Pollan and Eric Schlosser, their Peter Singer and Jonathan Safran

Foer, and are intimate with the horrors of industrial meat production.

They no longer wish to have an anonymous hit man between themselves and supper. They want to thoughtfully stare their protein in the face, to take locavorism to blood-flecked new heights. What they desire, as Tovar Cerulli puts it his new book “The Mindful Carnivore: A Vegetarian’s Hunt for Sustenance” (Pegasus), is as follows: “To eat with my eyes wide open.”

The woods this fall, these books imply, will be crawling with iPad-owning, J. Crew-wearing Natty Bumppos. Be prepared to duck.

Typical among them is Lily Raff McCaulou, the author of “Call of the Mild: Learning to Hunt My Own Dinner” (Grand Central). When she was in her mid-20s, her book explains, she lived in New York City and worked as a personal assistant to a movie director. She grew tired of urban life. Like a character in a Diane Keaton film she moved to rural Oregon.

Ms. McCaulou had never hunted. Once in Oregon, she says, and wanting to feel more connected to her meals and to the land, she purchased a Benelli Nova pump-action shotgun in the youth size for \$419. She took a hunting safety course. She began shooting larger and larger game. “Elk guts,” one hunter tells her, “are the real test.”

Her friends and “hippie, blue-state parents” were dumbfounded. “Won’t you be the darling of the right wing?” her father says. To her, it was “a bizarre version of coming out.”

The bulk of Ms. McCaulou’s book combines hunting stories with entreaties to be thoughtful about where dinner comes from and grateful for nature’s bounty. After blasting that elk, she leans in and says, “Thank you. I’m sorry.”

Women are the only demographic of hunters still on the rise, Ms. McCaulou notes, and she champions killing your own protein as “a final

frontier of feminism.” That’s an idea the food writer and blogger Georgia Pellegrini also picks up on in “Girl Hunter: Revolutionizing the Way We Eat, One Hunt at a Time” (Da Capo).

Ms. Pellegrini’s childhood was even more privileged than Ms. McCaulou’s. Ivanka Trump was a classmate at her Manhattan prep school. Ms. Pellegrini was as an analyst at Lehman Brothers before the collapse. She then worked at restaurants like Gramercy Tavern until she became a writer.

Her book has a Carrie Bradshaw meets Annie Oakley vibe. (A better title might have been “Lead and the Single Girl.”) She buys her first guns and then flies around the country and to England to blow things away, mostly in the company of men and usually with aged Scotch and good cigars the night before. She’s an exotic meats tourist.

She repeats, without much analysis, hunting clichés about how being outdoors is more important than mowing down animals, clichés that the writer Joy Williams has torn apart in her Esquire essay “The Killing Game,” collected in her book “Ill Nature” (2001). Ms. Pellegrini can also be banal. About the Mississippi Delta region she intones, “It is a place of such sweet sadness, of nostalgia, of blues pioneers and in some ways of hope for what could be.”

But I liked the way she pays attention to class issues, noting how expensive hunting has become and how much of the prime hunting land is available only to the wealthy. She is piquant too on sexism in hunting. When a married hunter snaps her on the bottom with a greasy dish towel, she recalls the misogyny of four-star chefs and “the jacked-up Lehman Brothers traders giving me a little tap when they were feeling particularly high on life or a little lonely after a long day at the office.”

Ms. Pellegrini wants to pay what she calls “the full karmic price” for her meals. In an observation few carnivores will protest, she says, “The duck you pluck will taste so much better than the one you don’t.”

The most touchy-feely of these memoirs is Mr. Cerulli's "Mindful Carnivore," which begins at a Buddhist retreat. Mr. Cerulli, who lives in Vermont, was a vegan for many years and thought that in being an herbivore he had found "the moral high road, the one true path to a harmonious, harm-free relationship with my fellow creatures." But he comes to find that there is harm in industrial farming too, and he simply can't deny his own wild instincts. When his doctor tells him he needs more protein in his diet, he picks up a rifle.

In a line that could have been written by any of these authors, Mr. Cerulli declares that hunting "would not put me on a new high road to moral certainty." He adds, "If this first experience of killing a deer was any indication, it would bring me face to face with ambiguity every time."

A counterpoint to these memoirs is "Meat Eater: Adventures From the Life of an American Hunter" (Spiegel & Grau) by a young writer named Steven Rinella. He grew up hunting, and on his television show, also called "MeatEater," on the Sportsman Channel, he comes off as equal parts Mark Wahlberg, Marlin Perkins and Ernest Hemingway.

His book will not convert vegans. There are long descriptions of his virile lifestyle; for example, how his house reeks of warm blood when he is making jerky. But he arrives at many of the same conclusions the other three do, and he is persuasive about hunting's upsides: "adventure, communion with nature, physical activity, a love of process and acquired skill, and a desire for an intimate connection to one's food."

Does the kind of sensitive, ethical hunting explored in these books have, as they say, legs? Mr. Zuckerberg's personal year of slaughter ended in May. His self-improvement task for 2012, he has said, is to spend more time coding.

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