

Hunters

By Lona Tankersley Burkhart

My family was not much for hunting. The ranch on the Mongollon Rim had lots of elk and deer, and we usually had some elk hanging, once in a great while a deer. None of us liked antelope meat so we never killed one. We did have a pet antelope, Andy, who was a real pill about getting on top of cars and pickups, and was often threatened with murder, but always survived. A hunter did murder Andy one fall inside the meadow in front of the house. All we found when we got home was his guts and legs. The little bell we'd hung around his neck was hanging on the NO TRESPASSING signpost. He was three years old and fat as a tick. He loved biscuits and beans, and believe it or not, chocolate cake. His mother had been wounded one fall and was crippled. She was just about dead when he was born the next spring. We brought them in and put them in the barn. We doctored her up and she got pretty good, and hung around, all summer, still lame, but healthy. Andy just moved in. We had fed him on a bottle and he thought he belonged. Come to think of it, he did.

Dad had killed sheep· men over water on the Arizona strip, but he would never kill game. He always contended God put cows here to feed man, and would never contest His judgement. My fondest memory of my father is staying down at the River line shack, and sittin' under the mesquites waiting for our horses to finish their nose-bags in the evening. He would always feed the quail some grain, and the coveys there were very gentle. They'd come up close and Dad would say "now sit real still, Punkin', and let them see you are a friend." Sometimes they would touch my pant legs. It was during the depression, and grain money was hard to come by, plus we packed it to the line camp. But we shared. Once, ridin' in to the camp, we heard shooting. Some hunters had walked from the end of the road, that line camp was on the old cavalry post at Camp Cady, which belonged to us. Dad met the hunters on high lope and took his catch rope down and went to swinging that horn knot over their backs. He was pretty vicious with that horn knot. He could kill a sidewinder every swipe. One ol' boy lost his shotgun and never stopped to argue about it. Dad took the gun to the line shack, it was still there when we sold that ranch.

