

**Published April 26, 2022. Editor's headline:
Oh Give Me a Family Where the Antelope Roam"**

https://www.thecheyennepost.com/opinion/oh-give-me-a-family-where-the-antelope-roam/article_a5eab36a-c589-11ec-bf33-473b1d8b5e7a.html

For five days in October 2018, I housed and fed four pronghorn hunters who used my garage to butcher and vacuum-seal what they harvested. Son Walter had arrived from Texas with a truck full of equipment. Flying in from California, his brother with his son brought a friend the boys have known from way back. All were born and raised in California, but Walter and family lived in Wyoming for twenty years before moving away. While residing here, he learned to love the outdoors in winter. Snow-skiing, ice-fishing, and hunting, he said, render bearable the harsh icy weeks and months.

He lugged extra rifles for his brother and nephew, neither of whom had hunted before, while their friend Robert brought his own hunting gear, having elk-hunted with Walter the previous year. A rancher neighbor who also hunts offered his walk-in cooler, where the boys hung the carcasses to cure before turning my garage into a meat-processing room. A workbench with my largest cutting boards became a butcher block. It was messy, but they cleaned up afterwards.

As they shrink-wrapped their cuts of meat, they stashed them in the freezers of the upstairs and downstairs refrigerators. The next day the cuts, solidly frozen, were ready to pack for the journey home.

There's nothing like hunting to remind us of our predatory nature, which is easy to forget when we purchase our meat neatly cut and hygienically wrapped. I thought butchering their harvest must be a grim undertaking but to my surprise, whenever I stepped into the garage, I found them joking and laughing. To be sure, they consumed quantities of beer as they worked, but still, it was cold out there. My sons hold that life is no cakewalk, an attitude that can perhaps be ascribed to their parents' disposition—their dad was an American of German extraction, while I left Germany as a young woman. Each of us settled in California after roaming elsewhere.

Both Darold's and my childhoods were joyless, Darold's from a bout with polio that took him to the isolation ward of a children's hospital; mine, from the chaos and hunger of the war- and postwar years. So, I was happy to hear the guys bantering among themselves. The friend's light-hearted take on life lessened my sons' by-and-large dour disposition. During their formative years I had adhered to their dad's conservatism; to my regret, parental viewpoints seem to have morphed into a tradition for them.

Somewhere I read, humans tend to adopt the attitudes of their environment. The culture that surrounds us determines certain aspects of our psychological make-up. Anthropologists have found, the harsher our environment, the more fearful we become, the more mistrusting of fellow humans, the more disdainful of the politicians we blame for our predicament. This is true even for variables like smoking and obesity. If your family and friends are smokers, you're likely to light up yourself; if they are obese, chances are good, you're apt to gain weight. It's not just "monkey see, monkey do." Getting along mandates a certain conformity. We adapt.

We should be careful about the company we keep. As concerns family, we don't have much choice. All we can do is distance ourselves from perspectives with which we disagree.

I am happy to report, a sense of humor can be contagious, at least during the hours you spend with the amusing person. My sons' friend, though a regular Joe, is such a guy. He and his family live in a dusty town in California's Central Valley, a region plagued with unemployment and crime; still, he and his wife have managed to save toward their two daughters' college education, with the proviso they complete the first phase in a two-year college.

I had lost track of Robert, who became friends with our boys in junior high, until he showed up at my house the day before the hunt. I do remember, when they were thirteen, Robert got hold of a bottle of booze. The boys indulged to the point of staggering around a country road, where a sheriff picked them up and delivered them to their parents. I was home with the youngest when the cops showed up with his two older brothers, and I thanked them and apologized in the same breath. When their dad returned from work, he was mortified his boys would do this to him.

My sons tell me Robert thought I must have forgotten the incident, else I would have harried him during their visit. In truth, so much sad and tragic stuff happened in the interim, I was glad for the laughter Robert brought with him, even if borne of unease over a juvenile misdeed. Not to mention, seeing the four in good health proved energizing.

The hunters, before returning home with their harvest, put a few cuts of pronghorn in my freezer. More importantly, they left behind a wealth of friendly memories. It made me hope they'll be back.