



I never didn't know what I wanted to do when I "grew up." From as far back as I can remember, I was called to the wild. My father was a master outdoorsman, and he blessed me by taking me into the woods from an early age and teaching me the ways of nature. I discovered peace in the awaking song of a cardinal at the break of dawn, and freedom in the sound of a gobbling wild turkey. I loved the excitement of a sudden encounter with a copperhead snake or spending an unexpected night sleeping under the stars.

As I grew into early adolescence, my mother, a country schoolteacher, encouraged me to discover the outdoor world I so enjoyed in books. I became an avid reader of all publications that had to do with outdoor adventure, wildlife and exploring wild places. As I read about faraway places, I longed to hear the cry of a loon on a remote lake, the roar of a red stag on a mountainside or the drips of water from a canoe paddle on some Arctic stream.

I joined the Boy Scouts and my interest in learning outdoor skills was further heightened in my quest to earn Eagle.

Skills such as camping, land navigation and wilderness survival helped further my dream of being a professional outdoorsman.

In high school a teacher once asked the class what each of us wanted to be when we grew up. Most students wanted to become engineers, doctors, firemen. When it came time for the shy skinny kid on the back row of the classroom to answer, I stood up and announced, "I want to be in the woods, like a forest ranger or hunting guide or trapper." The class roared with laughter and the

teacher barked, "You want to do what?" I knew then achieving my dream would not be easy.

My first real break came when I enrolled in Auburn University. However, it got off to a slow start when I told my assigned counselor I wanted my education to be in wildlife habitat management and outdoor education. "You want to do what?" he replied.

Here we go again, I thought, but I could still hear the call to the wild.

With some effort, I found several professors who understood my passion and helped me schedule what courses Auburn offered to meet my goals. Their help came with a warning: "It may be difficult to find a job in wildlife habitat management or outdoor education." I would worry about that when the time came.

About the time I graduated from Auburn, a unique job was created by the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service that called for just such training as I had. It was working with landowners in a test county to develop their properties into hunting and fishing opportunities that attracted sportsmen. I got the job. For me, it was like throwing Brer Rabbit into the briar patch. I was in the woods and on lakes constantly. The project caught the attention of Outdoor Life magazine's editors. Soon I was guiding their writers and photographers as they developed a feature story on the project.

One night over a campfire, the senior writer for the magazine told me, "You have a front seat to the greatest show on earth, nature. Why don't you write about and photograph your adventures and lifestyle? Thousands of readers would like to