

## SPOTTING DEER

Deer are present in almost every memory I have of up north. When I was a child, zooming in the car up north on the way to Grandma's house, my dad would point out the deer with their greeny-white reflective eyes standing by the side of the road. Heads held motionless, ears facing forward, white tails raised, ready to leap into action, the deer fascinated me from an early age. I looked for deer out the car window, as the fields and forests sped by, and nearly always would be rewarded by the sight of the reddish brown backs, heads bent over, grazing in the green grass next to the woods.

Some nights my dad loaded us kids into the car and drove around my grandma's fields, looking for deer. He plugged the big spotlight into the cigarette lighter and shone it around the edge of the woods until we'd exclaim, "there's one!" He drove up as close as he dared and we admired the deer with the big brown eyes and the attentive ears until it leaped gracefully into the forest. Always I wished I could get closer and reach my hand out to touch its statuesque head.

As the years went on, and I was driving up north myself, I became super sensitive about deer by the side of the road. I realized the danger of deer confused by the flash of headlights, sometimes causing them to dash out in front of moving vehicles. The lesson my dad taught me about spotting deer by looking for their reflective eyes and their dark silhouette was ingrained and came to the fore in those dusky hours after sunset.

One fall evening in 1977, Dave and I were returning to Grandma's house after spending a gorgeous day at hunting camp. Just after dusk, we hopped in Dave's 1972 Triumph Spitfire to head back to Grams' house. We had seen an abundance of animals that day, so we drove carefully along the ten miles of two track road, bumping over ruts and sticks and holes most of the way. Little mice zipped across the road in front of our headlights and we cautiously drove around a porcupine near the edge of the tire ruts. A skunk used the shine of our headlights to walk down the road. We followed him at a safe distance for fifteen minutes until he ambled into the woods.

Finally we reached the main road back to Grams'. It felt good to speed along a paved road after all those miles of dirt. High beams racing along with the car, I scanned the roadway for any sign of deer and Dave and I remarked to each other about the incredible number of animals we had seen that evening. We came up over the top of a little hill, and there, with absolutely no warning reflection or

silhouette, was an eight point buck in the middle of the road. Dave jammed on the brakes, but the deer froze right in his tracks. The car went into a skid and the deer leaped in front of us. I covered my arms over my face, waiting to hear the windshield smash into little pieces. I felt the impact of the deer. Dave yelled in pain, and I sensed the car coming to a complete stop.

I realized I was still in one piece. I slowly uncovered my face, and discovered the windshield was unbroken and the hood of the car wasn't crumpled. Dave said, "Am I bleeding?" and I turned to see him holding his head. He had a giant lump on the top of his head, and it was getting bigger by the second, just like in the cartoons. There was a hoof-sized hole in the convertible top, just over the driver's seat. The buck had apparently jumped just as the car hit him, and he slid up over the windshield. Then he gathered his feet under him and pushed off the roof, and one of his hooves had gone through the fabric top, and clunked Dave right on the head.

We shakily opened the doors and got out to inspect the damage. Besides the hole in the roof, the side mirror was askew and a plastic bumper part was cracked. We looked up and down the road, but the deer had vanished into the fields. There was a farmhouse nearby, so we stopped to call the sheriff. The elderly couple (Mr. & Mrs. Don Reed, Sr.) who lived there turned out to be friends of my Grams. They told us that big buck crossed the road there almost every night at the same time, which was the time we hit him. They came out and looked at the hole in the roof and the lump on Dave's head and said they'd never believe a story like that unless they saw it for themselves. We never did call the sheriff, because there was no dead deer to report, and because everyone we told seemed to be more amused than concerned.

I have never yet reached out to stroke a wild whitetail deer on the head, but after having one within inches of my face, I am content to admire deer from afar.