

'The Code of Honor,' By Ruth C. Adams NYTimes

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THE SECOND DAY of the Pennsylvania doe season, the doe that I have known well for several years and her yearling fawn were on my hillside, as I became aware before dawn when I heard volleys of rifle shots, of course illegal at that hour. Almost two hours later, the guns were still blazing. A hunter who appeared to be about 14 years old ran across my land (well-posted against hunting) pursuing the doe, now shattered by perhaps 20 bullets.

Four shots later he dragged the bloody mass of meat (all that remained of the doe) into the road. Township police, hastily summoned, said they could do nothing about the illegalities I had witnessed, nor about the danger to human life from high-powered rifles discharged recklessly near homes.

Meanwhile, my neighbors were screaming in panic as four adult hunters "harvested" the doe's yearling fawn, shooting almost into my neighbor's house. The child who butchered my doe told the police that not he but the four adults had committed the illegalities. These four told my neighbor it was the youngster. The fawn lay dead with God knows how many bullets in her from four hunters' guns.

I asked my township supervisors for an ordinance banning hunting in our heavily populated township. Any sane resident fears for his life if he steps outside during hunting season—more than two months of every year. Word got around. One hundred hunters jammed the next supervisors' meeting.

The county game protector (they don't call them wardens any more) spoke of the code of honor characterizing all sportsmen. Well, almost all sportsmen. (The most recent figure for fines for game-law infractions in Pennsylvania is \$312,270 annually.)

He spoke of the obligation of nonhunting residents who do not wish to be killed to report illegalities. He said, in essence, that I, dressed in everyday clothing, must approach hunters, dressed in highly visible fluorescent orange, and discharging deer rifles (capable of killing a human being a mile away and probably loaded with dum-dum bullets), and make, in essence, a citizen's arrest, by reporting a hunter's license number to game authorities.

He then ran through the litany of hunting: There are too many deer, groundhogs, rabbits, pheasants. They

must be harvested for their own good. They will starve or be killed on the highway. Hunters will kill them skillfully, humanely. We bleeding-heart nonhunters enjoy the beauties of wildlife in state gamelands purchased with vast sums of money from hunting licenses.

The litany hasn't changed for hundreds of years. (In 1974, Pennsylvania trappers killed in prolonged agony 10,105 red foxes, 9,285 gray foxes, 5,646 mink, 1,993 weasels and 131,293 raccoons, to say nothing of countless thousands shot by hunters. All natural predators having been thus disposed of in my township years ago, hunters must now harvest what little wildlife remains.)

Individual hunters present then spoke of their honor, their hunting prowess, the profound delight that thrills their souls with every kill. And the many violations of safety laws they have witnessed on the part, always, of other hunters.

Several protested that no one had yet been killed—what was the fuss about? One man told me that if a hunter shot me it would be accidental, so presumably I shouldn't mind. The fine for accidentally killing a person in a hunting accident is \$500. A news agency uncovered in a recent year the largest such fine actually paid in the nation: A hunter who shot and killed two children riding bikes was fined \$229. The National Safety Council estimates that 700 people are killed and 9,000 wounded in a typical hunting year.

It developed that Pennsylvania municipalities cannot regulate, within their own boundaries, either hunting or the ownership and use of hunting guns. This authority belongs only to the Game Commission. The Pennsylvania Legislature recently rejected a proposed law that would give Philadelphia and Pittsburgh the right to regulate hunting within their municipal boundaries.

My doe was testimony to the skill and humanity of hunters. In two hours of shooting half her head had been blown off, one leg was gone, her abdomen slit from head to tail with her organs hanging out. Tying her up and hacking her to death with a dull axe would be more humane. At least the carnage would be stationary.

My doe would not stagger past my window, gasping, shattered, bleeding, torn, still desperately trying to escape across that pleasant meadow where her gentle eyes had seen nothing to fear until that day.

Ruth C. Adams is a writer whose subjects are often ecology and the environment.