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The hunting ethic of tracking a deer alone in the woods is alive and well in the story of Kenneth Fezatt, who shot his first buck 70 years ago

Enneth Fezatt was 13 when he shot his first deer at a logging camp that his father managed near Florence. That was 70 years ago, and he hasn't missed a deer-hunting season since.

At age 83, Fezatt, who lives in Port Washington, will head to the Wisconsin north woods near the Upper Peninsula, where he will hunt with his son Gary, son-in-law Gary Frank and a friend who will be deer hunting for the first time.

Fezatt will use a 1906 rifle that has 33 notches on it — one for every deer he shot. He will also carry a pistol and crossbow. His son will likely use the 1903 rifle he inherited from his grandfather.

After the nine-day regular gun season, Fezatt will return to the woods during the 10-day

muzzleloader season, hunting like his ancestors did. He will use black powder and round lead shots that he poured himself.

Fezatt also makes the bullets he uses in his rife, something he's done for himself and other hunters for 50 years.

Fezatt prefers hunting with muzzleloaders, enjoying the challenge of shooting a deer with it and the ritual of loading the weapon — putting a premeasured amount of black powder into the barrel, tapping in the lead shot, making sure the shot rests on the powder, then putting a cap or flint on the nipple so he's ready to take aim if a deer comes within 100 yards.

With a black-powder pistol, the range is 60 yards, he said.

"My idea of a hunter is a man or woman who goes out in the woods alone, finds a fresh trail, tracks it and gets the deer," Fezatt said. "I don't think there are five hunters out of 100 who hunt like that and are successful."

Add a muzzleloader to the ritual and the success rate is even less, he said.

"It's a single shot, so you better do it right the first time because you only get one chance," Fezatt said. "In my case, I get two shots because I carry a (black-powder) pistol, too."

Fezatt sells, buys and trades muzzleloaders and pistols at three gun shows a year and also repairs them.

He can't remember when he initially became fascinated with black-powder hunting. He learned by trial-and-error, he said, developing his own style over the years.

"When I got into muzzleloaders years ago, there weren't too many people I could talk to and ask questions. I got a book from the library and followed that," Fezatt said. "I made mistakes, but I learned from my mistakes. Some people may not agree with me, but everyone is entitled to their own opinion.

"It seems people are getting more interested in black powder lately — maybe because they are cheaper to shoot and they have a 10-day season just for muzzleloaders."

Fazett and his wife Margaret, who he calls Mic, have been married for 65 years.

"She doesn't hunt or fish, but she never stopped me from it," Fezatt said.

Fezatt was drafted during the Korean War. Although trained to compile maps, he ended up being a weapons expert at Fort Bragg, S.C.

After his discharge, Fezatt was a tool-and-diemaker at Voeller Manufacturing in Port Washington until he retired in 1988. He lost portions of four fingers on his right hand in an industrial accident, so he makes gun triggers to fit his finger.

“I got into an argument with a machine and the machine won,” Fezatt said of the accident. “I adapted pretty good. I can do anything. It just may take me a little longer.”

Fezatt learned to hunt from his father Victor, who fought in World War I and later became a sheriff’s deputy in Iron Mountain, Mich., where Fezatt grew up.

“He was my hero. All he ever wanted from life was a good rifle and enough money to get by,” Fezatt said.

When his father initially returned from the war at age 19, he was employed as a lumberjack for $19 a month plus room and board. After he shot a deer and brought it to the camp cook to feed the men, the owner offered him $5 for every deer he shot. His father spent more time hunting than felling trees. He earned $75 his first month, and the lumberjacks ate venison.

Fezatt learned from his father to hunt, trap and fish and how to survive in the wild — skills he likes to share with young people.

Not only did he teach his son Gary to hunt — his daughter Cindy wasn’t interested, but she married a hunter — but also his two granddaughters, Ashley and Tracy Fazett, 21 and 25 respectively.

One or both girls went deer hunting with the group in previous years. They are both in college this year and unable to join the hunt.

Gary and Tracy are members of Fezatt’s trap team at the Saukville Gun Club in the Town of Saukville. Tracy also likes to bow hunt with her grandfather.

Fezatt is an active member of the gun club, which was founded in 1962 by 10 men. He was the 12th member to join.

“I’m now the oldest member. I wish I was the youngest,” he said.

He teaches people how to shoot muzzleloaders and hand guns and enjoys introducing young people to the wonders of being in nature, whether or not they shoot a deer.

“I’ve always said I wish there was a way I could give my memories to some young kid because when I leave, they’re going with me,” Fezatt said.

One way he shares his knowledge is through articles he writes and gives to his family and friends. Shortly before his 78th birthday, he wrote his life story titled “The Journal of an Outdoorsman.”

Stories of fur trapping as a teenager, including the time he caught a bobcat, shooting a moose in Canada and killing a charging wild boar with a hand gun in Tennessee are among the experiences recounted.

Fezatt decided to record his memories after learning his great-great grandfather Buck Fezatt ran a trading post in the late 1700s in Canada.

“I wonder what his life was like,” Fezatt said. “There is nobody to ask. When he passed away, all the things in his life passed with him.”