

Blood Sports

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THIS IS HOW I SEE IT. I find it to be a dark side of Mormonism, pervasive and insidious in character. Young men, in some cases young women, are socialized into blood sports. Youth in my ward are yearly given firearm's instruction—with parental approval and endorsement. There are visits to National Guard armories. I have overheard young boys enthusiastically exclaim: "What fire power! Those are some guns!"

I rarely speak out since what I say has no consequence except in my immediate family, but I am a cold war veteran who cannot easily bury my experience. I watched that intense era rupture into senseless killing fields—Indochina, Indonesia, Afghanistan. When I read Douglas Thayer's, "Sparrow Hunter,"¹ I found it difficult to contain my emotions. He captured a distressing feature in the Mormon cultural region—from Canada to Mexico, Colorado to California.

In my youth I witnessed armed invasions of young and old men from the settlements (a local expression) to my Cedar Valley home in Utah where the hunters indiscriminately slew wild creatures. At times their madness included our livestock—cattle, sheep, and horses grazing on the valley floors, bench lands, and high mountain slopes. During pheasant season I was kept from school riding our fence lines to keep hunters off our fields. Frustrated hunters shot at farm gates, wagons, equipment, and water troughs. Highway signs were preferred targets. I detested those vandals. On a farm road I was driving our family's 1936 Chevrolet pick-up truck loaded with scavenged firewood and sagebrush when I accidentally hit a hunter's dog. The truck had virtually no brakes, but I managed to stop. The hunter pointed his shotgun at my head and threatened me. Fortunately the dog was not hurt. I told him to get off our land. He laughed. In that fall of 1940, I was fifteen years old and small for my age.

I have spent a lot of time around committed hunters, and I have

1. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 145-60

never heard one of them express any remorse about the pain and death they inflict. One hunter had the audacity to comment that he cried each time he killed a bear, but a hunt was still a hunt. He went on to say that it was natural for men to kill animals. Furthermore, it made him more aware of his own mortality, but he was silent on the mortality of bears. He was a professed Christian of Protestant persuasion. "Animals have no souls. Why worry?" he said.

Hunters may give lip service to safety, but are unaware of and possibly unwilling to accept hunting's high human cost. For both my and my wife's families there was no relative killed or wounded in World War II. The same may be written for war veterans of my Cedar Valley home. Hunting was another matter. Just before and after World War II, I lost one uncle and my wife lost one cousin to the "sport." In Cedar Valley two young men died in hunting accidents. I miraculously escaped the same fate. In September 1937 during the excitement of an illegal pheasant hunt, an older teenage cousin driving his parent's Model-A Ford sedan stomped on the brakes, jumped out, opened the right rear door, and grabbed his loaded shotgun resting on the edge of the rear seat where I was sitting. The shotgun discharged six inches from the inside of my left leg, blasting away from the calf a chunk of young flesh the size of a small soup bowl. With violent force the load of shot passed on through the automobile's seat, striking my right buttock and destroying flesh in a deep wound twelve inches in length. The discharge narrowly missed my crotch. The femoral artery in my buttock was laid bare as if a skillful surgeon had sliced open the protective flesh.

On that mid-September day in 1937, at the age of twelve years, I was programmed for death. The ghastly right side wound was impacted with filthy cloth and cotton batting and lead shot. The only treatment was weak antiseptics, mainly iodine and carbolic solutions. A local belief was that the best course was to let wounds alone for a day or so in order for the body's natural immunity to initiate healing. One Cedar Valley youth, a McKenny boy, painfully died from widespread infection caused by a gunshot wound.

Fortunately for me another medical approach was forthcoming. Three frightened teenagers, fifteen to seventeen years of age, rushed me to the only doctor in Santaquin. He made a superficial examination, only discovering the wound in my left calf, and said he could do nothing. My panic-driven friends, at record Model-A Ford speed, transported me to the Payson hospital, a distance of some five miles. A veteran of World War I trenches, Dr. Stewart was waiting for me along with his nurse; and under that nurse's soothing words, my excruciating pain dissolved into anesthetized sleep.

Three weeks later my poverty-stricken parents placed me on an army cot loaded on the small bed of our 1930 Model-A Ford pick-up

truck. Our trip from Santaquin required travel over forty miles of gravel and dirt roads, passing through the town of Goshen and climbing over the low Chimney Rock pass located in southeast Cedar Valley. During the trip I became terribly ill. I was covered with fine dust and gasping for air. With great difficulty Dad released pressure on the throttle with the engine misfiring and the truck barely moving. The engine overheated, causing us grave concern. We were more than twenty miles from home, confined to a deeply rutted sheep wagon road. Fairfield's high ocean willow trees stood out as beacons on the valley floor. We were so close but so far away. We finally reached a graveled road where fresh air revived me, as I restlessly lay in my vomit, urine, and excreta. A great deal of my humanness vanished on that October afternoon.

On that same cot I was placed near the kitchen stove, the warmest place in the run-down adobe farmhouse. The twelve-inch wound festered and blood oozed in and out of the bandage. My mother and the local midwife, Anna Carson, became concerned. Each time they dressed the wound, more and more yellow matter burst forth. A foul odor was emitted, much like that of rotten flesh.

Again I was loaded onto the bed of the pick-up truck and transported over twenty-five miles, of which twenty miles were dirt and gravel road, to the American Fork hospital. Gangrene had set-in. Without any anesthesia, Dr. Richards cut away the spreading necrosis and found buried deep in the wound a large wad of cotton, which had restricted blood flow and acted as a breeding place for germs. The wound was laid open and cleaned out and soaked with carbolic solution. I liked that approach since the application of iodine to the raw wound was painful. The nurse would place a rubber roll in my mouth and hold my hands. I never cried out or screamed. A ranch boy must show toughness.

Dr. Richards' doctoring worked. I started to heal and mend. My neighbor Ernest Carson made me crutches out of two broken pitchfork handles. On a late Halloween day, I managed to walk with my primitive crutches to the corral, barn, and pens to visit my animal friends. The barnyard smells renewed my joy in life. I spent a long time with my mustang pony, nuzzling her head and weeping. I was alive.

I looked up at hay stacker cable stretching some thirty feet in length on which was resting a flock of small birds, mostly sparrows. I recalled the past summer hours when I had fired numerous stones at that resting place with my crude flipper, trying to bring down a small bird. When finally I'd succeeded, I experienced no joy. I wanted the fallen bird to return to life. It did not respond to my beseeching. I buried it with a prayer of apology beside a beautiful ocean willow tree.

I remembered family discussions of the past summer months around the kitchen table where Dad had extolled the virtues of the great missionary to Africa, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, who praised and sought protec-

tion of all living creatures. In his school-way wisdom, Dad explained that all God's creatures have a purpose, but at times our survival required their judicious killing.

After my terrible experience there was no question that animals experienced pain. If one must kill, then it should be done quickly and with compassion. Our old sheep dogs, the best kind of friends, were put away with dispatch and the shedding of tears.

In our subsistence lifestyle, we killed nearly every day—chickens, ducks, turkeys, rabbits, ewes, lambs, hogs, and steers. We hunted pheasants year-round. Venison was seldom secured during the hunting season. We rationalized that the deer grazed on our lands and, hence, they were ours to use. From Dad's wisdom we learned that some predators became wanton killers. Dogs can quickly change their character. They kill sheep for the sheer joy of killing. The same characteristic may be found in birds of prey. Chicken hawks sometimes kill for killing's sake. The same streak of viciousness may be found in human beings. The only course of action was to seek out these killers and exterminate them.

Then there were vermin. In our town there existed no rats but other sorts of rodents threatened and at times devastated our crops and harvests. Mass killings were the only solution—use of poisons, traps, and predators. Barn cats were valuable since they fed on destructive rodents. Rabbits strangely multiplied in waves. Widespread disease regulated their populations. Some diseases made for terrible festering sores. The coyotes seemed to relish these diseased rabbits and suffer no harm in consuming them. Casual, violent death was all around me, everywhere, and my own near death made my feelings for the preciousness of life intense.

Two decades, an education, and a long career path later these same feelings came back into sharp focus through encounters with the Islamic faithful. In a rundown, dirty Dutch colonial hotel in Surabaya, Eastern Java, Indonesia, with 1958 political insecurity everywhere, I accidentally met in the lobby a Singaporean of Arabic descent. He was a representative of a large British tourist agency investigating possibilities of travel business in Indonesia. He was a lost and frightened person. I shared with him my "smarts" which extended across the island of Java. The Arab was hungry. He could not find a restaurant that served, in effect, kosher food. He finally resolved his problem by traveling to a village where he purchased a small goat, said his appropriate Islamic prayers, and cut the jugular. Two weeks later he appeared at my home in Jogjakarta, Central Java. At the large Jogjakarta market, he had secured some "kosher" goat meat. My cook cut it into small pieces and prepared for him a delicious rice dish.

Since then I've moved to Alaska and learned that Alaskan Eskimos and other American natives pronounce prayers of thanksgiving for the

creatures slain for their use. I find this a commendable spiritual activity. All life is precious though I do wonder about Alaskan mosquitoes! They are vicious bugs.

Living in Pakistan (1964-69) I encountered firsthand the British love of blood sports. Big game hunting constituted the best form of manly sports. Major Jim Corbett of Kaladhungi, Captain Smith and Major Tucker of the Garhwal Rifles at Lansdown were the great sportsmen of India and Africa. They preferred to stalk and shoot their prey on foot. Any other hunting approach was considered unmanly and a form of murder.²

In early spring and fall, the Anchorage airport is full of Jim Corbett types, attired in their fancy camouflage hunting clothes and lugging large rifle cases. Their dream is to bring down a large Brown (grizzly) bear. I take every opportunity to irritate them, especially those individuals from Texas. "I am on the side of the bears," I say. I delight in telling them that yearly four or more hunters are mauled or killed. Those individuals who survive a bear mauling are invariably scarred in hideous fashion. Halloween is the best season for them since they will be in appearance frightening and hence in demand.

Nothing so distresses me as when visitors to a private lodge to which I belong seek to kill bears feasting in the lodge's garbage pit. I see no sport in shooting from a high platform placed between two Birch trees a curious bear seeking an easy meal. I admit that I fear bears. Of recent years I carry my 12-gauge shotgun loaded with slugs when I venture outside of the protection of the lodge. Brown bears are powerful critters and don't fear humans. Over the last twenty-five years I've become "riverside smart" and learned to avoid bears—especially sows with cubs. My hunting of bears is confined to the pointing of my camera. I will yield a fishing hole to a bear's desire. After all, I am invading the bear's territory.

I am disturbed by how shallowly and selectively the Word of Wisdom is taken.³ Drinking tea, in spite of its proven health qualities, is a grave sin, keeping one from passing through the sacred doors of the temple. In contrast, the unrestrained killing of birds and animals is not a barrier. Yet the mandate of the Word of Wisdom is clear and straightforward: "Yea, flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I the Lord, have ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving. Nevertheless they

2. See Jim Corbett's three books, *Jungle Lore* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953); *Man Against Man Eaters* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954); and *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955).

3. See "My 'Word of Wisdom Blues,'" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 30, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 49-64.

are to be used sparingly and it is pleasing unto me that they should be used, only in times of winter, or of cold, or famine" (D&C 89: 12 and 13). Killing may be justified and sanctioned by those in authority, but such acts should occur only after *careful* prayer. One's soul can easily become defiled and lost. I cringe when at funerals I hear persons of church authority relate: "I've lost my hunting partner." In several instances they have sorrowfully said: "Each morning and evening we prayed together and asked for a successful hunt."

I am sympathetic to a memoir written by a well-known Indian Muslim Shikar (professional hunter) and retired Deputy Conservator of Forest under the British-Indian Raj, the late H. Hakim-Uddin. For thirty-seven years Hakim was a civil servant clothed with the power of rulership. He was blessed with a happy marriage, five sons and three daughters. His loving and kind wife managed family life in careful ways. She was, however, opposed to his "shootings" whereas he was "very fond of shooting."⁴

Hakim emphasizes that: "[He] was never a reckless destroyer of wild game, but. . .in [his] early life. . .shot more than was needed for lavish distribution to staff, labourers and villagers. . ."⁵ In his declining years between 1942-1951 Hakim paid a high price for his "accumulation" of sins, or so he believed. In his words:

I lost my three eldest sons at the age of 33, 45 and 48 years leaving three widows, three grandsons and 11 granddaughters, mostly to my care, followed by deaths of my eldest son-in-law leaving 8 children, then my wife in 1951, shattering my happy home as I had shattered the happy homes of many a wild animal and bird, which God Almighty has no doubt created for the genuine needs of man in many ways, but surely not for their wonton destruction for pleasure and pastime.⁶

Hakim's health finally broke, confining him to "bed, room, hospital and verandah." He brooded over his "misdeeds of cruelty to innocent wild life" and was haunted by the killings. As a devout Muslim, Hakim accepted his fate or kismet. He writes: "I deserved the punishment which God almighty has inflicted on me and sincerely beg for his pardon and mercy."⁷

Cultural historians write that we live according to the games we play. During World War I young Oxford and Cambridge university-educated officers would kick soccer balls out of the front line trenches before going over the top with whistles blowing and bagpipes screaming. War was a

4. See his *Big Game Thrills, In Northern India* (Karachi: Paramount Printers, 1961), 140-141.

5. *Ibid.*, 139.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, 140.

football game to be played strenuously and with courage. The battlefield made for character and mental toughness. A lot of this British gallantry was the product of the upper class obsession with hunting and blood sports, which also found its way into the American ethos. Theodore Roosevelt and Ernest Hemmingway are two prime examples. Making war and shooting big game animals were pretty much the same thing.

In my boyhood days, playing war was a common activity, with an older chum leading the charge. During our fracas everyone got killed and was resurrected with a lot of arguing about who got whom. With the Great Depression weighing heavily over Cedar Valley, several of these fellows, enticed by twenty dollars a month and the opportunity to play soldier, enlisted in the Lehi National Guard Services Battery of the 222 Field Artillery. They saw action in the South Pacific—Saipan, Tinian, Leyte, Mindoro, and Okinawa. All fifty-seven Lehi men called to active duty were safely discharged in October 1945.⁸

At Bill Evans's pool hall, located on Lehi's main street, I heard remarkable accounts concerning Lehi's 224 field artillery unit. A booze-soaked companion who never got over his ordeal under fire extolled in weeping words the names of several fellows who thrived on patrols. He would pause and point his right finger, loudly saying: "Bam, bam, bam!" I could see them sneaking under the cover of Fairfield's dense, reed-like weed patches in the early fall. With a final "bam" the discharged soldier, who was never discharged in mind, recounted a "bivouacked time" in a partially cleared sugar cane field where a Japanese soldier would take potshots at unsuspecting "guys." In his garbled words: "This was a bad time. Several guys crept into the cane field and silenced that Jap."⁹

Since I was not at Leyte with Lehi's 224 field artillery unit, I cannot vouch for the veracity of the story. For over five decades I have heard it repeatedly told. However, in my wanderings in far-away places, I have met a number of gung-ho adventurers who were invariably forty year-old, potbellied men. With rare exceptions they rode motorcycles and flew planes. Their desire for women was prodigious. All these individuals that I knew were divorced. Most had fathered children. They were rapscaillon characters who treated danger and death in a nonchalant way. One such tale I heard was told with no remorse: "The last time I saw old Jim he was scrambling up the side of a steep bank with Vietcongs in hot pursuit. He had escaped from his burning airplane. He was the only one who got out. I'll take a drink to a damn good man." The important

8. See Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Lehi: Portraits of a Utah Town* (Lehi, Utah: Lehi City Corporation, 1990), 325.

9. I do not wish to release this person's name. He died at a relatively young age of forty or so years. Booze got him, but in my assessment, he really died in that Philippine cane field.

consideration was that old Jim died well. War was a replicated childhood game. Living on the edge of fear was a thrilling addiction, with the consequence of nonsensical cruelty and waste of life.

In my early years abroad, I was oblivious to the cost and pain of socioeconomic change. I had read history, but I had not felt it. But during three intense weeks of travel in September 1969, I lost my American innocence. On 30 August my tour of duty ended. I was Chief of the Public Administration Division, U.S. Agency for International Development to Pakistan, and was granted a year's leave of absence to attend the East West Center in Hawaii. First I was to travel to Washington, D.C., for debriefing, and the Department of State arranged stopovers enroute at Dacca, Saigon, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and Djakarta. At each city I had close friends, mostly Americans, but also some natives who had once been my students.

My first visit was with a Bengali friend and scholar, Kabir Chowdhury, who gave me a signed copy of his translation of Nazrul Islam's poems. Nazrul was a radical activist, a Marxist wrapped in Bengali-Islamic fervor. In his poetry Nazrul captured Bengalis' pain of oppression, which to my mind was of their own making through excessive population numbers. But in their Islamic-Hindu complex of belief, intellectual Bengalis could never accept this social explanation. Children were gifts of God. So they cried out their pain in the words of their poets but also in random fury.

Throughout my intense three-week journey, I saw a lot of random fury. One rebel would be killed and another rebel immediately took up the cause. "Rebel," one of Nazrul's poems describes the militant determination:

Only when the battlefields are cleared of jingling bloody sabers shall I,
weary of struggles, rest in quiet, I, the great rebel.¹⁰

There was a time when I bought into Nazrul Islam's revolutionary thought. Massive poverty was a crime against humanity; justice had to be pursued. Extraordinary means were sometimes required to eradicate the scourge. In my zeal for the pursuit of justice, I overlooked something more precious, the preservation of humanness. Violence generates evil where humanness is compromised, weakened, and often vanquished. In isolated instances there may be found rare persons who under oppressive circumstances represent the triumph of freedom of the mind and hence are a cause for celebration of the human spirit. However, these manifestations come at a terrible cost, much like one or two clean pebbles in a bushel of filthy gravel.¹¹

10. Kabir Chowdhury, trans. Nazrul Islam, *Select Poems* (Dacca, Bengali Academy/Burdwan House, 1963), 6.

11. An example is persecuted Indonesian writer Pramoedja Ananti Toer, a quiet

The stop in Saigon was of particular interest to me. My career plan was to transfer to Saigon after my year at the East West Center. Two closely related programs interested me and fell within my professional expertise: 1) land reform, and 2) rural pacification (establishing secure and viable local government and allied institutions such as irrigation districts).

While I was ordering lunch at a sidewalk café with an old friend and mentor who was in charge of land reform, two of his American acquaintances dropped by and joined us. One was a young Southerner, a Marine officer working with the pacification program, and the other a middle-aged Midwesterner, a retired Marine pilot flying for a CIA contract operation. Our conversation turned to the remarkable hunting possibilities in the Indochina highlands where vicious tigers and wild elephants could be found. Both men were carried away with the idea of the Great White Hunter. And the greatest hunting thrill, they agreed, was "man against man." Within the Marine tradition, they were well versed in the art of killing. They shared stories of how scouts and snipers worked closely together. Various weapons were described about which I had no understanding. The young Marine said that he preferred to hunt "gooks" alone. In vivid terms he described how he'd recently picked off a Vietcong "gook" pushing his heavily loaded bicycle over a narrow trail in a mountainous area. In his words: "It was no more than a turkey shoot. I could see through my telescopic sight the expression on the gook's face when the bullet hit his chest." Laughing in a weird way, he went on to say: "He fell to the ground and jerked around like a chicken with its head chopped off." The contract pilot then quickly picked up his beer bottle and stood: "I'll drink to you and a job well done. That was perfect killing!" Listening to these words, I became aware that Vietnam was a lost cause. We were, indeed, "Ugly Americans."¹² By these senseless killings great numbers of American lives were being corrupted in a terrible way.

Although I went on to Kuala Lumpur, Djakarta, and Hong Kong, arriving in Honolulu on schedule, I never reported to the Southeast Asian desk in Washington D.C. I just stopped my journey. Nor would I meet with any person from the Department of State or national security agencies, even when I was given instruction from Washington to do so. I was unavailable or I missed appointments. I maintained this silence for over

Marxist. See his *The Mute's Soliloquy, A Memoir*, trans. Willem Samuels (New York: Hyperion Press, 1999).

12. This was the message of the popular novel, *The Ugly American* by William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1958).

five years. I did vent frustrations and opinions to trusted academic colleagues. I expressed my concerns in scholarly journals and at professional meetings. To regain my intellectual integrity and freedom and composure, one year after my long trip home, at age forty-five, I resigned from the United States Foreign Service, walking away from a professional life that I greatly prized. The biblical mandate is straightforward: "Thou shalt not kill."