

Sister Sam Heart of a Lioness

by
Richard Mann

When I was a teenager she was mostly a pain. You know how younger sisters are. You have to take their places, they get into your stuff and tell your girlfriends things you don't want them to hear. In that way my sister Samantha was no different. We called her Sam because it was her initials and was easier to say. It stuck. Later when all the boys started giving her the googly eyes, well, she was my sister, and I couldn't let them think bad thoughts. Being a big brother is always work.

In other ways Sam was different. Mom and Dad both were hunters, and they always involved Sam and me. That stuck too. As a matter of fact, Sam has always been the outdoors type. She took to horses

Africa is a magical place that can forever change a hunter.

If there is a true hunter in Africa it is the lioness. She never gets the respect that the male lion gets, but does the lion's share of the hunting.





This is an excellent warthog by anyone's standards. What made it even more special was the broken leopard's tooth found embedded in the warthog's skull.

Though an exceptional impala ram, it was the only trophy Sam took on her first trip to Africa. Even though it was by far the best in camp, few of the other hunters acknowledged her accomplishment.



in her teens and became a very accomplished rider. I remember the quarter horse stud I bought that had an unpredictable and sometimes bipolar disposition. Sam managed to straighten him out in about a month.

For several years after college Sam's career got in the way of her outdoor excursions. About five years ago I was planning a hunt to Newfoundland and asked Sam if she would like to go along.

She did and on the third day of a five-day hunt, shot a young stag. A day later, while I was out looking for a moose, Sam took her video camera, a bottle of water and a stick, and went for a walk. It was well past lunch when the outfitter came to me and said, "We don't know where Sam is. She left early this morning and no one has seen her."

I wasn't too worried and told the guides she would be home when she got hungry. That didn't seem to calm them much, but about an hour before dark she showed up all smiles, wondering why everyone was stumbling over her.

Two years later I was putting my first safari together and again extended an invitation to Sis. After convincing her husband she had no choice but to go, she had less than a great experience. She was there mostly as an observer hoping to hunt maybe one animal. The other hunters in camp looked at her like, well, an observer or worse, my little sister. It bothered me, maybe more than it did Sam, and I threw a few verbal jabs at the chauvinists when I got a chance. Especially after she shot the best impala in camp.

After we got home I could tell Sam was not herself. In less than a month she called and said, "I'm going back to Africa."

I asked her who was going with her, and she said it would just be her. Mom and Dad of course were worried about their little girl heading off to the Dark Continent alone. I think her husband and I were the only ones with total confidence that she would be OK. One reason I knew for sure she would be fine was that the professional hunter she was with was more than capable and (just as important) respected Sis for the hunter she was.

On our safari together in South Africa, Sam and I had hunted with Hennie Badenhorst of Lyon Safaris on his personal concession just south of where the Crocodile and Limpopo rivers join. On her solitary safari Sam hunted with Pieter

Lessing, a PH that worked for Badenhorst. This time she hunted in the Waterburg Mountain area near Nylstroom, several hours east of Thabazimbi where Lyon Safaris is based. On her first day hunting she stepped in a warthog hole and severely twisted her knee while stalking a blesbuck. It was a rather wicked injury that complicated her entire hunt and still plagues her to this day. The injury didn't save the blesbuck. Sam shot him at over 200 yards.

Then there was the bushbuck, an animal she really wanted to hunt after witnessing me take mine a few months prior. With her knee swollen up like a football, she couldn't make a stalk so had to take another long shot. It was no problem; the bullet hit where it was supposed to and the bushbuck dropped in his tracks.

The most unique animal Sis took was a magnificent warthog that she had to shoot in the head, again at over 200 yards. When the skinners were pulling the hide from the warthog, they found a broken leopard's tooth embedded in its skull. They plucked it out and gave it to Sam. She now wears it around her neck as a reminder, she says, of her trip to Africa though I think it represents much more.

With all the big game out of the way, Sam and her professional hunter set out for a bit of bird shooting. She had brought along our mother's old Winchester Model 12, 20-gauge for that purpose. Sam's not one to brag, and she freely admitted it took her forever to bag the one bird she finally managed to hit. Still, it was special to take a bird in Africa with the shotgun her mother had regularly carried when taking Sam hunting in her youth.

Each year I help my friend Charlie Sisk of Sisk Rifles with his Hunting Rifle Workshop. Sisk invites several of his customers to attend a training workshop and shooting competition at the Hacienda Ranch in Texas. I teach the field shooting portion of the workshop and evaluate the hunters' performance on a variety of exercises involving a pop-up leopard target



Unlike a lot of hunters that travel to South Africa and stay in a cozy lodge, Sam wanted all of Africa she could get. She and her PH camped out under the stars.



and other realistic African and North American hunting scenarios. Another gun writer, John Barsness handles the evaluation and instruction on the charging Cape buffalo course.

Sam attended the event in 2007 as the only woman. She won second place claiming a new Bad Boy Buggy as a prize. The experienced hunters, all men, that she beat may not have formerly acknowledged her skill but did leave Texas knowing they had been soundly defeated by a woman. I was quite proud of her shooting and all

around sportsmanship but couldn't resist the urge to rub a little salt in the wounds of a few male competitors that did not display the sportsmanship Sis did.

Looking back on my sister's hunting experiences, I think she hunted early on because that's what our family did. I'm not sure that the trip she made to Newfoundland was inspired by a hunter's heart so much as it was the opportunity to see a far off land and spend some time with her bother. No, I think the time Sam spent in Africa alone is what awakened the hunter

inside her. I saw it in her eye when she came home, and that spark seems to have grown into a roaring flame.

I think everyone is born with a hunting instinct imbedded somewhere deep within. It will take more than a few hundred years of evolution to eliminate the desire to hunt from the helical spiral of DNA within the human species. What's important is that special event that unleashes the hunter within each of us. For some it can be a special time shared with their grandfather, or the first time they touch an antler like my six-year-old did when he shot his first buck. But for others, like my sister, I think it came in Africa. Africa can have that effect. Sadly, for some, it never happens.

My sister has a blossoming practice as a psychologist, and I often wonder when she is sitting across from some emotionally disturbed individual if the thought ever crosses their mind that the woman helping them find some happiness and reality within the distorted world they live, has the heart

of a lioness. I doubt it. But, maybe, if they see that leopard's tooth hanging from the necklace she wears, they might just wonder.

Sam's gear and outfitters:

Sisk Rifles: www.siskguns.com

Trijicon AccuPoint:

www.trijicon.com

Lyon Safaris:

www.lyonsafaris.com

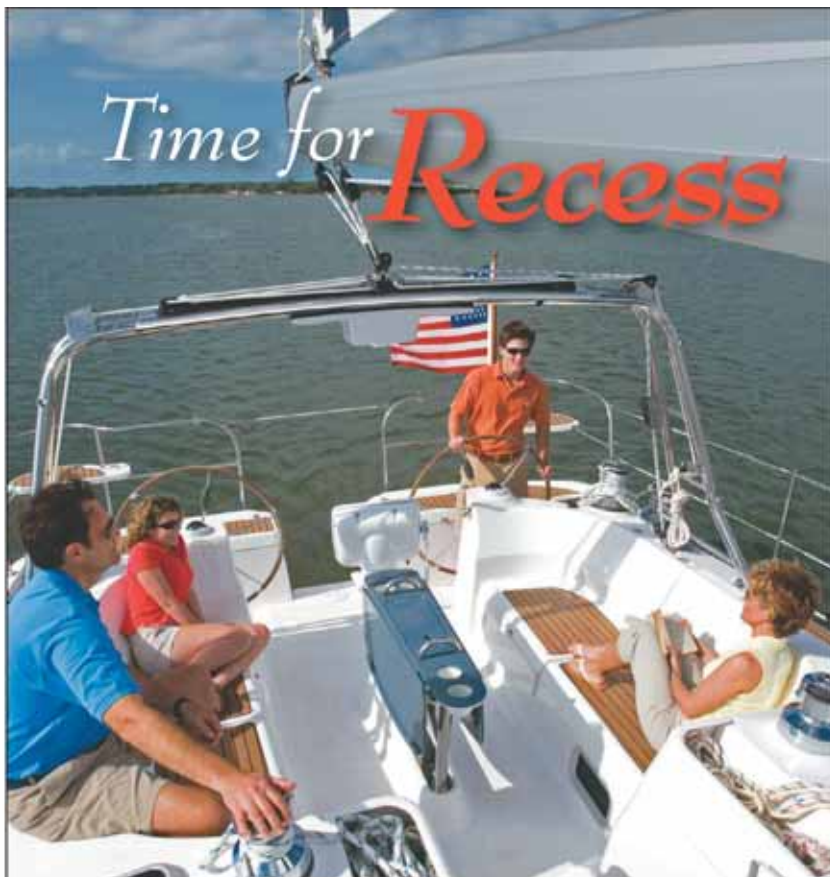
Richard Mann, a native of the Virginias, has been an avid outdoorsman all his life. He has hunted on four continents and is a former patrol officer, special agent and military & law enforcement firearms instructor. Richard is currently a field editor for the National Rifle Association's *Shooting Illustrated* magazine and regularly contributes to numerous hunting and

firearms periodicals. Richard is the compiling author of the newly released book, *Rifle Bullets for the Hunter* and also works as a firearms consultant for several companies. Richard encourages correspondence through ramworks@frontiernet.net and signed copies of Richard's books may be purchased directly at www.ramworks.net

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