

# The Crow

By Greg Ott



I had looked forward to moving to the country for a long time when I discovered what such a move would mean to me. I would be able to ride my own horse. I would get to explore woods that were isolated from the touch of civilization, but most of all, I would get to go hunting with my father. Oh, I had gone hunting with him on many occasions, but always as a spectator. This move to the country would move me a step closer to finally getting to use the old 20-gauge shotgun that had been waiting for me to grow up. I was nine years old, and I adored that gun. I knew every part of it. I could completely dismantle it and put it back together without any help from my dad because I had seen him do it so many times. He had told me that when we moved to the country and that when I was ready, he would let me use it for the first time. This was to be the day that I would discover just what he meant by "ready," and the day that I would view that gun in a different light.

We were setting fence posts at the front of our property when I heard the distinctive "CAUWW" in a distant, towering sweetgum tree. Excitement possessed me. My father had always been concerned by the legality of things. Certain birds were "legal" to shoot during hunting season, and certain birds were never "legal" to shoot. Some birds however were not protected by law and thus could be legally shot at any time. The crow was one such bird. And when I heard that crow call in the distance, my eyes immediately searched the treetops. This was a bird that could be shot; the shotgun was in the trunk of the car, and I was confident that I was *ready*. I eagerly approached my father and pleaded for the chance to shoot this bird. This was the perfect opportunity! It was perched some hundred feet up at the top of a tree about one hundred yards away. A clear shot. My dad had to let me take it! I *was* ready! To my surprise, my father agreed. He told me to calm-down and to quietly go to the car to get the gun so as not to scare off this prize of a bird.

As I crept to the car my mind raced. I could see this trophy mounted on the wall of my room. This was going to be my first kill. I couldn't wait to tell my friends at school. Had I known that my father never expected me to actually hit a bird that was this far away, I probably would have been able to breath more steadily. Had I known that he thought the bird would fly away long before I could actually place it within the sights of the gun, my heartbeat probably would have returned to normal. These things I did not know, and consequently I could feel my lungs expand and contract with force and could feel my heart pound as if trying to escape my chest. By the time I returned with the shotgun and the single yellow shell, my hands were sticky with sweat.

As I loaded the gun, my father quietly asked me, "Are you sure you want to do this thing?" I looked at him as though he had lost his mind. Of course I wanted to shoot this bird! It was legal, and I already had the gun in my hands! I was *ready*! I offered up a simple, "Yes sir," with a quick nod and looked up to make sure that the bird hadn't been spooked by our exchange. There he was... black as night against a clear blue sky, completely unaware of the preparation I was making to end his days. My father then gave me the "OK" and stepped back as I quietly lifted the gun to take aim.

It was a perfect shot even if it was a long one. There was nothing between me and that bird, just clear empty space. I pulled the stock of the gun more firmly against my shoulder in an effort to steady my nerves. I leaned my cheek onto the cool stock and steadied the barrel until the bird came into focus on the end of the bead. I held my breath, ... pulled the hammer back, ... and **BOOM**! The air shook and the sound echoed and that bird came tumbling down from the top of that tree. The splash of leaves as the bird hit the ground shot my attention back to my father. I stared up at him with huge eyes and he returned the stare. "Well, what are you waiting for? Go get him," was all he said. I handed him the gun and raced to claim my prize.

I was not prepared for what I would find when I reached the crow. He was lying on his side, shiny black against the brown and orange of fallen leaves. As I stared down at him, his beak opened and closed as if attempting to speak out. A tremor shook his left wing as it reached out for something that wasn't there. His feet clutched the emptiness of a world that was escaping him. All I could do was stare. I could hear my father tell me to bring him over to the car, but all I could do was stare as this creature tried in vain to hold on to the life I had cut short. All I could do was stare. I could hear the crunch of leaves as my father walked towards me, and I could feel his hand as he placed it on my shoulder, but I couldn't take my eyes off of that bird as he opened and shut and opened and shut his beak. When I finally was able to tear my eyes away from that bird, I looked up at my father and tried to speak, but I had to turn away to hide the tears that had begun to stream down my cheeks. I wasn't ready, and I was ashamed. I was ashamed of what I had done, and I was ashamed of how I felt...I knew that it would be a long time before I would ever touch that shotgun again...*if* I could ever touch that gun again.