



Opposites Attract: When an Elk Hunter Married a Non-Hunter

Though their experiences differ when it comes to elk hunting, Dave and Judy Yoder share a common commitment to RMEF.

Dave and Judy Yoder were an unlikely pair. When they met in Colorado in 1988, Dave was spending his free time in the woods, preferably hunting elk. Judy, on the other hand?

Well, "her idea of roughing it was staying in a hotel without room service," teases her doting husband. "And I married a hunter!" she claps back.

Judy was born in Illinois in 1944 but grew up in Montana. In college she wanted to major in business, but as a woman she was discouraged from pursuing that degree. So, she instead studied

music. Despite that setback, Dave points out that she went on to be quite the businesswoman and started a successful mortgage company.

Dave was born in 1940 in Michigan where he grew up hunting swamps for whitetails. Later, when he moved to Colorado, he used those skills to hunt elk from a ground blind. After selecting a location on a 320-acre parcel he'd purchased in the San Juan Mountains, Dave would construct a blind out of logs and brush. He'd then sit and wait for the natural world to come to life around him, witnessing

spectacles he wouldn't ever see while hoofing it. Chickadees landed on his shoulders, mice leapt in his coffee cup and pine martens padded by.

Tagging 19 elk in 20 seasons, his technique proved highly effective. Although Judy says she couldn't kill an animal if her life depended on it and didn't much care for the nights she had to scurry past an elk or deer carcass hanging in the ponderosa pine in their yard, she didn't mind eating what Dave brought home from the field. He took up the task of cooking their elk meals after they got married in 1989.

because Judy didn't like to cook wild game. This meant that Judy ate a lot of "Dave's elk mung" which he made with ground elk and whatever other ingredients he felt like throwing in it that day. "It was always kind of a hash," he says. "And if I put salsa on it, then it was a Mexican hash."

After marrying, the couple lived in Avon, Colorado, where Judy helped him run his engineering consulting business, and also set her sights on improving their small town. As an avid reader, she helped raise funding to build a new library and establish a library district, then helped plan the grand opening party. Never shy, she invited President Gerald R. Ford, a frequent skier at nearby Vail, to attend the festivities. Dave says he will never forget when Ford got to the door and said, "Judy, show me your library," with a smile. She continued to serve her community by acting as the mayor for four years, and on the city council for nearly a decade.

Despite her reluctance

to try elk hunting, it was Judy who discovered RMEF while checking out at a grocery store in Avon. She happened to pick up a magazine about elk hunting and wondered if Dave might be interested. "So I brought it home, and the rest is history," she says. Dave was hooked on that issue of *Bugle* after reading it cover to cover.

Since the couple's first exposure to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation their fondness for the organization has only grown over the years. Judy says she and Dave have great respect for what the RMEF does to conserve habitat for elk and other wildlife. They became Life Members in the '90s and now, over 30 years later, they are furthering their commitment and will donate the entirety of their estate to RMEF upon their passing, making them members of the Trails Society.

The Trails Society recognizes those who have included RMEF as a beneficiary in their estate plans through a will, life insurance policy, retirement account or

other means.

Recognition in this group of donors includes a Trails Society pin, their name in the recognition kiosk at the Elk Country Visitor Center in Missoula, Montana, and invitations to exclusive activities. Trails Society members also have the option to remain anonymous.

Dave killed his last elk a handful of years ago when he was in his late 70s, a cow he hauled off the mountain by himself in just two trips using a game cart. Though he's since hung up his rifle, he and Judy still enjoy being involved in all things elk. This summer, they ventured from their Florida home, where they retired in 2003, and drove their RV west to Montana to attend the RMEF's 40th anniversary celebration. They try to road trip out West each year because, as Judy says, they're "still westerners at heart."



The Trails Society: Committing to the Future of Elk and Wild Places

July and August is the time to catch our breath, relax and soak up the sun. Elk, meanwhile, are staying cool in the shade. Now on their summer range, cows and their new calves have rejoined the main herd. Calves chase each other, playing in nursery groups while an elk orchestra rings out as cows bark and calves mew and squeak.

Though younger bulls may run with this herd, mature bulls gather in small bachelor groups. As their velvet antlers sprout as much as an inch a day, they spend their time eating and lazing on ridges, catching a breeze to cool off and minimize bothersome flies.

Reflecting on seasonal transitions is appropriate for the changes in our lives. Looking forward to the next season is at the heart of RMEF's Trails Society, a group of supporters who will leave a legacy of conservation so future generations can enjoy stunning landscapes, plentiful wildlife and lasting memories. They help protect the places where summertime splendor can continue to flourish.

Including provisions for RMEF in your will or trust, or as a beneficiary of a retirement account or life insurance policy, is perhaps the most impactful way to support our mission. Trails Society members are a passionate and dedicated group of members ensuring this future.

If RMEF is already in your estate plans, we'd love to know about it so we can thank you properly. To learn more about planned giving and the Trails Society, please reach out to us at legacy@rmef.org or 406-523-3479.



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