

THE ART OF THE HUNT



BY WILL HAWKINS

As a young boy, I had the opportunity to share many outdoor experiences with my family. I got to tag along on many a hunting trip with my dad and the cast of characters that were his close friends and oilfield buddies. But there was one trip that I never got to experience, at least not as a child: his annual pilgrimage to West Texas to hunt mule deer. As a small business owner, my dad didn't take many vacations; our adventures would typically be a quick jaunt or a work-related excursion. When he packed up to head West with his jeep in tow, I always imagined it was special.

My family is fortunate to have lifelong friends. These include my dad's best friend Tommy Herring and Tommy's brother Bubba, who grew up working,

rodeoing and hunting, and who took their first West Texas hunting trip in the mid-1980s. So when a spot finally opened for me in 2015 to join to take down some mule deer – a cool 30 years after the trip's inception – I made sure to clear my calendar.

Even as a 38-year-old, I didn't know what to expect. I had always wondered why my dad traveled so far only to come back empty-handed. But when I discovered the treasure that is nestled in the vast expanse of West Texas, I began to understand.

I have since developed a profound appreciation for the unique blend of rugged landscapes, rich cultures, and unparalleled camaraderie shared with friends and family during our hunting expeditions. West Texas, with its sprawling deserts and sun-soaked mountains, holds a special allure that'll stop you in your tracks, alter your priorities, and instill in you a new sense of purpose. The landscape is a testament to the resilience of nature in the face of harsh conditions. It's as stern as a knife's edge, soft as pastel chalk. The endless horizon, punctuated by distant peaks, changes kaleidoscopically as we bounce around seemingly endless acres in our jeeps.

The cultural mosaic that is West Texas only adds to its appeal. Close as it is to the border, the influence of Mexico is palpable, especially on the tin and paper plates at our hunting gatherings. The aroma of sizzling onions and peppers, the savory beef tips for carne guisada, the flavors of freshly prepared salsas, and the warmth of tortillas straight off the burner are just as memorable as the activities in the field.

Our forays near Marathon are not merely the pursuit of game; they are a communion with nature, an exploration of ancient skills passed down through generations, a testament to the enduring bonds of kinship. And the challenges they present forge among us what become the bedrock of unforgettable memories.

I have recently endeavored to transform these memories into art. I could not think of a better way to celebrate the wisdom gained and experiences I





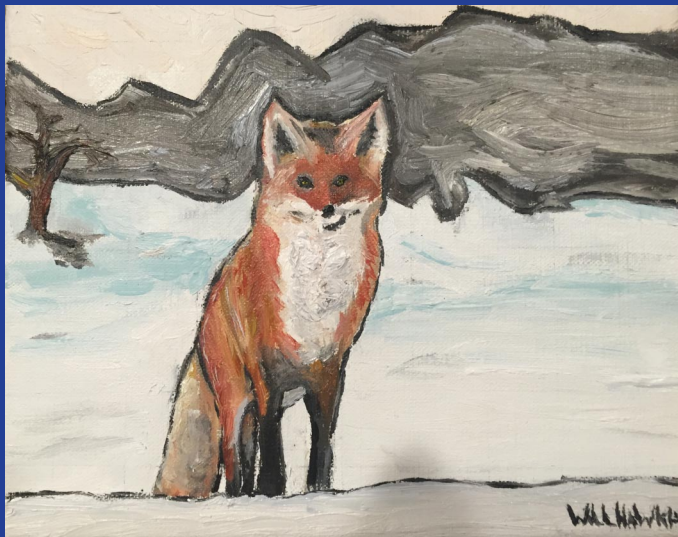
Jackalope



Mule Deer



Jeep



Fox



Fish

am fortunate to share with old hunting buddies than to convert our experience into a painting to give to Tommy and Bubba, who are not only mentors to me but examples of fortitude and paradigms of friendships.

This painting spawned other paintings of West Texas fixtures. I rarely come home with a mule deer, but always return with the inspiration to capture wildlife on canvas, and to try and recreate the colors of West Texas. The subject of the art changes, but the colors and themes stay the same.

The changing cast of hunters has added some dynamism to these experiences. From seasoned family members to steadfast friends, everyone brings a unique flavor to our adventures. Some are pillars of support and

laughter, others infuse fresh energy and perspectives into our shared pursuit. Yet our environs remain the same: the fleeting hues of twilight against the silhouette of hunters, the shared reverie around a crackling campfire, the solemn moments of reflection as the desert night envelops us.

My appreciation for this high desert extends far beyond its rugged beauty; it encompasses the cultural richness, the culinary delights, and, most importantly, the bonds of camaraderie forged in a shared passion – and it all happens near Marathon. Rest assured, our camp will feast on Tex-Mex and we will be back to West Texas next year. ■