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17 February 2010

Is Hunting Good for Bad Kids?

Is hunting good for bad kids? Does it teach violence or does it teach empathy and compassion? Would it be a more peaceful world if more kids grew up hunting?

These are some of the questions addressed in a recent book entitled *From Boys to Men of Heart: Hunting as Rite of Passage*.

The book's award-winning author is Randall L. Eaton, Ph.D., a behavioral scientist with an international reputation in wildlife conservation who has been studying hunting for 35 years. While producing "The Sacred Hunt" in the mid-1990s, a documentary that received 11 awards, Eaton interviewed scores of recreational and Native American hunters all of whom used the word "respect" to describe how they feel about animals they hunt.

That prompted Eaton to conduct questionnaire surveys on 2,500 mature hunters who described their attitude toward animals they hunt as, "respect, admiration and reverence." Over 80% of these recreational hunters claimed they prayed for the animals they killed or gave thanks to God.

Eaton's survey also asked hunters what life event most opened their hearts and engendered compassion in them. Choices included death of a loved one, death of a

beloved pet, becoming a parent, teaching young people and taking the life of an animal.

Women hunters overwhelmingly chose “becoming a parent,” but most of the men chose “taking the life of an animal.” Eaton said, “These results indicate the basic polarity of human life: woman are adapted to bring life into the world, but men are adapted to take life to support life.”

The same survey asked respondents to choose those universal virtues they learned from from hunting. The top three choices were, “inner peace, patience and humility.” Eaton believes that inner peace and humility are the foundation of religious and spiritual traditions across time and space.

Eaton insists that hunting is instinctive at least in boys who around the world start throwing rocks between the age of 4 and 5. His survey indicated over 90% of the men spontaneously had killed a small animal before the age of 10, compared to less than 20% of the female hunters.

“These are the same men who claimed that hunting had done more to open their hearts than any other life experience. Typically the boy cries as 8-year old Jimmy Carter did when he threw a rock and killed a robin. I consider it no mere coincidence that Jimmy Carter and Nelson Mandela both won the Nobel Peace Prize and both are avid hunters,” Eaton said.

The book interviews Dr. Wade Brackenbury, who for 13 years led groups of delinquent boys into the wilderness for two weeks where they had to survive off what

they could forage. Brackenbury is convinced that it was hunting small animals for food that had the greatest transformative influence. Surveys conducted a year later indicated that 85% of the boys had not got into trouble after their survival experience.

A best-selling authority on how to raise boys, Michael Gurian, also is interviewed in Eaton's book. He agrees that hunting does teach males compassion, and that it would be a more peaceful world if more boys hunted.

The book presents compelling evidence from several disciplines that adolescent males need rites of passage to become responsible adults. Eaton says that the original rite of passage was hunting because it proved a young adult male could provide and qualify for manhood and marriage.

“Without transformative rites of passage that open their hearts and connect them to nature and society males may become destructive and dangerous. Untempered masculinity is a major factor behind juvenile crime and gangs,” he said.

Inspired by Eaton's book, Dr. Karl Milner launched H.E.F.T.Y, Hunter Education for Troubled Youth, in Wyoming where the courts are sending juveniles to his program. The kids are engaged in conservation work on private lands where eventually they will be able to hunt.

Endorsed by the Wyoming Fish and Game Department, Eaton and Milner expect H.E.F.T.Y. to grow across the continent. “Dr. Eaton and I see the program helping thousands of wayward youth. It also will encourage more parents to get their kids

outdoors,” Milner said.

“Hunting and fishing are good for bad kids because they are good for all kids,” Eaton added.

To get Eaton’s newest production, “Why Hunting Is Good for Bad Kids,” visit his website at www.randalleaton.com. To learn more about H.E.F.T.Y. visit: www.hefty4kids.org.

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