

Paper Mache for 11-14-25 by David Read

Hunting season is well underway as evidenced by the early morning sounds of gunfire in the rice fields near our Plumas Lake neighborhood. It reminds me about how, growing up in my family's hunting, fishing, camping, boating, hiking culture, I would devour magazines (remember those?) about the outdoors; *Field & Stream*, *Outdoor Life*, *Guns & Ammo*, long before I had my first hunting license. For me, these were not simply magazines, they were gateways that fueled my never to be fulfilled fantasies about future hunting trips and safaris. Each month I looked forward to stories by some of the regular contributors. Three of my favorites were Elmer Keith, Jack O'Connor, and Robert Ruark, who had very different philosophies that helped define modern outdoor writing.

Elmer Keith was the iconic rugged Western frontiersman. A prolific columnist for *Outdoor Life*, he believed in heavy bullets, magnum cartridges, and stopping power above all else. Hoorah! His advocacy for large caliber revolvers was instrumental in the development of the .357 Magnum and .44 Magnum. He also helped develop the iconic Winchester Model 70 bolt action rifle. Keith believed in heavy fire power when hunting. I still remember one article he wrote about pass shooting overflying ducks at 100 yards with his double barreled 10-gauge shotgun. Probably not the most ethical way to hunt and far beyond a reasonable range for most hunters.

Another regular contributor to *Outdoor Life* was Jack O'Connor, perhaps the most celebrated gun writer of the era. O'Connor championed precision, marksmanship, and the virtues of the .270 Winchester, which he believed offered flatter trajectory and practical efficiency for North American game. O'Connor's writing was elegant, literary, and often deeply personal. The friendly but persistent rivalry between Keith's "big-bullet" magnum caliber philosophy and O'Connor's "flat-shooting" ideal captivated generations of sportsmen, my young self included.

Robert Ruark was another prominent outdoor writer and regular contributor to *Field & Stream*. His memoir *The Old Man and the Boy* and books about African safaris like *Horn of the Hunter* blended adventure with sharp cultural insight. His essay collections, including *Use Enough Gun*, showcased his humor, candor, and deep respect for wildlife. Ruark's storytelling bridged personal reflection and rugged experience, securing his legacy as another of America's most influential outdoor voices.

As an adult living in the Washington, DC suburbs many years later, I enjoyed the weekly columns by Angus Phillips, the Washington Post outdoor columnist. His passions included stories about hiking, offshore sailing and hunting in the mid-Atlantic region as well as dining on wild game. Angus taught me about the Billy Goat trail along the Potomac River and the proper way to prepare local blue crabs for a summer feast. And then there is the American author, Ernest Hemingway, perhaps the greatest outdoor author of all. Although he did write a few hunting and fishing articles for magazines like *True* and *Holiday*, he is better known for his stories and novels dealing with those "manly" pursuits. In the two parts of the short story "Big Two-Hearted River," the protagonist, Nick Adams, heads into the woods of northern Michigan to trout fish, but more so to recover from his time in Europe during WWI. "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" tells the tale of a husband and wife's ill-fated lion hunt. Talk about an understatement! *Green Hills of Africa* was a literary experiment in weaving a fictional tale directly out of a real-life experience, all based on his first safari. So this fall, I won't be found hunkered down in a blind near a rice field or walking the woods with a rifle over my shoulder, but rather sitting by the fire, book in hand reliving a lifetime of great times afield.