

Native American Hunting Interview

With Keith Wachter

By Nora Drews

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Nora Drews: This is Nora Drews with Keith Wachter. Thank you for being with me today.

So, are you from the U.P.?

Keith Wachter: Yes, born and raised here.

Nora Drews: Where?

Keith Wachter: Born in Manistique, MI. Raised in Naubinway. Lived in Naubinway for five years, moved to St. Ignace, lived there for nine years. Moved from St. Ignace when I was fourteen to Munising and I've lived here ever since. I'm fifty-five.

N. Drews: So, how you like going up in the U.P.?

K. Wachter: Wouldn't live anywhere else.

N. Drews: Yeah.

K. Wachter: That's why I've lived here.

N. Drews: So, I hear that your family was involved in the shipping, oh, the fish boats in Naubinway?

K. Wachter: Yeah, my grandfather and his father before him were commercial fishermen. My grandpa was born on Garden Island, out in the middle of Lake Michigan, north of Beaver Island. And until my grandpa was sixty-six, that's all he ever did. He was a commercial fisherman, cut pulp in the winter time. Obviously you can't fish when the lake's froze over. Did some winter fishing through the ice. That's all he ever did. He was a charter member of the Commercial Fisherman's Association of the Great Lakes.

N. Drews: Neat. So, talking about family. Is that kind of what got you into hunting? Are your family hunters?

K. Wachter: Well, growing up in a place like Naubinway, um, it's what people did. My dad, my grandpa wasn't much of a hunter. I mean, he did hunt but not as much as what my dad and his brothers did. They spent a lot of time in the woods. You grow up in place like Naubinway, the U.P. you grow up hunting and fishing. That's just part of growing up here.

N. Drews: So, do you have any favorite stories of hunting with your dad?

K. Wachter: Yeah, there was a lot things that could be related. I started a lot younger than most kids. Back then there weren't any restrictions like there are today. I was nine years old when I got my first hunting license. I was taught the up most of safety. My dad was a police officer, deputy sheriff, city police officer for about ten years. When I wasn't hunting with him, I hunted with my Uncle Don, my dad's older brother. It was just a way of life, it was what you did. And I learned a lot from the both of them. I spent a lot of time in the woods with them.

N. Drews: That's nice. You've been hunting for a long time. So, in all the years, what have you hunted?

K. Wachter: Started out small game, birds, rabbits. Still, even back then you couldn't hunt deer until you were fourteen. Which, the first year I hunted deer I was fourteen. And ever since, I've never missed a deer season since. As long as I've lived here I've never missed a deer season.

N. Drews: Have you gotten a deer every time? Every season?

K. Wachter: No. No, in fact when I first started hunting deer, your talking back in the early to mid-sixtys, sixty-five, sixty-six. You'd have to actually lay it out on paper, you know, a date. But deer hunting wasn't real good in the U.P. There was a big die off, a big kill off. There just weren't a lot of deer. There were, there was and always have been a lot of small game. It's just part of huh, the U.P. It goes in cycles.

N. Drews: Do you think you could even think of a number of how many kills you've had?

K. Wachter: Relative to what, deer?

N. Drews: Okay, small game and then big game.

K. Wachter: Well, small game it'd be really hard because there's so many years. And I never really kept track. I'd like to think I never took more than what I needed or what I could use. I killed my share of deer, not a lot. Not a lot. But, I never really put a trophy deer on the wall. I've killed some nice ones, but never killed a trophy.

N. Drews: Speaking of your trophy, your big elk you got down state. I know, I read the article that was published. Tell me about that day, kind of run through it from the start of the day, what you did, and where you found it.

K. Wachter: It started before that day with getting the permit which was the luck of the draw. It's like winning the lottery of hunting. It literally is like winning the lottery of hunting. There were over 44,000 applications for 89 permits and I was lucky enough to draw one. And I drew the grand-daddy of the permits, the choice hunt. Choice for a, choice being a bull, a cow or a calf. I contacted a guide through, a guide from town here. The guide's an experienced guide, knew where to go. He's from that area. Told me that

I wouldn't shoot a cow or a calf. He said that absolutely wouldn't happen. He said you will get a bull, we know where their at. And you know I put my faith in him and it worked out. Season started at eight o'clock that morning and at 8:15 we saw a five by five, that's five points on each side. And he said if I wanted to I could shoot it. Now, this is only 15 minutes into the hunt, into the day. But he assured me that we would see bigger animals and better animals. And I did have seven days and I was prepared to spend seven days but ah. We went around several different areas in the area I was allotted and saw a couple other nice animals but he kept assuring me that there'd be something bigger. And we drove by a place that we had already been and two friends that were with me in the vehicle behind us radioed us and told us there were two really nice animals standing just off the road. And we turned around and went back towards where those animals were. And got out of the truck, missed the first shot. Connected with the second one and from there, it was kind of a blur. It was, it was the hunt of a lifetime, I mean the chance of a lifetime. Just to get a chance to shoot at animals like this. You know, it was incredible, incredible.

N. Drews: I bet. So, how big was it?

K. Wachter: Well, it weighed 590 pounds dressed. It's called an eight by seven. It's got eight points on one side and seven on the other in a non-typical figure. It scored 309 on the Boone and Crockett System with, well, there was some deductions for the non-typical part. But I believe the taxidermist said it was 13th best all time in state of Michigan since there's been an elk hunt.

N. Drews: Wow, that's neat.

K. Wachter: It's on my wall in my living room.

N. Drews: Oh yeah, yeah. The article also said it was 5 ½ years old. They could figure that out by it's teeth huh?

K. Wachter: Yeah.

N. Drews: So, is that what a normal mature elk would look like?

K. Wachter: Well, he could have been even bigger. They will get, the DNR said up to 8 or 9 years old and they start going down. They're an unbelievable big animal when you've been a deer hunter all your life. You actually stand next to one of those things, it's just, their monstrous.

N. Drews: Yeah, so how'd it taste when you got to bring it home and all that?

K. Wachter: Well, a lot of people would have thought really, really good. But in all honesty it was tough. It was tough eating, it was a running bull. Cooked it right it was really good eating.

N. Drews: So, you've mentioned you got your trophy, sitting above your chair in your living room. Do you just want to explain how you mounted it, cause I know it's not from the neck, it's from the shoulders.

K. Wachter: Yeah, it's a head and shoulder mount. Well, I could pump up the Out Door Adventures Taxidermy in Harvey. They get a commercial for that. They are fantastic taxidermists. The guy, Mike Anderson is phenomenal in my estimation. It was done really well. It's a head and shoulder mount with what they call a sneak. It's got a little bit of it's head like it's looking into the room. He watches the front for me.

N. Drews; Good. So, I know you don't have the opportunity to ever do it yourself again because your only one license for a lifetime, but if you were to give advice to a fellow hunter, what would you tell them.

K. Wachter: Contact the Huff family in Johannesburg, MI outside, east of Gaylerd. Between Gaylerd and Atlanta. They know what their doing. Guide fees aren't cheap, they aren't outrageous either. Not for a hunt like this. A hunt like this is, if your lucky enough to draw one, you want someone like that who knows it unless you want to go the whole nine yards doing it yourself. Go down there and spend a lot of time. I know that if would have, the time involved to find an animal like this and the time it would have taken and the trips back and forth just to go there would have far exceed what it cost me. I know it would have. For the amount of time involved, which was an hour and a half. The animal was on the ground at 9:30 in the morning. You know, it was...it was a chance of a lifetime. Like I said, 44,000 permits for 89 tags, 89 permits. It was....a chance of a life time.

N. Drews: I'm really glad you got the opportunity. That's amazing. Thank you for answering all my questions. I appreciate it.

K. Wachter: Sure.

Munising resident drops trophy bull elk

Hunt of a lifetime

By JOHN PEPIN

Journal Munising Bureau

MUNISING — Fifty-three-year-old Keith Wachter has been hunting deer since he was 14.

But the Munising man who bagged an elk downstate in the Pigeon River State Forest this week said the experience was something he'll never forget.

"This is definitely the highlight of my hunting life," Wachter said. "I've never seen anything like this."

For years, Wachter had applied for a state elk hunting permit, hoping to be one of the roughly 90 hunters drawn from more than 41,000 applicants who would get a chance to hunt among five areas set up for the hunts in the Lower Peninsula.

Wachter and a woman from Iron Mountain were the only two hunters chosen this year from the Upper Peninsula. Wachter had applied for his permit at Denman's Hardware store in Munising.

When the notice he'd been selected came in the mail, he could hardly believe it.

"I had a choice hunting bull, cow or calf," Wachter said.

All of the selected elk hunters went through an orientation on Dec. 5 with hunting open from Dec. 6 through 13.

Wachter was hunting north of Atlanta in Area B along the Chandler Dam Road with friends Bob Hanson of Naubinway and Rex Warner of Munising — two buddies who didn't have elk permits themselves, but enjoyed being along for the ride.

With the help of a guide from the Troy Huff Guide Service, the men found the large 590-pound bull elk off a cutting near the road at about 9:30 a.m. Tuesday.

See Trophy Page 16B, col. 1

Trophy

Continued from page 13B

Wachter raised his .338 Winchester magnum and shot twice at the elk and the towering animal fell to the ground. This was the first time he'd ever been elk hunting.

"I literally can't say enough about it," Wachter said. "Thanks to all the people that gave me advice and helped me out."

Michigan Department of Natural Resources technicians pulled a tooth of the elk, dissected it and counted striations



Keith Wachter of Munising poses with a 590-pound elk he shot downstate in the Pigeon River State Forest. Wachter, who has hunted deer since he was 14, said having the opportunity to hunt the bull was the chance of a lifetime. (Journal photo by John Pepin)

to estimate the age of the bull elk at about 5½ years. The rack has six points on one side and eight on the other.

Having had the hunter's choice of elk to hunt, Wachter is now unable to win another elk permit in Michigan.

Calling himself a "jaded Yooper," Wachter said he's long-believed there's no other place like the U.P.

But the elk hunts of the beautiful Pigeon River State Forest place a close second, he said.

"If you're a hunter, it's a chance of a lifetime," Wachter said. "It's worth every second of the experience."

