
Letter from a Trapper

Dear Friends,

I am the oldest in a family of 15 children, and the only one who became a trapper—hunter—fisherman. Although my father had some influence on me as a hunter, my attraction to trapping came at an early age via a Métis trapper who lived in my community. He had no children, but wished to pursue the traditions of his father — traditions that required a son in the bow of his canoe while trapping, fishing, and hunting. I became his substitute son, and he became my hero and role model. He taught me how to trap muskrats and mink in the marsh behind my home. He encouraged my trapping ventures by giving me an old canoe to repair and by secretly placing beavers in my beginner trap sets. He was admired in the community as a renowned otter trapper who gladly shared his vast knowledge of wildlife.

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The seed he planted in my soul took root. I decided to become a professional trapper, against the wishes of my parents, who wanted to arrange for me to go to college. I soon learned that it was difficult to earn a living solely from trapping, so with the blessing of my parents, I chose a career in wildlife biology. In this profession I could apply my trapping skills to the management and research of my beloved furbearers. As life rolled on I also became a trapper education instructor, a part-time fur farmer, the president of the Trappers Association of Nova Scotia, and finally, a director on the Board of the Fur Institute of Canada.

During this journey, I learned about the importance of trapping as a wildlife management tool. Furbearers are a renewable resource and respond well to the modern science of wildlife management, which ensures the health and welfare of animal populations. Successful trappers are among the best outdoorsmen in existence.

Trapping has been under attack by animal rights groups for some time. Activities of anti-fur groups have lowered fur prices so much that many no longer trap. Opponents of trapping, as well as some folk who do not understand the entire situation, question the need for trapping. Even if trapping is not needed, and most wildlife managers believe it is, trapping is a legitimate activity that removes excess animals from the wildlife population. Sound wildlife management practices allow the harvest of excess animals because wildlife is a renewable resource. Trapping helps keep wildlife populations balanced with their habitats. If beavers become too

numerous, there will not be enough trees to support them and they will literally eat themselves out of house and home.

I have often pondered the question, "Why do I trap?" This trapping obsession cannot be explained by monetary gains, which are so marginal and uncertain. I have to look at my ancestors within the process of evolution to explain the Creator's design of human behaviour. Studies of skulls and teeth indicate that human beings are omnivorous hunters and gatherers descended from a lifeline that is several million years old. Science dictates that the human brain couldn't have evolved to its large size without the consumption of protein-rich meat. To



assure survival and development, the Creator surely had to cause the evolution of natural instincts, desires, and contentment in association with hunting and gathering. I cannot conceive that a few centuries of modern living would completely erase instincts that are millions of years old. I believe modern man still pursues these natural instincts, even in unnatural settings where substitute behaviours satisfy these urges.

I have also looked at the morality of trapping, since modern man has detached himself from nature and often considers animal use immoral. For me, morality implies a spiritual connection to goodness

and respect according to conscience, God, or the Creator. My understandings and feelings for nature are central to my soul – while seemingly absent in modern humans who have detached themselves from natural processes.

I am perplexed by the extreme view that says the Creator made a mistake in his design of natural predator-prey relationships. I find great comfort in the belief that, as a trapper, I am a predator in the Creator's design of nature's surpluses. At the same time, I realize that because of current extraordinary human population numbers, man's predatory activities need to be regulated and controlled out of respect for the Creator's design.

Thus, spiritually, on the trapline, I feel that I am one with nature.

I hope these personal notes help to explain my personal point of view. Thank you for reading.

Paul Tufts