



KATHLEEN VINEHOUT

STATE SENATOR

November 22, 2017

The Zen of Deer Hunting **By** **Senator Kathleen Vinehout**

Sitting alone in the fog. Blending in with the grass and trees. Don't move. Just listen. Breathe.

"Caaw, caaw caaw." Two crows overhead. One higher, hoarser, more nasal. A young one. Looking for food. They are opportunists. Listen.

"Tuk, tuk, tuk tuk, tuk." A wild turkey to the north.

The soft whoosh of wings overhead. Something flies by. Very still. Don't move. Wondering. An eagle screeches. A Hairy Woodpecker drums. It's still early. Dark. Quiet. Watch.

A glimpse of a silhouette on the horizon. Too far. Too dark. Stay still. Watching. Waiting. Listening.

A twig snaps. My heart pounds. Stay still. I silently chuckle as the red squirrel starts to chatter.

The distant sound of gunshots to the west; answered by two shots to the east. The red squirrel again scolds.

The morning turns slowly from night to day. Wisps of fog linger above the hills. Thirty shades of brown and gray. I meditate. The rhythms of nature are so much slower than our hectic lives. The shades of brown and grey so much subtler.

Another silhouette. Not grass. It's moving. Coming nearer. I watch as it angles away. My heart's pounding. Be still. Breathe.

More shadows take shape. What I imagined as wild creatures, solidify into small bushes and clumps of dark grasses. Mother Nature playing with my mind.

Listen.

“Tzeet, tsitititit tit!” a small bird hops from branch to branch in a nearby brush pile. Size of a junco. A flash of a salmon colored breast, an eye stripe. What is that bird?

Daylight settles in. The weather turns from a cool, enveloping dampness to a steadier, drier, cold wind with a bite to it. I zip my jacket and pull down my hat. Breathe.

The sound of wind, a whisper I heard before I felt. Whooshing through the tops of the spruce. The rustling of leaves, the fabric of the blind.

Then settle back to blend once again with the trees and the grasses. Listening. Watching. Waiting.

Movement to the left. A slow turn of my head. I see a flock of White Throated Sparrows flitting in the bushes. Feeding.

“Huurp, Huurp, Huurp.” The nasal, honking of the Trumpeter Swans. The pair spent the summer in the backwater of our valley. I don’t see them, but I know their voices.

“Graak, Graak.” A throaty deep hoarse call, “Kraaaaah.” The ravens are back.

Many crows calling. “Caarr, Caarr.” Another answer, “Prrrk, Prrrk.” They come closer.

Two “caaw” together. Very close. I stick my head out of the blind and peak up. Sitting on branches near me two crows eye me. One cocks her head. She seems to say, “how can you find breakfast sitting there, not moving?” I wait. Listen.

The sound of tires on gravel. Someone else is going to find breakfast.

“ToWEE toWee toWeeto, tweet.” The high rapid song of goldfinches near me. Though I can’t see them in the tall grasses, I know they are flitting from seed head to seed head. Feeding for winter. I listen.

Above me, a chorus of Canadian Geese. A slow paced, mellow, “h-ronk, h-ronk, h-ronk, h-ronk.” I feel drowsy. Minutes pass.

The wind picks up. Building like the sound of trains coming from opposite directions. The fabric of the blind flaps. A sustained gust picks up one edge of the blind. Cold fingers, nose and toes.

The crack of a rifle behind me, echoing down the valley. I’m alert. Heart pounding. Breathe. Minutes pass.

A dark shape in a far-off field. Too far to make the heart beat faster, but fun to watch. She grazes. And I wait and watch. Listening.

Tundra swans overhead. They fly low. A gentle “Klooo, kwoo.” I remember how they babble all night long. Like teenagers at a slumber party. I focus on my breath. Listening.

What I miss when I forget about the power of being still. All around me. Every day. I feel a reverence for my place in the world, for my place in the circle of life. I share this story with you. A bit of a Thanksgiving gift. Wishing you peace and gratitude. The power of being still.

For those who are wondering, Yes, I did get my deer. Happy Thanksgiving and Safe Hunting!