

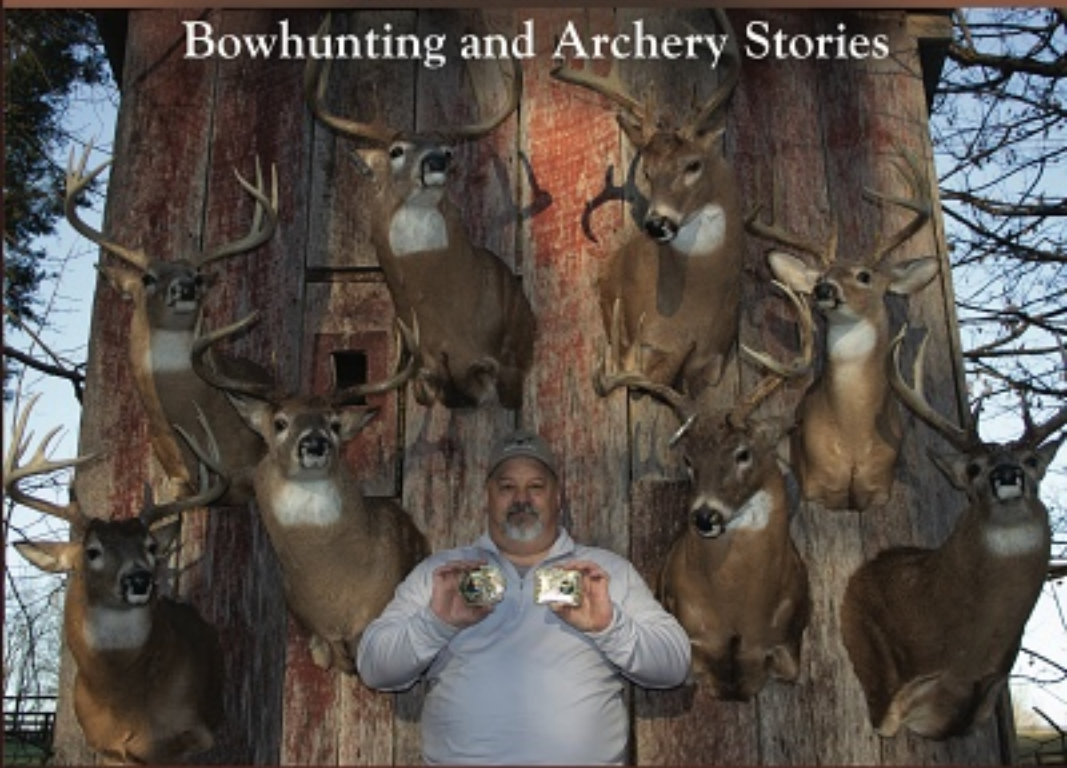
*Behind The Riser is a book of stories that cover thirty years of bowhunting and competitive archery. There are stories of both successful and unsuccessful hunts, as well as how I became an IBO “World Champion”.*

**Behind The Riser:  
Over 30 years of Bowhunting and Archery Stories**  
By Eric Grippa

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# BEHIND THE RISER

Over 30 Years of  
Bowhunting and Archery Stories



**ERIC GRIPPA**

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First Edition

# Archery

“The key to becoming a better archer is not to focus on your successes but to learn from your misses.”

– Byron Ferguson

“The bow is something you can hold like a child, but wield like a giant.”

– Howard Hill

“In archery, as in life, the successful shot requires both precision and patience.”

– Fred Bear

“I think the best thing about archery is it’s just me and the target. I don’t have to worry about anything else. That is my moment of peace.”

– Geena Davis

“Archery is not a sport of instant gratification. It’s a pursuit that rewards patience, practice, and perseverance.”

– Brady Ellison

“Archery is the poetry of the air.”

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

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## The Beginning.

Well, where did this all begin? I am only speculating, but I got my start in what I imagine was a similar way to how most archers out there got their start. My parents got for me a bow when I was a kid. I am not referring to a toy bow with suction cup-tipped arrows or one that launched projectiles of the foam variety. The bow I am talking about was a little red fiberglass recurve. It was probably only about a twenty to twenty-five-pound draw, it had a white ambidextrous handle, came with a vinyl finger tab and handful of wooden arrows. I don't remember why they bought it for me. I am not sure if I asked for one or if they just did it on their own. My father hunted, but not with a bow. He was into more upland game than big game, and to be fair, back then the deer population was nothing like it is today. I'll talk more about Dad and his influence in just a little bit.

Let's get back to the little red recurve. I was about ten years old, I think, and for some reason I really took to that thing. I remember shooting it in the backyard until my fingers were sore. I was not very good. I knew nothing about shooting a bow, let alone instinctively. My dad, as I mentioned earlier, was not a bowhunter but was a middle school PE teacher. Somewhere back in his physical education; education, he had a small unit on archery for gym class. So, he dipped way down deep in his archery knowledge and told me the following. "Put the arrow on the string. Hold the string with your index finger over the arrow, and your middle and ring finger underneath

it. Pull it back to the corner of your mouth, point it at your target and let it go.” That was the extent of his archery knowledge.

I now have learned that there is a little more to it than that. Anchor point, archer’s parallax, arrow spine, etc. meant nothing to me back then. No wonder my accuracy in those days was inconsistent at best. Let’s just say, anything smaller than a paper plate past ten yards away was pretty safe. That didn’t stop me though. I shot and shot that little red bow. That is probably where the first spark for the sport was lit, but it was going to have to wait a little while.

When I was eleven, Dad decided I was old enough to start hunting with him. So, I took my hunter safety course, got my first Ohio hunting license and just like that, I was a hunter. This is the period in my life where I hit pause on the archery thing. I, along with my dad, our beagles, and a few of his buddies did our part to rid southwestern Ohio of cottontail rabbits. For the next few years, a shotgun was my weapon of choice.

As I mentioned earlier, bowhunting, or just hunting deer at all, was not really on our radar. Back in the 1980’s, when we were rabbit hunting, we never saw any deer, especially in the early 80’s. I can remember this one hunting trip in particular. We were heading out to go rabbit hunting and while driving to one of our favorite spots, we went by a cut cornfield. Dad was driving and I just happened to glance over and I saw about seven deer in that field. I couldn’t believe my eyes.

“Dad, look at all those deer!” I exclaimed.



“Where?” he asked.

By the time I realized what they were and got the words out of my mouth, we had already gotten past the point where he could see in the field. I explained to him, “I’m telling you, there were a bunch of deer in that field!”

Although he didn’t admit it at the time, I am pretty sure he didn’t believe me, because he swung the van around to get a look for himself. Fortunately, they were still there.

“Wow, I have never seen that many deer at the same time,” he said.

Can you imagine? At that time, he was somewhere in his late thirties, he grew up on a farm, lived in the southwestern Ohio area his entire life and had never seen seven or more deer at the same time. We talked about seeing those deer for weeks.

Fast forward a few years. My younger brother, Allen, had also reached the hunting age and was now a regular on our trips, but it wasn’t long after that that our dogs got too old to hunt. My dad’s hunting buddies moved away, I went away to school, and for some reason the rabbit population seemed to be on the decline. I wonder if it had anything to do with the increasing deer and coyote populations? (That should’ve been read in a sarcastic tone.) During that time, from the tail end the 80’s and early 90’s, I actually went a few years without hunting at all. I had started to fill that void with Bass fishing. I loved it, but it just wasn’t the same.

Then one fateful evening my then girlfriend, now wife, and I were at the wedding of one of our friends from high school. The reception was basically a high school reunion for us. At one point in the evening I found myself across the table from Danny. I of course knew him from school. He was a bowhunter and had started pretty early in his life, at least as long as I had known him from our days together in Environmental Biology class.

As I mentioned before, we archers love stories, and this moment was no different. Danny was telling me about a very nice buck he had just killed a few weeks prior. If memory serves it was a very large eleven pointer, with great mass and tine height. I was hanging on his every word, just absolutely captivated by the story. When he finished I had already decided that bowhunting deer was something I not only wanted but I needed to do. My only problem was I had nothing. No bow, no arrows, no treestand; heck I'm pretty sure I didn't even have any camos. So, I asked him, "Hey, if I get a bow, will you give some pointers and help me get started?"

"Absolutely." He replied. (He later told me that he thought I was full of crap and was just blowing smoke)

That was all I needed. Right then and there the wheels started turning. Where can I get a bow? As a poor college student, I knew I was going to have to stick to the used or even the hand-me-down market. I quickly remembered that my Uncle Drew, my dad's youngest brother, had a compound bow. I remember the two of us shooting together back when I was

shooting Little Red. I knew he was not a bowhunter and after a quick double check with him, I had a bow. It was an old Bear Whitetail Hunter. It was a great bow in its day, but by 1991 standards, it was already obsolete: round wheels, steel cables, and the wheels were mounted on brackets bolted to the underside of the limb tips. Top of the line back in 1978. After getting my hands on it, I went to the local sporting goods store to get some arrows. Not knowing any better or any different, I grabbed the cheapest half dozen I could find. They were aluminum 2117's with five-inch vanes. Like I said, I knew nothing. I dug up my old finger tab I used with Little Red and started flinging arrows. It did not go very well.

I called Danny and he came over with his bow. We were going to shoot and he promised he'd show me a few things. His bow was much more..... let's say, up to date. I quickly noticed that he had this device that he strapped to his wrist. It clipped on the bow string to draw his bow with and then let it go with the pull of a trigger! Crazy!

"What is that?" I asked.

"It's called a release," he replied.

After a few minutes of shooting I soon came to the realization that I might in be over my head. I had this bow for all of about three days and it was already time to upgrade.

So, once again the wheels started turning. It's then that I remembered a buddy of mine, Jason from high school, who had a bow and I was pretty sure he wasn't hunting either. I

called him up, asked him if he still had it, and if so, would he be interested in selling it? Yes, and yes.

In less than a week and \$140 later I went from a 1970's compound bow to one that was popular in the 1980's. That bow was an Oneida Eagle. It was an interesting hybrid between a recurve and compound. If you know bows, you know what I am talking about. Still an older bow but man what a difference. I loved that bow. After saving a few more bucks I actually went to a Pro-shop this time and ordered some arrows with a proper spine and picked up a new release. Danny came by and gave me a few more pointers and I was off and running. It was just like I was that kid with his little red recurve. I shot every day, for hours. I wore a path in my parent's side yard walking back and forth to my target.

At this point in my life I had transferred schools and was now commuting. This allowed me to live back at home at Mom and Dad's and was considerably cheaper. I was working as a bartender back then and that allowed me plenty of time to shoot that summer. I remember working late at the bar, and when I woke up, the first thing I wanted to do was shoot my bow. It was my routine. Get up, shoot, eat, go tend bar, get home late and do it all again the next day.

Having never hunted deer before, let alone with a bow, and never killed anything bigger than a ground hog, I was genuinely concerned about this "Buck Fever" ailment I had heard so much about. Being a biology major, I had studied in a few of my courses the Fight or Flight response. Based on what I was hearing about this "Buck Fever" thing, I quickly

deduced that the two had to be tied to together. Knowing the effects of adrenaline on the human body, I knew enough to know that I had to get my shot sequence burned into my neural pathway. So, I kept shooting. Coupling that with something Danny told me, I was very driven. I remember it well.

“I just want to tell you that there is very good chance the first deer you shoot at, you will probably miss, and the first deer you hit, you probably won’t find.”

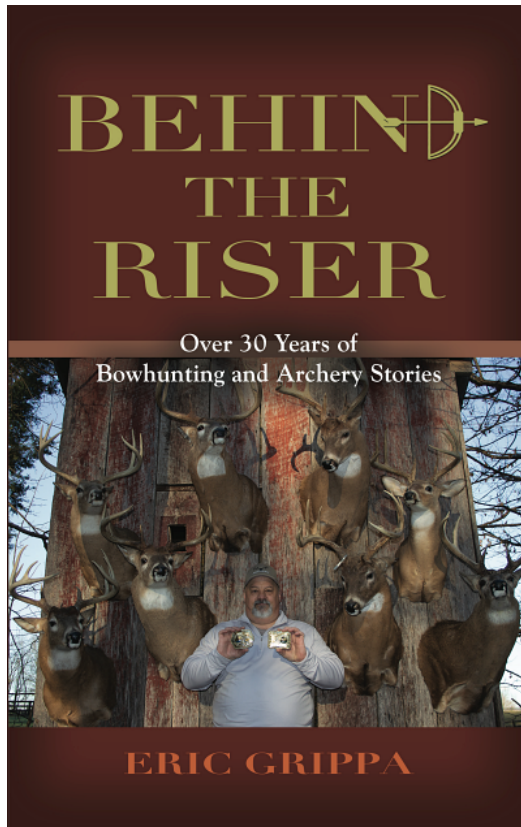
I did not want either of those predictions to come true, so I kept shooting. Plus, I just loved flinging those arrows. The pin settles, the shot breaks, the arrow gracefully arcs on its parabolic path to hit the exact spot behind my sight pin. Is there a better feeling? I submit, there is not.

I have been “Behind the Riser” now for over thirty years and have launched thousands, probably a few hundred thousand arrows and it never gets old. I was bound and determined to make sure that Danny’s prediction did not come true. I kept up my daily routine and actually made one more bow upgrade about six weeks prior to opening day of my very first deer season. I did some horse trading and actually ended up with Danny’s bow. It was a High Country Sniper, the one he killed that big 11-pointer with and the bow he had that first day we shot together. I was on my third bow and I hadn’t even gone hunting yet.

Danny and I did a little scouting in preparation and he showed me a few things about deer sign and what to look for. I

acquired a few tree steps along with a stand that had no seat, and picked what I thought was a good tree. As we got closer to opening day, I switched over to broadheads and made sure I was sighted in with them. I had to make a few tweaks but was soon on target with my broadheads. I mailed in my application for my two tags; yes, we had to mail in an application back then, and when they arrived in the mail I was ready. I was going to be a bowhunter!

I went from hearing a hunting story at a wedding reception to being at the base of a tree, in full camo, bow in hand, ready to climb into my ambush spot. I was twenty-two years old and had no idea where this “hobby” (I use that term as an ironic understatement) was going to take me. I find it very fitting my journey down this path with archery started with a story and now I am writing a book of stories. It’s kinda funny how things go. Oh, did I get the first deer I shot at, or was Danny right? Well, I guess you are going to have to read on to find out.



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