



# My Friend the Deer

JEFF GUTHRIE confronts life and death on a back road

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*My heart leapt into my throat seeing this poor animal suffering.*

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I'm still not sure why, but on this day I decided to carry my gun with me in the car. I rarely ever took it with me when driving, but this day was different. I live about 30 miles outside of the city, in a nice rural area with tobacco fields and lots of woods. On this day, my wife and I loaded up the car and headed into town. It was such a pretty day. We talked about inconsequential things as we drove, just basking in the glow of togetherness. It was bright and sunny with lots of little animals scampering through the woods and birds flying above.

We had to drive a lot of twisting, turning, two-lane blacktops on our trip into town. It was on one of these roads that, as we rounded a bend, my wife and I both noticed a deer's head poking through the underbrush on

the side of the road. I slowed and we both watched for a minute. The deer actually looked at us as we passed and, honest to God, it looked like the deer was crying.

My wife reached over and put her hand on my arm, to tell me to stop and check on that deer, but I was already slowing. I quickly turned the car around and headed back. I stopped about 100 feet away from the deer and hopped out, telling my wife to stay in the car. I knew that a deer could get ugly, especially if it was protecting a fawn. As I got closer, the deer turned to look at me. I could tell she was frightened but I could also see that she was suffering. Her eyes were ringed with water and mucous and drool ran from her mouth. My heart leapt into my throat seeing this poor animal suffering. I had no idea what was wrong but I was certainly going to try and help.

I crossed the ditch onto the scrub-covered side where the deer's body was hidden. I was still 40 feet away from the deer. I pushed through the thin layer of undergrowth and peered at the deer. From my vantage point, I could see that the deer's hind end was a mess. It appeared that a car had hit her — one that must have been traveling fast. I could see that both her legs were broken and it looked like she had spinal damage, as well. Tears sprang to my eyes as I squatted down to watch her for a moment. I looked back at the road at the probable point of impact and could see that she had dragged herself from the road, across the ditch, and up into the weeds. My God, that must have been incredible agony for the poor deer.

I hunched down low so the deer could no longer see me but I could still see her. As my heart ached and tears streamed down my face, I watched as she struggled for breath. I asked God to give her strength to endure such agony and I prayed that he would take her life right then. Nothing happened. I thought to myself, "God, how could you let such a beautiful creature suffer? Why would you do this and then not take her life?" My faith was tested that day because my heart ached. I questioned God and asked him for an explanation. None was forthcoming.

I sat for another couple of minutes, tears still occasionally running down my face. The deer was having a hard time. Her eyes kept glazing over and her head would droop. Before passing out, the deer would snap her head back up and squeak in pain. Oh God, I cried inwardly, please end her pain. Again, no answer. Finally, I semi-crawled out of the underbrush, crossed the ditch back onto the road.

I steeled my nerves for what I was about to do. I walked back to the car and opened the door.

My wife looked anxiously at me and asked, "Is there anything you can do for the deer?"

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“Yes, honey. There is one thing I can do for her.”

“What?” she asked as I reach across my seat and grabbed the butt of my pistol.

“Oh God, please don’t!” she cried.

“Sweetheart, I questioned my Lord today and asked him why he wouldn’t end the suffering of that poor deer, while all along that is exactly what he intended. Why else would I have brought my pistol? I don’t think I’ve had this gun in the car more than twice and for some odd reason, I brought it with us today. Can you explain that?”

My wife just looked at me with tears in her eyes. She reached over and squeezed my free hand and that was all she

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*Jeff Guthrie grew up in North Raleigh and now lives in Youngsville, N.C., with his wife and their 10-month-old baby. By day, he works in Raleigh as a software-support analyst; by night, he can be found either brainstorming for a new story or fixing lattes at Starbucks.*

needed to say. I took my pistol, hid it behind my back, and walked around behind the car. It took me a few minutes to crawl around where the deer could not see me. I got close enough and took just a moment to whisper silent thanks to God for putting me in the right place at the right time. Then, I did what was necessary.

I sat for a few minutes afterward, smelling the fresh cordite hanging in the air, and thought about my faith. I now know that God placed his hands on me and told me to bring my gun on this trip to town. I’ll never doubt that for as long as I live. I will also never forget those beautiful eyes, gazing at me, thanking me, as the light faded from them. I saw in those eyes, the recognition of a friend.

I returned to the car, visibly shaken, and laid the empty gun on the dash. I pulled myself into my seat as my wife watched silently. She didn’t have to say anything, and I could see on her face that she hurt as bad as I did. I could also see the wonder and glory in her eyes from the realization that God had visited us today. We both know that God is with us every day, but one seldom gets an opportunity to feel his presence and act upon it. We were sad but blessed that day. As I started the car to leave, my wife reached over with both hands, hugged me and kissed me on the cheek.

“I love you,” she said.

“I love you too, baby,” I replied as I pulled out and drove away.

Less than a year later, I sold my gun back to the gun shop where I bought it. In today’s day and age, owning a gun seemed wrong. Guns are weapons of destruction and should never be taken lightly. I was blessed this one time, however, to have used my gun for mercy. I will never forget that deer. She will always hold a place in my heart. Goodbye, my friend. I know you are in a better place now. •

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