

RATS

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BY James Collins

If you were 20 years old and lived in the blue-collar section of the Bronx on a Friday or Saturday night, you met your buddies at the local bar. This was neither desirable, informative, nor was it always peaceful. This was a place where you could get into a fight at the drop of a hat.

Because of this nasty environment, I did everything I could to get out of the Bronx on the weekends. My brother, my best friend and I went hunting or fishing on Saturdays and Sundays. My brother and his friends often went bass fishing and roughed it staying overnight in tents.

It came to my attention that there was one aspect of hunting open to us that was not limited nor had a season. This was the hunting of rats with small caliber guns. Now rats tend to like garbage dumps and friends of mine let me know that in Patterson New York there was a massive town dump. It had rats by the thousands and tens of thousands. The residents of the town had no problem with the teenagers and young kids on weekends going up there and shooting rats as long as it did not interfere with the dump itself.

On one memorable weekend, we all agreed we had to try this experience. A friend of mine named Eddie Daley lived in Mount Kisco and he agreed to meet with us at my aunt's house in Purdys New York. Since Patterson was 90 miles from New York City, this 50-mile drop off point was convenient for everyone. We met and all got into the big Chrysler and found our way to Patterson.

We arrived about 7 o'clock in the summer afternoon and unfortunately, it was still so bright out we had to sit around and wait a couple of hours for darkness to appear. In the meantime, people were dropping stuff off at the dump and we learned that there was one area off to the side, which had seven dead cows. A dairy farmer had placed them there a few days earlier. This raw meat was a massive attractant for the rats. As it became darker, it became more difficult to see one another. Luckily, we had many flashlights because we had taped the flashlights underneath the barrels of the .22 caliber rifles so we could illuminate our prey and then shoot as needed. At the same time, we wanted to make sure we did not shoot each other. About 10:30 that night, the moon came up. It was a full moon and with the full moon came a lot of illumination. It was far from daylight but it was bright enough to see and to move safely into the killing ground. The first rats were a little bit timid because they could see us. After we shot a half-dozen, they became more cautious and then the clouds covered the moon. When that happened it became pitch black. Darkness enveloped one like a shroud. Now the only way to see the rats was to see them in the beam from the flashlights. Rats were everywhere. We were shooting until the barrels were hot. We killed them by the dozens. I even shot one the size of a cat out of a tree. That gave us pause to reflect. We had not expected them to be above us. Now we looked up before we moved near a tree. The most exciting moment came when Ed Daley flushed a rat but Ed was standing between the rat and its hole. In its panic, the rat went

straight at Daly. Ed dropped the gun and ran. He spent the rest of the night in the closed up car.

For years after, we met and retold the story to gales of laughter. Our city friends spent their reunions at AA meetings or wakes for those who died of alcoholism.

THE END