

**The Bird Pie - Eat What You Kill
by M.D. Smith, IV**

I have not killed a song bird in over 50 years, but when I was 12 years old and it was Christmas of 1952, I got a great gift, the "Most Powerful BB Pump Gun" that Daisy Mfg. Co. made.



Everything Daisy made was spring operated and not the high powered real Pneumatic air rifles made by Crosman and Benjamin (that came a year later). But it was the most powerful one Daisy made and my friends told me it would kill a squirrel. Well, it wouldn't as I found out Christmas afternoon, but it was deadly on birds.

I envisioned myself in the image of great explorers Lewis & Clark or Davy Crockett living off the land in the woods. My father who had taught me to shoot, the rules of gun safety and hunting, always said that hunters "ate what they killed." By golly, that's what I was going to do. The new Daisy Pump gun was quite accurate, and I earned NRA marksmanship bars shooting the "Official NRA 15' Target" with scores that put me in "Expert Marksman" and later "Sharpshooter" category. I often wore my NRA pin with bars hanging below it displaying my skills.

Time to be a "real" hunter and stop disposing of Sparrows, Larks and an occasional Robin in the trash or leaving in the woods for predators. We had a cook named Polly and she told me if I'd clean and collect the birds, she'd cook them for me when I got enough to make a good meal. I saw visions of our family of four (I had a younger sister) having a fine meal of game I had bagged in the woods near our house and me being singled out as the food provider for the whole family that evening. I was on a mission.

From that time in January on, I would come home from school every cold afternoon and put on "hunting clothes," the old blue jeans and old scratched leather jacket, to crawl around in the woods under thick cover and under giant bushes which were almost clear inside and a perfect vantage of an unsuspecting bird that might fly to roost for the afternoon that would be my prey. I rarely came home near dark at 5 pm empty handed. Then I had to clean my game tucked away in my jacket pockets in small paper sacks. It was cold squatting down on the concrete with ice cold water running from the hose as I picked the bird clean and basically did everything you would do to clean a chicken, but my game was MUCH smaller. Still, my small scout knife did the job and soon the bird or birds were ready to wrap in freezer paper and put in the deep freeze to wait until I had enough for a fine family meal. The sparrows were pitifully small, and all I saved was the breast meat out of them, as there would be no way to pick meat off a drumstick or wing. The occasional Robin or Blue Jay was much better keeping the whole bird.

Finally the day arrives that Polly tells me I have more than enough for a meal from the birds. I'd had a fine hunting season by March (I didn't hunt every day) and I was proud of the size of my game bag. Unknown to me, when Polly had said it was time to cook my birds, my mother said there was no way the rest of the family was going to eat them, and Polly would cook a regular meal for the rest of the family. Frying the small birds like Fried Chicken would have taken much too long and so Polly decided to make me a Bird Pie. She said she'd use all the birds like she would do if she were making "chicken and dumplings" and put a layered crust on the top and bake it. That didn't sound quite like I'd imagined, but what the heck, my game was being used because a "Hunter always eats what he kills." (My sons know this today as together we have cleaned and eaten squirrels as they grew up with pellet guns)

Dinner is served in the dining room with white table cloth, china plates and the food is brought in. The family was served plates with Meatloaf, mashed potatoes and green peas. I was served a casserole dish with a brown pie crust on top and inside were the dumplings made of flour

and the birds, all baked and cooked together. The smile went off my face when I realized I was not providing for the entire family as I envisioned. But I had my hunter's game meal, so I was still happy somewhat . . . until I tasted it. I had a small plate on the side and got several large servings of birds & dumplings. I picked up one of the larger birds by a leg, blew it to cool a bit and took a bite from the largest part, the breast. I did not taste good. It had a wild "gamey" taste and no other seasonings besides the taste of the not fully cooked dumplings. Ugh!

As my parents ate their meal, they smiled as they asked me how my dinner tasted. I said it was not quite as good as I had imagined, but I still went on eating. I stopped long before I was full, but I certainly had eaten enough. I sat at the table until the family was finished as customary and asked to be excused. Later in the kitchen I went to see if there was any more meatloaf, but it was all gone, and I did get some left over mashed potatoes. Polly asked me if I wanted the Bird Pie put in the fridge for the next night and I said no, and watched her rake the entire bowl full of dumplings and my small birds into the garbage can. I felt a sadness from all the time, work, wet cold hands and effort I had spent that was now being trashed in front of me. I truly appreciate to this day that my father and family "humored" me to be the "Great White Hunter" of Canterbury Road. I never had a Bird Pie again. I have certainly eaten Dove and Quail, properly prepared and I think are especially good marinated, wrapped in bacon and spices and roasted in the oven. The Bird Pie is just a memory.