

Photograph courtesy of John Hafner

## Rachel Hogan



***Meet Rachel Hogan our new chef, author and outdoors-woman. She has a unique culinary style merging wild game and comfort food, sometimes with a nutritious twist. As a professional chef for over a decade, she has honed her craft working in the wilds of South Dakota and guiding hunts with her English. Here is a more detailed life story of her....***

Life is strange...and weird...and wonderful. Like a well-seasoned dish, life develops flavor and depth by our experiences. We try on different thoughts and practices, just like changing summer clothes for winter coats. And all these paths eventually lead to where we need to be, if we keep doing the next thing.

Yet, the path of my life hasn't been as straight as my grandparents' gravel road. In my teens, I was fortunate to start training and competing with field-bred English springer spaniels. This ingrained in me a deep and earnest respect for sporting dogs and the outdoor lifestyle. I didn't foresee that Lyme disease would present a curve on that road and become one of my biggest teachers. My health deteriorated severely, and I was left in a wheelchair for years during my early 20s. I didn't know at the time that the illness was just the perspective shift and course correction that I needed. I always knew I loved to cook, but this life-changing battle to regain my health let me know just how important food was for physical and mental wellness. Cooking became a way to heal my body and my spirit.

After recovering my mobility and a level of health, I decided to attend a nutritionally focused culinary school. I learned so much about beautiful food and addressing illness with diet. There was a major focus on how to celebrate vegetables and use Mother Nature to nurture us.

It has taken me several years to find my culinary voice. I didn't know if it was possible to marry the clean-eating perspective of my education with the "love and butter" mentality I inherited from my family as a child. I jokingly call the two parts "Jekyll and Hyde." But food is seasonal, just as hunting is seasonal. So is life. My goal is to find a balance, so I look to infuse as much health and nutrition as I can into food that delights the soul. I lean toward approachable food with the hope of empowering others to create on their own. You won't find me saying no to a kale smoothing or some fried pheasant. It's easy to get lost in the details. So, the philosophy I now employ is this: Eat whole food as often as possible. Minimize consumption of processed food. Maximize use of food close to its natural state. A cheese puff probably doesn't qualify, but goat cheese definitely does. Try to connect to where food comes from as often as you

can. Eat lots of vegetables but make them delicious and irresistible. And don't be afraid to utilize some good quality pork nectar, a.k.a bacon fat, from time to time. This is my recipe for success.

I now know that a big part of the genius in my mammaw's gift to me was to let food be fun. Let it be interactive. *Taste. Feel. Create.* Cooking as an art, not a science, so let go. This brings to mind a childhood afternoon—permitted as only a grandmother would—allowing me to throw pie dough scraps at the wall while the pies were baking. Imagine! My mom is still traumatized. But there is inspiration in the joy and indulgence of that memory. So this past fall, when I had the privilege of hunting with a teenaged girl at my workplace in South Dakota, I couldn't resist pulling her into the kitchen to create a pheasant pot pie. What could make a golden flakey crust, tender meat, veggies, and a smoky creamy sauce better? Creating it with someone else, especially a younger set of hands. From rolling out savory dough to filling and fluting crust, and finally applying egg wash to ensure golden-brown perfection—we made a one-of-a-kind piece of edible art and memories. It was messy and joyous, just as Mammaw would have loved. I was so deeply honored to be able to spend some time creating, sharing a few laughs, and making a bit of a mess with this lovely young woman.

After the hunting season came to a close, I pondered those times in the kitchen, both as the young mind and now as the mentor. The pieces had finally all fallen into place. Does it age me a bit? Probably. But now, I am the one who can assist in creating that "loved up" feeling, just as Mammaw did for me all those years back. I have the privilege of passing on the joy that creating food can bring to the next generation.

So why should you get in the kitchen? Because it's a way to share your story. Find the balance of nutrition and decadence that's right for you. Why should you utilize game meat? Because it's a pure connection to the source. Game meat is lean and nutritious and delicious. It stems from a beautiful partnership that we share afield with our companions, whether they are canine or the two-legged variety. And why involve the younger generation? Because it's an honor. It's a tribute. And it will be our legacy.