

*“Smells are surer than sights or sounds to make your heart strings crack.” Rudyard Kipling*

## Sniffing Out a Memory

*From an article by Boyd Gibbon, 1986*

On the wall outside my bedroom hangs a photograph of my grandfather in his brown hat and windbreaker standing with my father and me. My grandfather died years ago, and his image in the frame, caught in a moment of posed reunion, often reminds me of my boyhood when he doted on me as his hunting and fishing companion. Yet the recollections are vague and distant.

Recently, however, I took his old deerskin hunting vest out of the closet and on an impulse pressed it to my face and sniffed. Abruptly there came over me a rush of emotion and memory as intimate as it was compelling. No longer was I an adult squinting across a chasm of years at dim events. Suddenly I was a boy again, and there in all but the flesh was my grandfather, methodically reloading his shotgun as the flushed quail sailed beyond the mesquite.

This was no hazy reverie. I could feel his whiskered cheek against mine and smell his peculiar fragrance of age, wool, dust, and a touch of Old Grand-Dad. Momentarily, I was once more on the floor of my grandparents' breakfast room, the linoleum cool against my belly as I sketched B-17s, then sneaking down the hall into my great-uncle's gloomy bedroom hung with mounted pheasants and deer heads—musky and mysterious. The epoch slowly faded as I lay curled up in the backseat of my grandfather's Ford, returning from a long hunt in Mexico, half-listening to the men up front and Fred Allen on the radio, drifting into a sweet exhausted sleep.

All this from the whiff of a vest.

