

A REALLY





Author Gerry Danko was thrilled when he found a nice knife stuck in the snow while elk hunting 40 years ago. The knife's story didn't stop there, though.
(Photo by Ken "Mitch" Mitchell)

GOOD KNIFE

When a hunter found a knife lost in the snow during a successful hunting trip, he never imagined he'd find the blade's original owner decades later

By Gerry Danko

In 1978, I was with a group of people from Powell who hunted in the Crandall and Sunlight areas of northwest Wyoming. We drove from a cabin at Squaw Creek to the Russell Peak area. It was a tough drive to the upper plateau where we unloaded a lone snow machine and left it with our pickups while we fanned out on foot in search of elk.

I took off alone on the south flank of Russell Mountain and moved up into the trees, working my way west to the peak. After a few miles, I crossed to the north side and worked my way back to the east. I bumped into a cow and calf about half way back, and since it was downhill I decided to take the cow. After field dressing the elk, I slid it down the side of the ridge through thick timber and deep snow. When I ran out of downhill help, I started to walk out in the flat. I had marked the place in the trees next to a horse track in deep snow and was about to head back to where the pickups and my companions were. I looked down to see which direction the horse track was going and noticed something dark sticking in one of the hoof prints. I reached in and pulled out a hunting knife that was suspended vertically in the deep snow of the hoof print.

“What luck!” I thought. I wondered about what that horseman would think when he needed it and would find it missing.

I walked back a couple of miles and met up with my crew which was reassembling at our pickups. One man had brought a piece of corrugated metal siding with a tow rope attached. He and I rode in on the snow machine and located the cow. Bringing it out whole was an easy ride on the deep snow.

I really liked the knife I had found and made no effort to understand who may have had it slip from its scabbard that day. I had a spot for it in my bone saw scabbard, and it accompanied me on almost every hunt from that time on. When my son, Carl, started to hunt with me, he always made sure I had “that knife” along because we seemed to do well when we were so outfitted.

In 2007, new neighbors moved in across the road from our place south of Powell. Ken and Pat Mitchell turned out to be a great neighborhood fit. Ken, who we called Mitch, had attended school in Gardiner, Montana, while his family lived in nearby Mammoth in Yellowstone National Park. He had also attended school in Powell. Now retired from the electronics field in Phoenix, Arizona, the couple wanted to escape the heat and population, so they returned to Wyoming.

Ken “Mitch” Mitchell, left, and Gerry Danko went on several elk hunts together over the years. The friends were surprised there was a connection between the two dating to when Gerry found a knife while on a hunting trip four decades ago. (Photo by Carl Danko)



DID YOU KNOW?

Gerry Danko didn't know it when he found the knife, but the blade was made in a city reputed for its quality knives and blades: Solingen, Germany.

Knives, swords, scissors, daggers and various forms of cutlery have been made in Solingen since the middle ages. Dubbed "The City of Blades," Solingen continues to live up to its reputation to this day. Blades made in Solingen are known worldwide, and they have held a reputation as quality items for centuries. It's of little surprise that the memory of the quality knife lived with the original owner and his family for decades after it was lost to the trail.



Carl Danko accompanied his father Gerry Danko, friend Ken Mitchell and others on an elk hunt in Park County. Carl regularly asked his dad to bring his found knife during hunting trips because it seemed to bring good fortune. (Photo by Gerry Danko)

WHERE IS IT NOW?

By Tracie Binker, Wyoming Wildlife editor

When Gerry Danko first contacted *Wyoming Wildlife* in 2018 about a story detailing how he found a great knife and then discovered decades later that it once belonged to his best friend's father, it certainly piqued our interest. He submitted the piece earlier this year, and we were excited to see it in the magazine.

Gerry passed away in July 2019, but his desire to pass on the knife as a legacy has been fulfilled. After first writing the essay in November 2018, Gerry gave the knife to his friend Mitch so it could be passed on to his grandson — Jaxson Allen. The knife is now with Jaxson's mother for safekeeping until the right time for him to have the knife on his own.

IT'S A REALLY GOOD KNIFE





Mitch had a lot of family in the area as his father Don had retired to Powell after years of being the head of the Bell Telephone region around Yellowstone, southern Montana, and western Wyoming. Don was an avid hunter and had taken Mitch on many hunts from his early teens onward. Mitch continued to hunt with his dad for many years, even though his career caused him many moves in and out of state.

Within a short time Mitch, Don and I were doing some hunting and horseback riding together. One day when Mitch and I were on an elk hunt, he noticed the knife with antler handle. He said his dad once had a knife just like that made in Solingen, Germany, but had lost it. His dad had told him it was a really good knife and he regretted losing it.

I told the story of how I had found the knife in such an unlikely spot — a horse track in the snow on the north side of Russell Mountain. It got kind of quiet. He explained that his dad had lost his knife while riding his horse on that very trail. Talk about serendipity. The knife that had accompanied me on many hunting adventures over the years belonged to the family that had moved in across the road. How can something like that happen? You can't make this stuff up!

A short time later when we were all together, I offered to return the knife to Don, but he said no. He'd gotten along without it for 30 years, and he felt that I should continue to use it. It's a really good knife.

Don passed away in July 2011. Mitch told me I should continue using the knife. I think the next best thing would have been to give it to Ken's boy, Levi, but he, a four-time deployed Marine, also passed away in 2011.

But all is not lost and we have a continuance. Mitch plans to give the knife to his grandson as soon as I'm done with it.

I have since made a sheath for the knife so it can stand alone as a legacy to some great hunts and enormous friendships.

Now I'm done with this knife. So, about 40 years after I found it, I'm giving it to Mitch for his grandson.

I'm sure glad I had a chance to use it. It was a really good knife.

—Gerry Danko submitted this story to Wyoming Wildlife, and it was selected as a contribution to the magazine.