



Nathan Wright

Lake Charles, LA

The early 1900's were lean years in the agricultural lowlands of central Louisiana. The first world war. Then the great depression. The second world war. Tough times. Folks did what they had to do to make a living. Moonshine and market hunting along with raising free range hogs and maybe a cow or two was how Nathan's folks make out. Those were serious people. Be serious or be broke and hungry. Inevitably they sold ducks at the train station in town. There the birds were put on trains headed south to New Orleans or north to Shreveport. Calls, decoys, boats, guns, ammo - today those things are toys. In those days they were tools of the trade. Nathan was raised up by the folks who lived that life. And in many respects were still living that way well into the early '70's. That world and those people taught Nathan the things that have distinguished him throughout 42 years of guiding and lead to 18 waterfowl world championship calling titles.

In 1950 Nathan's parents left Avoyelles parish and moved down to Lake Charles, LA to take jobs in the booming petrochemical complex. He was born there in 1954. Nathan's dad loved to hunt ducks and had "put many ducks on the train" back in the depression days before he went Pacific Island hopping with the Marine Corp during the 2nd world war. His dad hunted ducks down south of Lake Charles and Nathan grew up doing that with him. Of course, in those days if kids wanted to hunt, they first had to work. Grassing blinds, dealing with decoys, launching, gassing, driving, and maintaining the boats and pirogues, those things were mandatory. Hunting was a privilege to be earned. In this way Nathan learned the nuts and bolts about what he'd later need to know to be a guide.

Nathan's dad really missed farm living. Working at the chemical plants paid well but it just wasn't the same. In 1964 Nathan's dad began working on his days off with an extended family of Sweet Lake Land and Oil sharecroppers who farmed rice southeast of Lake Charles. There were a lot of cattle in Louisiana then and the rice farmers alternated their rice crops with fallow pasture for cows. The farmers would flood duck hunting ponds in the rice stubble and keep the fallow pastures dry for the cows. The grown-ups hunted in the flooded rice. A kid had to wait and maybe get a hunt if a grownup wasn't going. One of the farmers told Nathan that if there were no spots in the rice stubble that he could hunt geese in the fallow pasture with the cows. This suited Nathan just fine.

The dry pastures meant he would be hunting geese. Specklebellys mostly and without decoys, and for eight years Nathan hunted with cows. He learned to call and hunt Specks following those cows around. He hunted with the cows till he graduated from high school in '72. This was the same year that commercial club hunting began in southwest Louisiana. There had always been big duck clubs with wealthy members. Rich folks. But what began in '72 meant that just regular people could buy hunts on

a one day at a time basis. Nathan got wind of one of these new clubs located in Toomey Louisiana. He went for an interview which required a demonstration of calling skills. Nathan got the job and began a 42-year guiding career.

Through guiding he met a lot of interesting people. One man was a doctor from Bossier Louisiana. "Doc" traveled with his doctor's bag that contained at least 200 calls. Every kind of duck and goose produced back then. 50 years ago. Doc heard Nathan blowing his home-made speck calls and when they returned to the camp after a hunt, he invited Nathan to dig around in his call stash. That was the day Nathan first used a PS Olt Fox and Coyote call. A predator call built by the Olt company of Pekin, Illinois. Instantly Nathan heard the speck in the call and from that day till today that rudimentary sound has been the basis of 50 years of building calls.

In '85 his friend who quit guiding to go to LSU law school called Nathan and told him about a speck calling contest that was going to be held under the Baton Rouge Mississippi River bridge. He talked Nathan into entering the contest and that day Nathan won the first contest he ever entered, the 1985 Louisiana State Championship. This was the first of 55 championships he would win over the next 30 years. Nathan was hooked. Problem was that there were only two contests held in Louisiana each year. After winning both of those for many consecutive years and wearing out his welcome, he traveled to Houston TX to compete in some events over there. In those days callers from Texas did not come to Louisiana and callers from Louisiana did not compete in Texas. Like two different worlds. Through competition he met several Texas callers, in particular David Pruett and James Prince. The three began a friendship that created a bridge between Texas and Louisiana. Now it's typical for callers to compete across state lines.

In 2006 Nathan began exploring the idea of building goose calls on a professional basis. For many years he had built calls for friends and to sell to his clients but trying to enter a nationwide market was much different than that. That year he launched RedBone Custom calls. The adventures that followed took him to California, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas and back home in Louisiana. Making those trips, combined with his continuing success as a competition caller got his calls into the spotlight of the blossoming social media platforms.

2020 marked the end of Nathan's career as a full-time guide and as a competition caller. He still judges contests from time to time but mostly he just builds calls and goes fishing. He never completed a formal education or held a steady job except for when his sons were young. Taking that guiding job back in '72 meant giving up opportunities for a steady life for a life outdoors doing what he was raised to do. Early on his family and friends encouraged him to give up guiding and become a respectable member of normal life but he held out choosing what he loved to do over the security of steady work.

He is old enough to have experienced the end of hunting like it was in the old days. The golden years of water fowling when there were numbers of birds like cannot be imagined by today's standards. He saw it like it was back in "the day", knew market hunters, saw and experienced some of the things they did. He saw the land before all of it was drained and tamed down into what it is now. He counts himself fortunate beyond measure to have seen those things and been part of them. Apart from his relationship with God and his family he considers the guide life he lived to be the greatest blessing of his life.