

# Bagging A Bargain On The Quest For Dead Animals

My husband is on a quest for dead animal heads. Cheap ones.

Where we are from, decorating with mounted fruit-of-the-kill is unusual. Since relocating to South Dakota, the wide open spaces containing pheasants, deer, buffalo, pronghorns and geese have infected us with dead animal head fever. We are delirious with it.

It has not occurred to either of us that he should actually hunt in order to procure one of these. That the goal might be to engage in this activity and hang the trophy on the wall as a memento of manly courage and skill. Where is the fun in that? My husband would rather stalk a bargain.

So far we have two pheasants preserved forever in stunned mid-flight, and a prairie chicken. Technically, these would be considered dead birds instead of animals, but I digress.

The prairie chicken is an elderly, bereft-looking garage sale find that landed on



**Kerry Peresta**  
Columnist

my husband's desk as a joke while we were out of town. We didn't know what it was, but it went straight on the wall anyway. Our first South Dakota dead and mounted creature! We began to feel like natives.

We were told our windfall might be a female pheasant and quite illegal to put on a wall, whether we killed it or not. This information spurred a flurry of internet research, whereby we discovered we did, indeed, put a prairie chicken, or grouse, on the wall. But I hid it halfway behind a ficus tree just in case. It looks like it was stunned by gunfire and leapt from the tree. Which is ridiculous because they live on the ground. But still, it's

a rather nice effect.

The pheasants adorn a huge wall in our living area, and are flying gracefully toward each other. My husband hammered out a bargain on these babies that was unbelievable.

We have gasped over beautifully mounted caribou, buffalo, moose and mountain goats. We have salivated over craftily posed pronghorn and elk. A nice rack of antlers gives us goose bumps.

My husband alertly spies out possible dead animal head venues everywhere we go. Some of them he has approached more than once, reasoning that the longer a dead animal head is displayed, the lower the price will be. Apparently this is not the case. I have noticed his repeated

visits elicit evasive behavior from shopkeepers. They seem to disappear out the back whenever they see him coming in the front. I have decided to let him lowball dead animal head venues without me.

My absolute favorite place in the Black Hills is Sylvan Lake Lodge. It is an animal head Mecca, including moose, elk, buffalo, pronghorn and a mountain goat. I like to sit under the biggest head in the room, which in this case happens to be a buffalo, and gaze fondly at his assorted fallen comrades-in-arms mounted on every square inch. Sometimes I sit under the mountain goat, who somehow talked the taxidermist into preserving his entire body. They have become like

family to me.

Recently we visited what appeared to be the dead animal capital of the United States: Jackson Hole, Wyoming. We were astonished at the variety of animals displayed for sale; among them a full-size polar bear (\$35,000), a full-size buffalo (you don't want to know, and besides, who wants a full-size buffalo in their house?), an intense, searingly realistic cougar (\$17,000) and antler concoctions defying description (\$12,000 and up). We decided then and there to

commit more enthusiastically to our quest. Paying for a dead animal what we would pay for a small automobile is out of the question.

We are positive that we would be satisfied with a few more bereft-looking and elderly dead animal heads. They're out there. They are reasonably priced. We'll flush them out eventually.

*Kerry Peresta is a mother of four adult children, a syndicated humor columnist and a career marketing professional. She and her husband live in Ft. Pierre, SD. Visit Kerry at [www.emptynesting.webs.com](http://www.emptynesting.webs.com) for more information.*

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