



Passing the Torch to the Next Generation

By Jim Hamm

I always thought chasing whitetailed deer with a handmade wooden bow was the zenith of hunting, that it couldn't possibly get any better than pulling the rug out from under a mature buck with an arrow at ten yards.

Boy, was I wrong.

My granddaughter, Kaylie, started whitetail hunting when she was eight years old. She began shooting with a .22 single shot when she was five, and progressed to a .223, which she shot well in practice.

With the drought in full effect then, she was restricted to does when she started hunting with her dad, Reed. An opportunity presented itself that first year.

The first time she tried to squeeze off a shot she started shaking. Reed whispered for her to take some deep breaths and try again. Same result. After a third try, and so much adrenalin-induced shaking she opted not to shoot, she said to Reed, "This is a lot harder than it looks."

When later she related her experience, we all laughed, but we were quick to point out that we weren't laughing at her, but with her, because we had all been in her shoes at one time or another. She resolved to do better the next year.

That same season, our friends Craig and Carrie Merritt brought their sons for a first hunt. Their oldest, Coit, was ten years old and shooting a 22-250. When he got a chance at a doe, he made a nice shot and took home his first venison.

The kids practiced shooting for months afterwards, and the next season were eager to try again. Best of all, the drought had ended and the deer were in good shape, so they had the green light for a buck if they chose.

They were again hunting with their dads, and over a couple of days passed on several bucks. On the evening of Dec. 5th, 2015, they sat out once more.

Coit was then eleven years old, and was sitting with his dad on a clearing along a power line. About 5:30 I got a text from Craig. "Coit shot at a nice



Coit and Kaylie pose with their fine Mills County Whitetail bucks.

buck. Undetermined result. Please help."

Well, I loaded up my Blue Lacy tracking dog and held my breath all the way to their location, hoping he made a good shot. But no worries, for by the time I arrived they had already found Coit's buck, a fine eight point which had expired from a very precise hole in his heart.

As we field dressed the deer, Coit and Craig couldn't stop grinning. Neither could I.

Then we heard a shot that could only have come from nine year old Kaylie. I immediately started holding my breath again, wanting more than anything for her to have made an accurate shot and have good memories of her first deer.

By the time we loaded Coit's buck and reached

the wheat field where Kaylie and Reed were hunting, it was dark and we could see flashlight beams probing the ground. Reed reported that upon the shot at the edge of the field, the buck had darted into the brush and disappeared. They were on a scattered blood trail, but asked me to see what our tracking dog could do.

With nose down, our Blue Lacy took off for Bulls Creek which bordered the wheat field. But instead of crossing it as I expected, he took a hard left. Within twenty yards, he found the buck piled up in tall grass. The deer, shot squarely through the heart, had gone less than eighty yards.

"Here he is," I called, and Kaylie and her dad came at a trot.

Holding up the fine ten point's antlers, she stroked his hide and examined the shot placement. She suddenly stood and spun around and around in a circle, her arms upraised, a grin threatening to split her face.

Along about that time I had to get something out of my eye...

I've decided that as far as hunting goes, nothing could possibly be better than two young hunters getting their first bucks with perfect shots under pressure.

That day was the highlight of my fifty years of hunting, and I never fired a shot.