



Local Girl Grows Up 'Hunting with Poppy'

Bayleigh Hicks The Goldthwaite Eagle

My grandfather Jimmy Hicks and I started going hunting when I realized I wasn't getting included when he went.

At that time, I had no idea what a can of worms it would open, how many stories we would tell, and how much closer it would bring my Poppy and I. One day I decided I'd had enough of sitting back and watching while my best friend disappeared to a mysterious place my mom and granny called the "deer blinds" without me for hours at a time, so I asked if I could go.

Eventually, he decided to take me out and target practice with me. That's when I realized I didn't like shooting guns. So he gave me a couple of years of just going and sitting with him, not expecting me to try to shoot anything. Now, you can imagine sitting on the sidelines kind of got boring, so I'd usually bring a blanket and lay down in the floor of the blinds and go to sleep until he woke me up and told me it was time to go. Looking back I think all I really wanted was to be with him; it really didn't matter what we were doing.

Since I really didn't like shooting guns, he brought up the idea of shooting with a crossbow. It sounded intriguing so I tried it and loved it, so we began to sit with the crossbow. My grandfather has always been handy but the things he did to make the blinds adaptable for the bow were more than cool. For instance I wasn't tall enough to get a good angle to shoot from the high blinds we were in so he cut a notch out where my bow would rest and hinge back and forth in; pretty cool right?

We would sit in the cold blinds in the early mornings and the late nights waiting for the "perfect" buck, hoping one day I would finally find it. One day as we sat waiting for the perfect deer to grace us with its presence we saw a bobcat! My grandfather has impeccable aim, but he got rushed and shot just above him hitting the fence with the arrow making a horrible, nails on a chalkboard sound.

It was exciting, but what isn't with Poppy?

The pattern continued until one evening a nice buck walked out, and Poppy gave me the signal to ready, aim, and fire. The problems were as follows: right before I shot, I had developed something called buck fever where you get shaky. I closed my eyes as I pulled the trigger, and I felt the bow jerk two inches away from the target. Now from what you've probably



Bayleigh and Jimmy 'Poppy' Hicks share some quality time in a Mills County deer stand.

already gathered, my first shot at my grand champion show pony was not a success, but my Poppy just looked at me with a big grin and a sense of pride on his face as he laughed. It didn't bother him in the slightest that I'd missed. He was too busy being entertained at the fact that I was so shook over my "first shot."

Now after this I had made all the mistakes and knew everything there was and would ever be about deer hunting. The next time we prepared to enter the blinds was like suiting up for battle. I was ready to kill a deer, and not just any deer - the deer. I wanted so badly the approval of my grandfather, knowing now that it didn't matter what I did, I already had it. I was determined, and ready.

As we sat the next time in the blind I was focused, and wasn't going to be distracted. I had acquired a target, and this was my most important mission. As we sat I got more anxious about the possible kill I would make, and as the sun started to go down a group of deer hopped into the pin, and in the mix of deer stood what I thought, at that time, was the biggest buck I'd ever see.

Poppy gave me the go-ahead to shoot it and without moving a muscle I slowly squeezed the trigger of the crossbow and watched as the deer hit the ground and then stumbled back up and kept running.

I'd done it! I would finally be "one of the guys."

After the initial shock of the kill wore off, and we were ready to go find my acquired target, we hopped out of the blinds and started to look for drops of blood. I looked on the ground and said, "Poppy, I see blood," while Poppy crept around a tree and replied, "I see a deer."



Bayleigh with her first buck.