



A Random Act of Deer Hunting

By Steven Bridges
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At *The Eagle*, we often hear of incidents of a "random act of kindness," that had a tremendous effect on someone's life. It's actually a pretty common occurrence here in Mills County, which is one of the great things about living in a small, tightly-knit community.

But what about a random act of deer hunting? As it turns out, they are not so different.

Steve Jones owns a high-fence ranch in Mills County with very large bucks and lots of deer. During a recent visit with Steve, he recounted a story for me that was really sort of indicative of the very best parts of the deer hunting community in our little corner of the world.

Steve and Dedra had gone to an area department store to do some shopping. They were standing next to the peanut butter section, when two men in camo walked up. They were looking for peanut butter, too. A discussion ensued concerning whether creamy or crunchy peanut butter would be better at deer camp.

It was during this discussion that Steve and Dedra noticed a girl with the men. She was around 12 years old.

While the men were discussing peanut butter, Steve and Dedra decided to strike up a conversation with the girl. They asked if she was deer hunting. She said they were, and as the two men joined the conversation momentarily, Steve learned that they had a small, family place — about 15 acres — and it was slim pickings to say the least.

The men's mission was to help the little girl get her first deer, a doe. But they were the last bunch able to get to the lease, and since it was so small, and it was so late in the season, they hadn't had a particularly successful mission.



FIRST DEER, FIRST SHOT: Brynlee James of Stephenville harvested her very first deer with her very first shot last season. She made a perfect "heart" shot at about 85 yards with a New England Firearms Handi Rifle SB2 .223. She was accompanied by her Dad, Jarrod James, on a local ranch in Mills County. Brynlee is 8 years old, and a 3rd grader at Lingleville ISD.

Without telling them much about his place, Steve said he offered to let them come hunt on his place the next day.

After the men got over the initial shock of such an offer from a complete stranger, they decided his generous offer to help the little girl get her first deer was one they couldn't pass up. They made plans to meet up the next day, and it wasn't long before they were all in a stand on Steve's place.

A few deer walked out and everyone got excited immediately. They wanted to shoot something right away, but he convinced them to wait a bit. Then a small buck, by Steve's estimation that is, came walking out, and the men and girl

all said that was the biggest one they had seen all year.

The excitement started to mount.

Not long after, the bucks that Steve considered to be big bucks started walking out. The men and little girl were amazed at the genetically superior deer (the 200 B&C size deer Steve has on his place).

They were starting to understand what kind of ranch they were on and what a great opportunity they were given, Steve said, though he would never have said as much to them.

Eventually a big, mature doe came to the feeder, and Steve encouraged the little girl to take her shot. It took awhile for the doe to get in the right position, which probably seemed like an eternity to that little girl, but

when she finally got the chance to take her shot, she did and it was a great shot, he said. The doe made it about 75 yards and piled up, he said.

Steve said they went out and got the deer and got ready to lay hands on the little girl's first deer. He was feeling pretty darn good about how it had all turned out, he said. The little girl and her dad, however, were feeling a bit more than "good," he said.

The girl started actually crying with happiness, and Steve was touched, he said. It was great, but not unexpected of a young girl getting her first deer. When her 6-foot-6 big, tough guy of a dad started sobbing uncontrollably, however, that was when Steve truly realized the gift he had given this family.

"I thought I was gonna join in with them," Steve told me. "It was just emotionally overwhelming!"

He said they tried to pay him for the hunt, which he appreciated, but somehow it felt like that would have taken away from the whole experience at that point. Also, he said, how do you put a price tag on an experience like that?

"It was a random act of deer hunting I know that daughter and father will never ever forget, and I'm just proud to have a place where I can share that kind of experience with someone who might not otherwise have that opportunity," he said. "It's one of the best things about being a rancher in Mills County."

Editor's Note: Steve and Dedra host many deer hunts each year for kids, soldiers and others who don't have hunting access. They have seen the many positive effects of random acts of deer hunting over the years. They have been there for many kids as they took their first deer. The couple has hosted many hunts with veterans as part of the OATHE program.