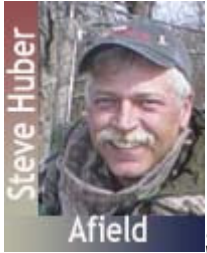


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## Tis Far Better to Give...

Nov 21st, 2008 | By [steve](#) | Category: [Hunting](#)



Sure, it's part of an old saying, but when you think about it, it's really true. And in this case, it's the absolute truth! It all started almost a year ago, when I was having a cup of coffee with Dick Busha of [Little Lakes Ranch](#), a whitetail preserve in Irma, Wisconsin. He casually mentioned that he would like to host a disabled war vet on a whitetail hunt, but he was having a hard time getting it put together.

**Like the idiot I can be, I figured “Heck, it can’t be that hard,”** and said, “I can put that together, it’s a good thing to do, it’s the right thing to do and besides, it would make a great television show.” **Ahhh, little did I know...**



I contacted numerous organizations, individuals in the military, even the Pentagon to no avail. Eventually, with the help of retired Master Sergeant Jeff Johnson of the [Wounded Warrior Regiment](#), we found a young Marine in Missouri who was in need of such a trip. I talked with his wife Stephanie, told her what we wanted to do, and she thought it was just the thing for Shawn. The trip was set up in no time at all, with them leaving their home on November 17th, making the nine and a half hour trip north.

Swearing Stephanie to secrecy, I had made plans to make the trip extra-special with the aid of friends in the local area, as well as support from friends in the outdoor industry. You see, while Shawn knew he was going on a whitetail hunt, he didn't know what else was in store for him.

I drove the 35 minutes to [Little Lakes Ranch](#), bright and early on the 18th, with a pile of goodies, all my video equipment and a light heart. I had a good feeling about this hunt.



I met Shawn and Stephanie at the beautiful lodge at Little Lakes Ranch. I could see the lines of stress in Shawn's face, and knew by the end of the trip, those would be gone, at least for a little while. We sat and talked for a while, drinking coffee, getting to know each other and talk about our love of the outdoors. During this conversation, I learned that Shawn had never shot a buck! I couldn't take it any longer and brought the subject around to firearms. I knew Shawn no longer had a deer rifle and he was under the impression that he would be borrowing one of my rifles as we both shoot left-handed.

I brought out a rifle case and showed him a nice little Savage 110, a left-hand bolt action rifle chambered in 7mm08. He admired the rifle, shouldering it a couple times and commenting on how well it fit. **I wish you could have seen the look on his face when I told him, "I hope you like it, because it's yours!"** A few of those stress lines disappeared as his face lit in a smile.



A trip was quickly organized to the [Lincoln County Sportsman Club](#) rifle range. With a few adjustments of the Bushnell 4 X 12 scope, Shawn proved that the Marines do indeed teach their guys to shoot! I was confident that if “Buck Fever” didn’t strike too hard, there was a buck out there in serious trouble.

Back at the lodge, we had lunch and discussed the afternoon’s hunt. Dick and I enjoyed watching Shawn and Stephanie as they gazed in wonder as deer roamed within sight of the dining room table. 76, a bottle-baby doe that Dick hand-raised gave us a great show as she strutted around the lodge, even taking care to check out the Argo Frontier 6x6 atv that [Beaver Dam Argo](#) loaned me to get Shawn into the woods and more importantly, get his buck out!

Finally, our guide Mark Busha arrived and announced that it was time to head for the blind. “Dressed to Kill,” we headed out, Shawn decked out with his new Savage and cold weather gear, I was armed with my Canon video camera. It was my job to catch the moment on tape if I could.

Situated on a little wooded knoll overlooking a meadow, the blind was a perfect location for an ambush. It wasn’t long before we had deer filtering through the woods and feeding in the meadow. As much as I enjoyed watching the deer, I enjoyed watching Shawn’s face even more. A couple times, bucks appeared that I was sure were shooters, and when we looked at Mark, he’d shake his head and whisper, “*Not big enough.*” Shawn was dumbfounded, seeing bucks that were bigger than anything he’d ever seen with a gun in his hand, and Mark was telling him to wait! I wish I could have been monitoring his vital signs, because I’m sure his pulse was racing and his blood pressure was hitting the redline!

A couple of times, I was again sure that it was just a matter of moments before Shawn would be pulling the trigger, but the deer would get spooky and bolt from the clearing, only to have others slowly ease back in. This happened more times than I care to think about.

As the sun was getting low on the horizon, I was beginning to think, “Ah well, tomorrow’s another day.” By this time, there were several does and small bucks in the meadow, but nothing with enough age or antler to pull the trigger on. I

was fairly certain that with thirty minutes of camera light left, we'd be getting up early in the morning for another blind session. I was fine with that. Even though we were hunting a preserve, **the deer just didn't like being TV stars and I know they didn't read the script!**

Just about the time I had my mind made up to start tearing things down, Mark whispered, "*Pssst, get ready, I think this one is for you.*" A good eight-point buck cautiously entered the meadow and Mark asked Shawn, "*You like this one?*" Well, that was a fairly stupid question to ask a guy who'd never shot a buck! I thought Shawn's head was going to vibrate off as he nodded YES!

Shawn eased the rifle out the shooting window of the blind as I followed the buck in the camera's viewfinder. With about a sixty-yard shot, I wasn't too worried, having watched Shawn shoot at the range. But buck fever was in the back of my mind as I watched, filmed and waited. The bucks played Musical Chairs as they fed through the clearing. For what seemed an eternity to me, and I'm sure even longer to Shawn, if there wasn't a deer in front of the buck, there was one behind him. So even though the buck was broadside to us on more than one occasion, there was never a safe shot!

Knowing how fast we can lose camera light, I watched with a sinking feeling as the buck started to walk to the edge of the clearing. I thought he was leaving, heading to the nighttime feeding area, and never offering a shot! Just yards short of the wood line, he stopped to sniff the air. With so many deer mingling in the meadow, Shawn was distracted and lost track of the shooter buck! *With a tinge of desperation in his voice, he whispered, "Which one is he?"* I whispered back that he was the one with his nose in the air. And of course exactly at that time, a smaller buck stuck his snout in the air as well! Luckily, the smaller deer was colored differently enough that we were able to soon get Shawn on the right animal.

The trigger was squeezed, the 7mm08 roared, sending a 140-grain Remington AccuTip bullet on its way, striking the buck just behind the shoulder, right in the crease I told Sean to air for. The buck hunched up, hit hard and bolted for the woods, just yards away. As he bounded into the safety of the woods, his antler snagged a branch, spinning him right around and dumping him on the ground. A couple kicks and the buck was still; **Shawn had his first buck!!**



Tearing my eyes off the buck, I looked at Shawn, who at this point had eyes the size of saucers! Let me tell you, there were lots of back thumps and handshakes going on in that blind!

I wish I were a writer of sufficient skill to put into words the emotions that were playing across Shawn's face as we approached the deer. Elation, jubilation and a touch of sadness were just a few of the more easily readable expressions as he looked over the huge-bodied, magnificent buck. With eight point and a beautiful symmetry, it was a buck that many hunters go years without seeing, and this was Shawn's first!

Briefly we admired the buck, videoing it from several angles when Shawn made the decision that we needed to go to the lodge and bring Stephanie out for the recovery. After all, in a way, it was her buck too. It was dark by the time we got the buck loaded up in the Argo for the trip to the skinning shed, but we went with light hearts and a heavy load.

Tom Hunter of HeadHunter Taxidermy arrived at Little Lakes, and after some story telling and congratulations, got to work. It didn't take him long at all to have the buck skinned and caped. Measurements were taken and a catalog was brought out as Tom and Shawn discussed the pros and cons of various poses, finally settling on one. With the cape and antlers safe in the truck, he promised to have the mount done as soon as possible.

The story doesn't end here though, it will be complete months from now. Shawn and Stephanie are going to come back to Little Lakes, bringing their four children with them for a weekend getaway. Dick and his family (Little Lakes is a family operation), Tom Hunter and his wife, as well as Janet and I are planning on being there for the grand unveiling of the trophy mount. I can't wait for the celebration!

I'd like to thank the following people and businesses for supporting this much-needed hunt for a deserving young man. He's given so much for this country, it's great to see some giving back.

Jeff Johnson of the [Wounded Warrior Regiment](#), for putting me in touch with this brave man.

Dick & Bev Busha, Mark Busha, Eric & Missy Wegner of the [Little Lakes Ranch](#), Irma WI (715-536-9377) provided the hunt, as well as the lodging and some great meals.

Randy Garrett of [Garrett Cartridge Company](#), Chehalis WA and his father Clyde Garrett (a WWII vet) donated the funds for the purchase of the Savage 110 rifle.

Gander Mountain of Wausau WI (715-355-5500) reduced the price of the rifle, scope mounts and rinds to the point we could afford to purchase the Savage rifle.

Tom Hunter of HeadHunter Taxidermy, Merrill WI (715-873-4164) has provided his skill and artistry, mounting Shawn's first buck.

John Gillespie of Gillespie Convenience & Fuel, Rhinelander WI (715-369-5658) donated BP gas cards in sufficient funds to cover the round trip from Missouri to Wisconsin.

Christopher Schenkel of [Beaver Dam Argo](#), Fox Lake WI (920-296-8364) provided the use of an Argo Frontier 6x6 to help out during the hunt.

Mike from Hodag Gun & Loan, Rhinelander WI (715-369-4884) donated a Bushnell 4x12 power rifle scope, the Remington ammunition and a sling for the rifle.

Mitch Mode of Mel's Trading Post, Rhinelander WI (715-362-5800) donated a nice pair of Spartan insulated camo coveralls and bore sighted the rifle/scope.

DeByle's Men's Clothing, Rhinelander WI (715-362-4406) donated a great (and much needed) pair of Carhartt insulated underwear.

[Lincoln County Sports Club](#), Merrill WI generously allowed us to use their rifle range to sight in Shawn's rifle.

Please take the time to thank these sponsors of the hunt, as without their support, this would have been much more difficult. Most of all, I'd like to thank Shawn for all the missed birthdays, anniversaries and holidays. He gave a lot in his service to our country, and others gave even more. So also thank a vet! This was a project I was proud to be part of, and if there's anyone out there that would like to do the same, get in touch with Jeff Johnson of the Wounded Warrior Regiment, he'll help you find another deserving vet.

Steve

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