

A chilly wind foretells a heartwarming story of a young man's first bow buck.



Considering it was his first time on stand alone, I thought my son Ryan did everything right to take a most memorable trophy.

A Memorable Milestone

TRADITIONALLY, the Olszewski family has hunted whitetails at Potts Creek Outfitters for many years, with considerable luck, and we have special ties with the good folks there in Paint Bank, Virginia. In early November 2009, we were back for yet another hunt, and our main goal was to get my 15-year-old son, Ryan, his first archery buck.

On the evening of November 7, I was



When a chilly wind gust slapped me in the face, I took it as some sort of sign.

hunting a stand in an area where Potts Creek wildlife manager Josh Duncan had captured photos of some real bruiser bucks on his trail camera. At precisely 5 p.m., from out of nowhere, a rather chilly, sharp wind gust hit me square in the face. It may sound a little strange, but I seriously took it as some sort of sign. "Ryan shot a buck." I remember saying out loud. I could feel it.

WHEN JOSH ARRIVED at dark to pick me up, I told him that Ryan had shot a buck. He looked at me like I was crazy. Moments later, a garbled voice

AUTHOR'S PHOTOS

BY MARK OLSZEWSKI, ART DIRECTOR, & RYAN OLSZEWSKI



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came over Josh's radio. It sounded like guide Bob Beasley, who had gone to pick up Ryan from his stand. Through the static, I could make out that Ryan had hit a buck.

"I knew it! I had a feeling! That is so awesome!" I yelled out as we sped towards Ryan. Josh was equally excited. Ryan had

done it. He had shot his first bow buck. I wanted to be there so bad to share in all the exuberance, but I was miles away.

Now, in all of my excitement here, I've already stolen way too much of my son's thunder. After all, this is *his* story! So without further delay, let me turn the keyboard over to Ryan...

WE LOVE HUNTING AT POTTS CREEK, it's like Heaven on Earth for me. The people at Potts Creek are the nicest, friendliest people I know. Josh Duncan is always trying to put me in a place where there are some good shooter bucks. On this hunt, I started out in a ground blind, with a field below me and hardwoods all around. I was seeing a lot of deer from this blind, including some nice bucks, so I hunted there for the first couple of days, but I didn't have any luck.

Before our last evening's hunt, Josh asked me if I wanted to hunt out of the blind again or try my luck hunting a spot called the Hemlock Stand. My dad killed an amazing 10-point out of this stand two years ago, so I thought maybe his good luck there would carry over to me.

We dropped my dad off at his stand, and then Bob, Grandpa, and I drove several miles to the Hemlock Stand. My Grandpa had already shot a doe in the morning, so his hunt was done for the day, but he was going along for the ride and was helping me out with some good advice. Since this was my first time alone in a treestand, I was a little nervous.

Stepping out of the truck and into the chilly air, the first thing I did was put my safety harness on. Then I climbed up the ladder stand to the seat, and strapped myself in. Grandpa and Bob wished me good luck, and then left me to sit alone in the quiet, beautiful woods.

I sat back against the rough bark of the hemlock tree and closed my eyes, listening to the wind in the trees and the birds singing. Moments later, I opened my eyes to the sound of something walking behind me in the leaves. Ever so slowly I reached for my bow while trying so see what was creeping up on me from behind. My heart was pounding like a hammer! After a few minutes, I finally saw what it was — a gray squirrel! I was really disappointed.

Before long, I started to doze off. Then I heard more crunching in the leaves. Trying to remain perfectly still, I rolled my eyes to the left and saw a nice doe. She was like a ghost and made no sound. The doe kept looking back the way she had come, and then magically, two fawns appeared over the hill, running towards their mom.

The doe and her fawns kept me entertained for a few minutes, and then they left. A few minutes later, three more does



We stayed at this old railroad foreman's house built around 1909. This place is part of why Potts Creek is like Heaven on Earth.

fed past me on the same trail. Then I saw another deer come over the ridgetop. It was a spike buck! My heart started to race and my hands started sweating!

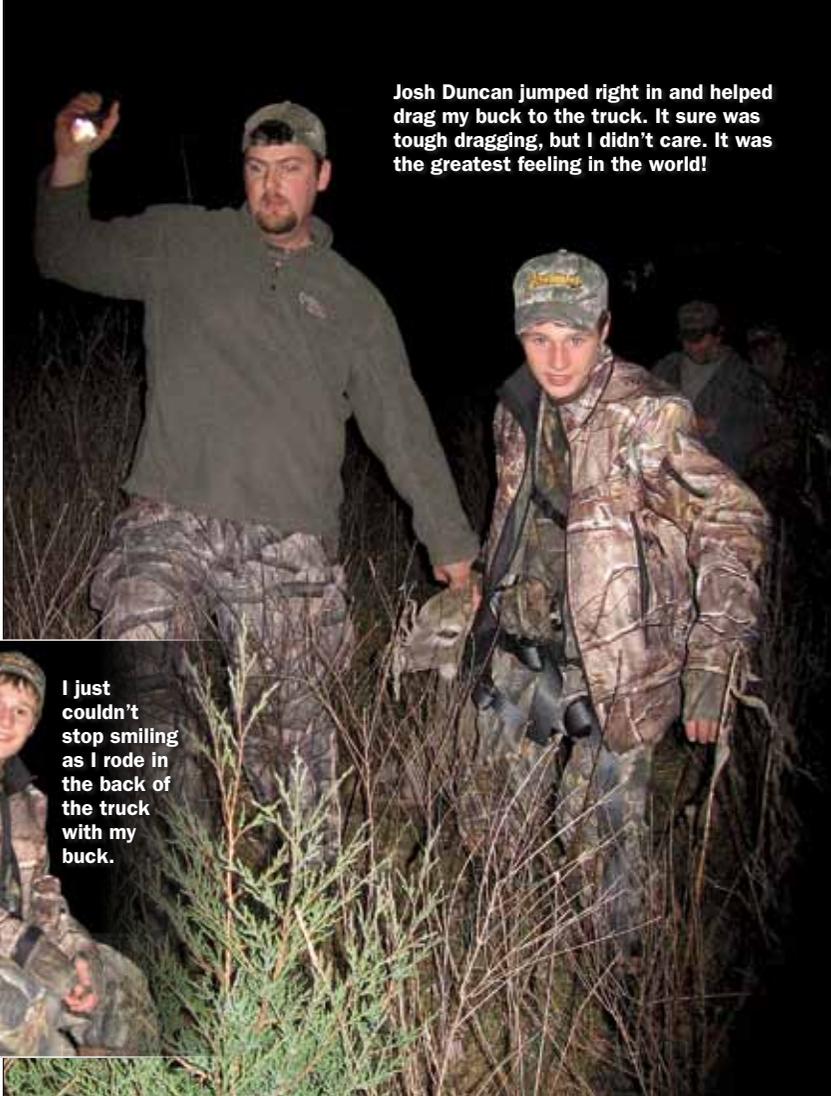
Josh and Bob both had said to hold out as long as possible for a chance at a big buck, but it was getting late, and I didn't want to pass up this opportunity to get my first buck. Minutes later, the spike stood about 20 yards from me. I thought about everything my dad, grandpa, Josh, and Bob had told me. I was ready.

There was a doe in line with the buck, and while I waited for her to move, I silently asked God to help me make a good shot so the buck would not have to suffer. When the doe cleared the broadside buck, I drew my bow, took careful aim, and let the arrow fly.

My shot looked good, and right away I started shaking. I even had to hold on to the tree because I was shaking so bad! As the deer ran away, I tried to watch it as far as I could see. Right before the buck disappeared from my sight, he started to slow down.

I pulled out my rangefinder and used it to look for my arrow, but it was almost dark now. I still could not believe what I had just done. It was the greatest feeling

AUTHOR'S PHOTO



Josh Duncan jumped right in and helped drag my buck to the truck. It sure was tough dragging, but I didn't care. It was the greatest feeling in the world!



I just couldn't stop smiling as I rode in the back of the truck with my buck.



in the world! I was almost bouncing out of my seat as I waited for Bob and Grandpa to pick me up.

When they pulled up, I had already climbed down from the Hemlock Stand and was on the ground, grinning from ear to ear! They were really happy for me. "That's what it's all about!" Bob said.

We couldn't find my arrow at first (Grandpa found it later), but we did find little drops of blood, so we started to trail my buck. As we walked, the blood sign became more and more plentiful, and then Bob yelled, "There it is! There's Ryan's

buck!" The buck had gone about 150 yards. Both Bob and Grandpa congratulated me, and then Bob got on the radio and tried to tell the story to Josh and my dad, but the radio reception was poor.

We dragged the buck downhill through a terrible mess of briars and other thick brush, but I was so pumped up I couldn't even feel the thorns tearing up my skin! Soon, we saw more headlights coming up through the woods. I knew it was my dad and Josh.

When we got to the bottom of the hill and about halfway to Josh's truck, we met up with my dad. He had run through the briars, in the dark, with no flashlight, and I could see that the thorns had bloodied his face and hands. Dad gave me a big hug, saying "Wow! I can't believe you got your first buck! Awesome!"

We took some photos and loaded my buck onto the truck bed, where I rode with the buck back to the meat locker. On the ride back, I thanked God one more time for helping me make a good shot and for letting me find the buck. I had never gutted a deer in my life, but I had promised Grandpa I would, so I had to do it. The

"I SPEND THE BETTER PART OF MY YEAR SCOUTING LOCATIONS, HANGING STANDS AND MAPPING OUT APPROACH AND EXIT STRATEGIES. WHEN THE SEASON ROLLS AROUND, I GEAR UP SO THE WEATHER DOESN'T UNDO A YEAR'S WORTH OF HARD WORK."

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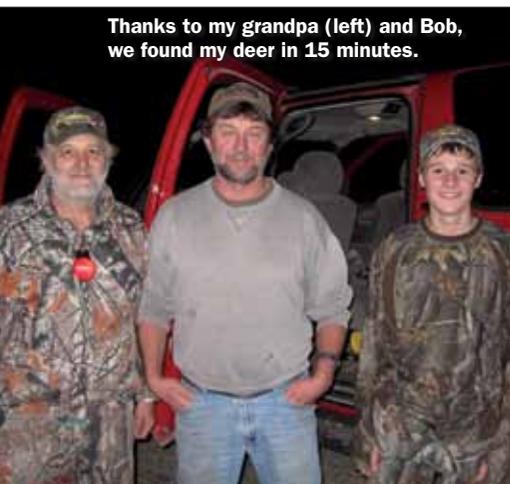
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Thanks to my grandpa (left) and Bob, we found my deer in 15 minutes.





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I promised Grandpa that I would gut my first buck, and even though I had no clue as to what I was doing, Grandpa helped me out. "Not bad for your first time," he said.

smell was horrible, and I had no clue as to what I was doing, but Grandpa helped me and Dad laughed the whole time as he took photos and videotaped it all.

I will never forget this for the rest of my life. What an awesome feeling!

...AND HE IS RIGHT ABOUT THAT.

"You will remember this moment for the rest of your life, Ryan," I said to my son. "And throughout your life, you will play this moment over and over again in your head. That's what it's all about."

Remember that chilly, sharp wind gust that slapped me in the face at 5 p.m.? Well, that's when Ryan did indeed shoot his buck, just as I'd predicted. Very surreal, isn't it? He'd done everything right. I was very proud of what he had accomplished on his own.

In quoting Editor Dwight Schuh, "We all love to live in the moment and experience the adventures, but the real trophies are the memories." In the case of Ryan's buck, truer words may never have been



On the chalkboard at the foreman's house where we stayed, I wrote this. I like to think my "11-point" spike beat my Dad's 10-point!

spoken. It didn't matter how big the rack was. It was Ryan's buck. His first. It was a special moment and a special deer.

That's what it's all about, my friends. 🐾



My grandpa caped out my buck. He plans to mount the head for me. Please hurry, Grandpa, I can't wait!

AUTHOR'S NOTES: Ryan used a Browning Micro Midas 2 bow, and shot Carbon Express Maxima 250 arrows tipped with Rocky Mountain Titanium 100-grain broadheads. Dad used a Mathews Switchback XT bow, Carbon Express Maxima Hunter 350 arrows, and 100-grain Muzzy heads. Ryan and I wore Realtree camo and we all stayed safe with our Summit S.O.P. saftey harnesses. Ryan also used a Nikon Monarch Laser800 rangefinder.

To schedule your own memory-of-a-lifetime bowhunt with Potts Creek Outfitters in Paint Bank, Virgina, contact Josh Duncan at (540) 897-5555 or visit www.pottscreekoutfitters.com.

AUTHOR'S PHOTOS