

A Season of CHANGE

STORY BY KATIE BLAIR
PHOTOS BY MICHELLE BLAIR



Charles Bukowski once said, "Some moments are nice, some are nicer, and some are even worth writing about." This, is one of those moments.

As hunters, we never forget certain moments, seeing our first deer, shooting our first deer, our first missed shot, and shooting our biggest buck. I was lucky enough to have one of these moments on November 22, 2017.

I had not been hunting in quite some time and when my dad asked me if I wanted to join him and my sister, Hailey, on an afternoon hunt, I couldn't pass up the opportunity. I spent the morning with my mom and my youngest sister, Becca, cleaning house and putting up Christmas decorations. I was starting to get antsy, counting down the minutes until I was able to meet my dad and sister and head off to deer camp. Since it had been a while since my last hunt, I realized that most of my clothes were either too small or my sister had stolen them. With limited options I opted for my dad's pajama pants, a rather tight camo jumpsuit, a Bass Pro Shop hoodie, a very oversized camo jacket, and to top off the look, a beanie with a giant purple puff ball on top. With my gear in tow we headed out to meet my dad. That 25 minute drive to his office felt like a lifetime.

Arriving at my dad's office I notice that they are already packed up and ready to go. I jumped into the truck and thanked my mom for dropping me off. That ride to camp brought back so many of my childhood memories. The sight of the falling leaves outside, my dad driving with the windows down, and my sister and I laughing about past experiences. An hour later and we arrived at deer camp, a place I had not been to in over two years and I could hardly wait to get into a deer stand. As we were unpacking the truck and about to head out, my dad handed me his .30-06 rifle and to my surprise told me I would not be hunting with my trustee 7 mm 08 rifle. I was skeptical of his gun, having never shot it before, but decided it wouldn't hurt to give it a try. We each said our good lucks and good byes and headed off in separate directions. I choose to hunt from the wooden box stand. As I climbed the ladder I took everything in; the chipped wood, the faded camo paint, and the over grown grass near the ladder, to me it was perfect. Once I got settled into the stand I leaned back into my chair and closed my eyes, just listening to everything around me. Being a sophomore in college, I had not had much time to be outdoors and enjoy nature so I wanted to take in as much as I could in that moment. The wind was crisp and swirled

all around me, making me shiver. The leaves behind me rustled. The crows cawed back and forth to one another. I heard ducks landing in the lake behind me. The longer I kept my eyes closed the louder the world seemed. Until suddenly, everything seemed to quiet down. I opened my eyes and scanned the food plots; nothing. The air slowly began to get colder. I felt my phone vibrate and noticed a group message between my dad and sister. Hailey had some deer in her food plot, two spikes and three does, and my dad and seen a couple of does run off. I was excited for them and continued to enjoy the serenity of the outdoors. Then out of the corner of my eye, I saw some movement in one of the food plots.

I slowly turned my head and noticed two deer at the edge of the plot. I reached for my binoculars, trying to catch a better glimpse. Two yearlings had made their way to me and were beginning to enjoy a nice grassy dinner. In past years, I would have been disappointed in seeing the two, however, something changed this year and I just smiled and thanked God for what a wonderful day he had given me thus far. Even with just the two yearlings, my day had been made! I watched the two slowly work their way closer and closer to the stand. I watched their tails flick and their ears twitch. I laughed at their curiosity to a fallen leaf and when they jumped back in surprise when the wind blew it back up into the air. I kept quite so I wouldn't disturb them, although several times I was sure they would run away after looking directly up at me. Over an hour had passed since they had first stepped out onto the food plot and I was still being entertained by them. Suddenly both were deathly still, their ears flicked forward. I followed their gaze, wondering what caused them such concern. Out stepped a young buck, warily at first. I noticed that he only had one antler with two points, and I knew that this must be the deer that my sister referred to as "The Unicorn". I chuckled at his rather odd physique and began to watch how he interacted with the yearlings. They seemed to ignore each other for the most part, with an occasional glance to the others direction, and then returning to eat the grass. I watched as the sun slowly began to set behind the pine trees and the sounds of day began to fade away. The birds stopped chirping and were replaced by the sounds of crickets. The caws of the crows were replaced by the hoots and the screeches of the owls. A moment of sadness passed over me, as I knew it would

soon be time for me to leave and go back home, away from the beauty of this place. I continued to watch the three deer eat and pace back and forth from one side of the food plot to another. In just a few minutes the light of the day would fade into darkness and I knew that my time was almost up. But I was not disappointed, God had given me a beautiful day and I couldn't have enjoyed it more.

I felt another vibration from my phone and decided it wouldn't hurt to check. It was my sister saying she was watching a few deer on the east end of her food plot and would stay with them until it was too dark to see them anymore. I put my phone down and looked back up, hoping to see the three deer I had enjoyed watching still in the food plot. However, upon looking up, I noticed that there were four bodies instead of three. A large deer had entered the food plot and was walking across. I reached for my binoculars to get a better look. It was then I noticed this deer had antlers. Time instantly suddenly slowed down.

This buck was old and wise and wasn't going to stop to feed. With every step he took I could feel my heartrate

increasing. It pounded like a giant drum in my chest. I knew that to take this deer I was going to have to take aim at a moving target. I reached for my dad's gun and placed it tight into my shoulder. I looked into the scope and set my crosshairs onto his right shoulder and lined my shot ahead of him just behind a small tree located right on the edge of the food plot. I knew I only had moments before this buck would step back into my view and I would have that one and only shot before he would disappear into the woods. I could hear the sound of my own breath leaving my mouth. I knew that I had to take the shot now or risk losing my moment. I pushed off the safety, slowly breathed in and exhaled as he stepped into view I pulled the trigger. BOOM, the sound of the shot echoed through the woods and everything become quiet. I looked up and for a moment saw nothing. Did I hit him? Did I miss? Did he run? The questions of uncertainty were endless. As I locked my eyes onto where I took the shot I saw the deer. He dropped where he stood, kicking twice and then became still. It was then that time returned to its normal speed. I began to notice how bad I was shaking and how fast I was breathing. I could hardly text my dad letting him know that it was me who shot and that I had shot a big buck. I waited anxiously in my stand until dark, giving the deer time to take his last breath in peace and assuring that the deer was dead before I walked up to him. Climbing down from the stand my mind was in a haze. Did I really just harvest a big buck? The walk to him seemed like an eternity but when I finally arrived at his side, I could not be more surprised. Lying in front of me was one of the largest bucks I have ever seen! I could hardly believe it. I came into these woods, not expecting anything, just wanting a day in nature, and here before me was this amazing buck. I ran to my dad in jubilation shouting about how large this buck was and how happy I was to have this experience.

I thanked God for what he had given me and I thanked the deer for the meat he would be providing me and my family. My dad was so proud. He said this was a once in a lifetime buck and he wanted to get me a full shoulder mount to enjoy this buck for years to come. I felt so blessed to have been able to experience this moment and to be able to have these amazing memories with my family. I want to thank my mom and my dad for teaching me to appreciate what God and nature have provided me and showing me what it truly means to be a hunter.

