



THE *Faithful* STORY & PHOTOS
BY NOEL GANDY
HUNTING  **GROUND****S**

When the clock struck midnight and January 2016 began I never would have imagined that my life would have been so much different as it was then. A desire to follow the Lord and plant a church was on my family's heart and we were off to pursue that calling with no reservations. We quit our jobs, packed up our brand new home, loaded the wagons and headed to a place we felt God was leading us to start a brand new Southern Baptist

with many people in our small town of Shenandoah, IA and had gained permission to hunt on some local farms. I will make a disclaimer: it is not as easy as some of the magazine articles make it out to be to gain permission from farmers to hunt. That and the fact that much of the timbered property is leased or already spoken for makes hunting ground come at a premium. My blessing was that I am a bow hunter. Many locals in my area choose to gun hunt so finding a good



Church. Luckily for me that place was Iowa!

To say that trophy deer didn't cross my mind at the prospect of moving to the Midwest would be a lie. I have been an avid bow hunter for nearly 17 years and have hunted the Midwest for the past 10 years for whitetails and turkeys. My enthusiasm for the work and for the play was through the roof!

Fast forward to September. By this time I had formed relationships

archery spot proved to be fruitful.

Scouting proved to be a joy. Literally, my very first trail camera photo was of a buck that would eventually grow over 170" of antler. I was ecstatic. However, the only place that I had to hunt this deer was a corn field edge. In fact, my access was to the field side and not the timber side of the edge. That means that there was no place to hang a tree stand. While scouting from afar I noticed that

several deer, including the booner and a couple of his high racked buddies, were using a drainage ditch to cross from field to field. This ditch is only about 50 yards wide by 100 yards long but a plan was being formulated. I would place a ground blind just inside the corn on the edge of the drainage ditch and pray to not be winded or spotted.

Season opened up on October 1st and I had been granted residency in Iowa which allowed me an archery tag. My enthusiasm to hunt waned as I check the wind for opening day. I absolutely had to have a North wind to hunt my location but a direct south wind was in the forecast for the foreseeable future. I snuck in one quick "marginal wind" hunt that first week but quickly realized that I would need my perfect wind. After all, I was not dealing with "average" bucks. These guys were big and they didn't get big from being careless.

On October 7th I finally got the break in the wind that I needed. A cool snap swept through the area and the temps were going to drop nearly 20 degrees with a nice breeze from the north. I knew this was my chance.

As I settled into the ground blind I quickly retrieved the card from the trail camera and checked it with my card reader. To my surprise the pictures were showing that the big bucks had changed their pattern and were coming in just after dark. However, as I drew to the end of the pictures and focused in on the day of my hunt I realized that my giant, "Captain Hook" as my family calls him, showed up in the first ever morning daylight picture that very day. My enthusiasm peaked back up as I heard the loud crunch of an approaching deer heading my way from the north.

A yearling buck was being followed by a two and a half year old eight point. I watched the two deer feed for nearly 20 minutes until the larger of the two got spooky. He glared into the timber and above the sage brush I could see a rack of antlers approaching. I quickly identified the deer as a shooter and assumed it was my crack at the booner. I readied my bow and took the first ethical shot that I had once the deer cleared onto my side of the property. I released the arrow and hit the deer solidly. It made for a short track job.

Upon approaching the downed buck and to my surprise I had not killed "Captain Hook." However, I had harvested an unknown buck and could not have been happier. My first ever Iowa bow kill took place after a couple of short hours of total hunting and I had a 154" 10-point in the bag. The impressive thing about the Iowan was that his antlers were dwarfed by his massive body. My local Department of Natural Resources (DNR) representatives assessed the deer to weigh between 280-300 lbs. A true sight to behold, indeed!

My hunting was over relatively quickly in Iowa so I turned my attention to Kansas. I have hunted in Kansas with my family and friends for the past 10 years and have established quite a relationship with the state and some of its people. I had teamed up with Mike Ruddle of Central Plains Outfitters to come in and hunt since I was now living so close to the area. He has been a dear friend to me and my family for over a decade now.

I conducted our Sunday services at the newly established Christ Point Baptist Church on November 6th and made my way Southwest to Lindsborg that evening. I enjoyed a great visit with Mike and he and I strategized and checked trail camera photos. I did a self-guided hunt due to familiarity with the area. It is pretty sweet, though, to have someone there on the farm to keep an eye on patterns and routines. By this time much of that was thrown out the window due to great rutting activity but we still knew which bucks were living where.

I hunted a particular buck on a particular favorite farm for the first sit. I have a love affair with that farm so I went more for the nostalgia than anything. That evening, I chose to sit on some property close to the lodge. On my way to the stand for the evening hunt I saw a shooter buck standing beneath my stand upon



approach. I had to watch him for a while until he cleared the area. He was one of two deer I saw that day.

The next morning, election Tuesday, was exciting. It wasn't exciting because of an abundance of deer sightings but more so because of the high prevailing winds. I was nearly blown out of the tree. I quickly ended my morning hunt on my nostalgic farm because I didn't think I could hit a deer if it did walk by. I drove back to camp to regroup.

By that time Mike had called to check in on the day's activities and he highly encouraged me to go and sit where I had seen the shooter. His thought process was that the deer was cruising the area checking for does and he would likely stick to that area. I obliged and set out early so as not to be busted like the day before.

This was one of the more exciting hunts I've ever had. At the 3:00 hour that evening I saw a small buck cross a wheat field some 300 yards away. I took my Primos Buck Roar and wailed away. It didn't turn the buck but it immediately got the attention of another unseen buck and brought him to the base of the tree. He was not a shooter but exciting none the less. This occurrence happened no less than five times that evening. I would grunt and a new buck would show up. The young guys were definitely on their feet.

Up to that point all I had seen were very young deer and they all came from the same direction. Naturally I dedicated the bulk of my attention to the creek bottom where they were running. Shame on me. After a session of grunting during the "witching hour" I turned to place my grunt tube down and caught something out of the corner of my eye to my immediate left. It was shocking. The 148" 10-point was standing no more than 16 yards and looking in my direction. I thought I was pegged but the deer calmly eased



his head back to the ground and began scent checking the area for does. In one smooth motion I grabbed my bow from the E-Z hanger, attached my release and drew the bow. The deer entered a clearing and I released an arrow into his vitals. I had the pleasure of watching him expire no more than 60 yards into an uncut milo field. Again, I had harvested a scale bender. This deer was guessed to be nearly 270 pounds.

To say that I was blessed this deer season would be an understatement. I've taken some great deer in my lifetime but this year topped the cake. I am forever grateful to the Lord for

blessing me so abundantly.

More importantly, I am grateful that the Lord called me to serve Him. I have never had more satisfaction in my life that I have had in pursuing and living within His will. To God be the Glory. I'm happy to report that Christ Point Baptist Church is about 4 months ahead of schedule as far as our projected growth is concerned. There have already been many lives touched by this ministry and I pray that many more will come to the saving grace of Jesus Christ. To God be the Glory!