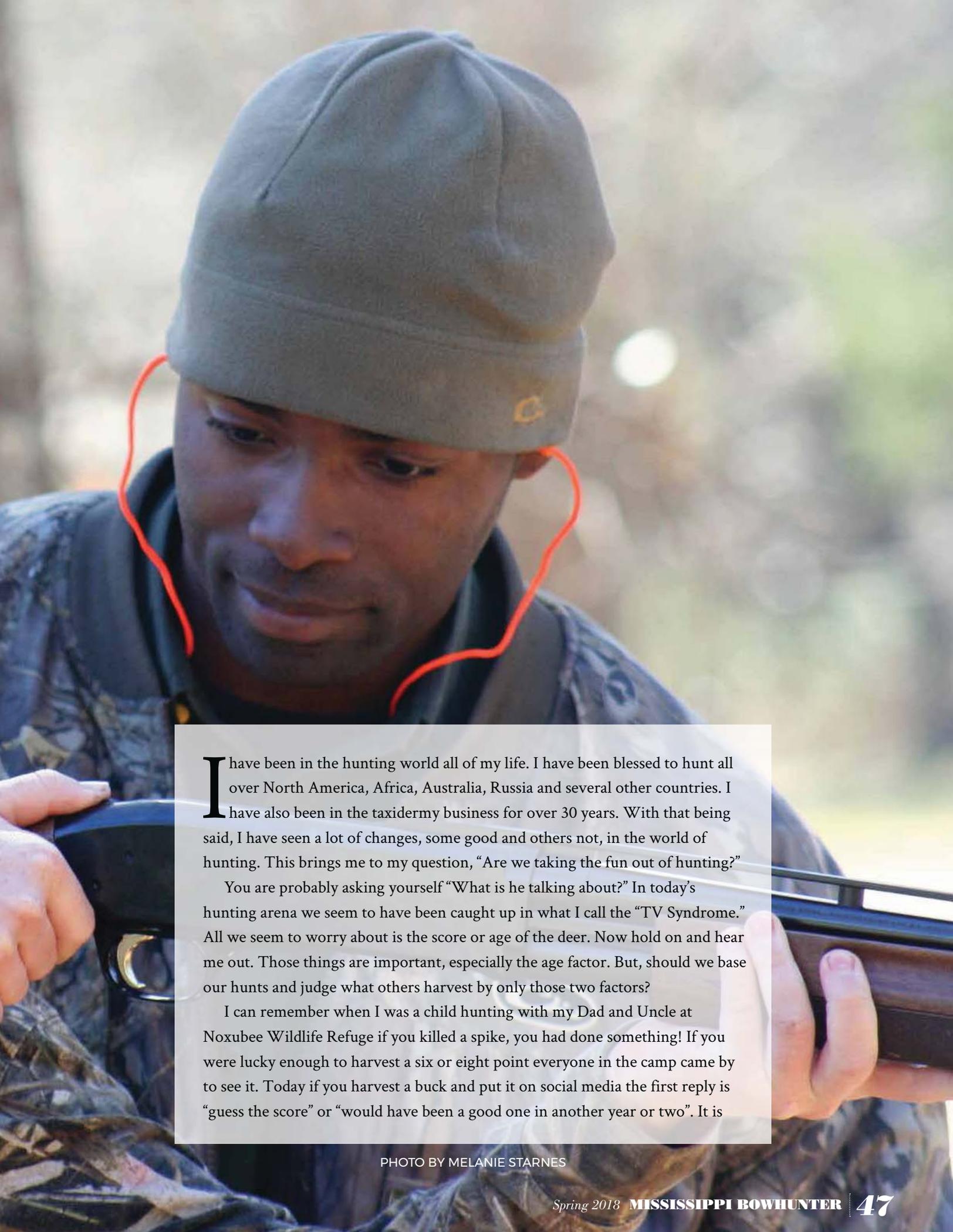


A young person with dark hair, wearing yellow safety glasses and a camouflage jacket, is shown in profile, aiming a bow. The background is a blurred natural setting with trees and foliage. The text 'TAKING THE FUN OUT OF HUNTING' is overlaid on the image. 'FUN' is written in a large, orange, brush-stroke font, while the other words are in a white, serif font.

TAKING THE **FUN** OUT OF HUNTING

STORY BY ANDY STANFORD



I have been in the hunting world all of my life. I have been blessed to hunt all over North America, Africa, Australia, Russia and several other countries. I have also been in the taxidermy business for over 30 years. With that being said, I have seen a lot of changes, some good and others not, in the world of hunting. This brings me to my question, “Are we taking the fun out of hunting?”

You are probably asking yourself “What is he talking about?” In today’s hunting arena we seem to have been caught up in what I call the “TV Syndrome.” All we seem to worry about is the score or age of the deer. Now hold on and hear me out. Those things are important, especially the age factor. But, should we base our hunts and judge what others harvest by only those two factors?

I can remember when I was a child hunting with my Dad and Uncle at Noxubee Wildlife Refuge if you killed a spike, you had done something! If you were lucky enough to harvest a six or eight point everyone in the camp came by to see it. Today if you harvest a buck and put it on social media the first reply is “guess the score” or “would have been a good one in another year or two”. It is

PHOTO BY MELANIE STARNES

such a common thing we've come to expect it, but are we selling ourselves short? Here are a few things to consider.

Example 1:

Consider the region in which you are hunting and the potential of bucks in the herd. If you hunt in north Mississippi and you set the bar at 120" and five years old, you might be in for a long haul. However, if you are hunting in south Mississippi, this is a very attainable goal.

Example 2:

Never judge another person's harvest by the size of the antlers or age of the deer. A lot of times it isn't the deer that makes it a trophy; it is the story behind the harvest. I

have taken many a doe with my bow on heavily hunted public land that provided a greater adrenaline rush than a giant buck or a three-year old 110" buck.

Example 3:

Not all of us are trophy hunters. Most just enjoy the great outdoors when they find time and are probably more proud of their harvest than most. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Example 4:

Our youth are the future of hunting and fishing in Mississippi. It is our responsibility to teach them everything we know about our natural world and encourage their hunting interests whether they prefer

archery, a rifle, a crossbow, or some other weapon of choice. Experiment with them and let them make the decision. The bottom line is keeping it fun for the kids!

I'm not saying we shouldn't have guidelines, I am just saying be realistic. Know the property on which you hunt and what a true "shooter" is for this location. Get the kids involved. Teach them about hunting regulations and what is expected of them as hunters. Ask them to consider what they are hunting before they enter the woods. Do they want to take a doe or do they want to wait on the big one? By encouraging them to plan for the hunt, it is less likely they will be disappointed if they come back



PHOTO BY JAN ALLINDER



empty handed. After all, that is why it is called hunting.

Most importantly, please consider joining organizations such as the Mississippi Bowhunters Association, Pope and Young, National Rifle Association, Safari Club International,

Mississippi Wildlife Federation, National Wild Turkey Federation and the list goes on and on. These organizations fight our fights and help protect our rights. By standing together we are a mighty voice which cannot be quietened. Remember, it

is the squeaky wheel that gets the grease. Together we can accomplish anything. Now get out there, sling some arrows, shoot guns and have fun! God bless you all.