

THE MEASURE OF A MEMORY

HUNTERS FOR MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN

STORY BY BLAKE REECE

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BERRY, HFMC DIRECTOR



“Dreams come true, just keep praying and working on what you want to achieve and ask God to lead the way. I have been praying that I could do this.”

– JEANTHONY ROME

Looking back over a lifetime of hunting I can't help but smile as I relive some of the more memorable moments I have encountered, if only in my mind. Though I have been blessed with many great memories on my journey as a hunter, many of my fondest memories are from early childhood experiences in the outdoors. Those memories helped shape me into the man I am today and I will always hold them close to my heart. Maybe you can relate.

I think back to my first kill, a doe. And it wasn't *just* a doe; it was an accomplishment like no other at that time. It was redemption from the one I had missed two days prior. I was the happiest little boy on the planet that day, and the afternoon was filled with high-fives around our camp ground and being accepted as one of the guys. I listened to the old men tell their stories of their early kills. It was a great day.

I am forever grateful to those that have selflessly taken the time to let me tag along as a youngster, teaching me the ways of the outdoors, guiding me to a successful harvest, showing me that hard work along with patience and persistence will pay off. These people, my father, uncle, and friends taught me about respect, about leaving a place better than you found it, and were prime examples

of passing along our hunting heritage to those who will soon follow in our footsteps. The measure of a man is the legacy he leaves behind; what he does for those who can never pay him back. That's what this sport of hunting is all about.

Now I am the age of those who passed this tradition on to me and I am inspired by those who stand beside me, who are taking the initiative to teach others and share these great experiences with the younger generation. Hunters for Mississippi Children, Inc. (HFMC), a non-profit organization, was created for the sole purpose of introducing children to the outdoors with a focus on, but not limited to, single parent families, children with disabilities, and other children that may not normally have the means to participate in the outdoor activities that we so often take for granted. HFMC focuses on activities to include as a primary point of interest; hunting, fishing, and camping adventures.

HFMC was established by ten close friends whose aim is simply to pass on the tradition of hunting to the less fortunate. And as of November they have already made many memories that will last a lifetime with stories of successes and failures, laughs and high fives, and an occasional tear or two of the simple joy from seeing the excitement on a young hunter's face.

Jeanthony Rome, pictured above, from Cleveland, MS. had never been hunting and stated that the opportunity to do so would be a dream come true. That's all longtime friend and outdoorsman Michael Berry needed to hear to make it a priority to get this young man into the woods.

HUNTERS FOR MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN

Hunters For Mississippi Children Inc. is a nonprofit organized exclusively for charitable, and educational purposes within the meaning of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. EIN#82-2481962.

What We Do: HFMC has been established for the sole purpose of introducing children to the outdoors. With a focus on single parent families, children with disabilities, and other children that may not normally have the means to participate in outdoor activities. HFMC focuses on activities to include as a primary point of interest; hunting, fishing, and camping adventures.

Contact: Please check out our Facebook Page! We are continuously posting opportunities for children to participate. We also love to share the outcomes of all activities involved with the HFMC outdoor events. With any questions, please feel free to contact Michael Berry (601)927-9355 or michaelberry44@hotmail.com

Who We Are: The idea of giving back to the children across the state of Mississippi was brought up in a group discussion one night as a few fellow hunters asked if there was anyone that offered hunting trips for children that would not normally have the means to experience a successful hunt. We all discussed the bigger organizations that take groups of kid's deer hunting one time a year, but we were hungry for more. We started tossing up ideas for deer, duck, and turkey hunting, fishing, camping, and any other activities that we could get kids involved with.

This is something that I personally have wanted to do for a long time. I sat my son Huntley Berry age 7 down to discuss this opportunity. If you know Huntley, he is a kind-hearted deer killing machine! I asked him how he felt about letting other kids experience what he has experienced since age 4 when he first started killing deer. His eyes lit up with joy and he carried on about how we could help others for hours. From that point on, we haven't looked back yet.

HFMC was established by ten close friends and hunters that have remained focused on bringing the outdoors into the lives of less fortunate children. As we worked to establish this organization, we have also brought our kids into the view of what it means to give back. The families involved with this organization are driven to remain focused on our mission and vision and plan to thrive with success for others.

Mission: To search and find those in need of welcoming the outdoors into the lives of Mississippi children.

Vision: May the memory last a lifetime for all that are involved.





It would be an experience Jeanthony will never forget. On November 21st, Michael made a trip to pick up Jeanthony and they headed out to make preparations for his first deer hunt in hopes of it being a successful one. Within a mere ten rounds Jeanthony proved his marksmanship abilities were on par with the task at hand and he was ready to hunt! That afternoon Jeanthony got to see several scrapes, rubs, and an abundance of deer sign keeping his anticipation high, and even had a deer snort at them, which was a first as well. As often happens though the afternoon ended with no opportunity at a deer.

However, all hope was not lost.

Michael made a promise to Jeanthony, *“I will promise you one thing; I will be back and we will get you a deer!”* The mission to make this dream come true was underway. On day two HFMC Directors Michael Berry and Hunter Cox, along with Jeanthony made their way to a promising location. It was windy, but they were confident deer had been frequenting this particular food plot often. Suddenly, shortly after 4:00 P.M. a few doe stepped into the food plot and Jeanthony was ready! With excitement at an all-time high, He took careful aim and fired. With the ring of

shot, it was obvious the deer was hit well. Jeanthony had sealed the deal on his first deer!

Michael added: “I am not sure who was shaking more, me, Jeanthony, or Hunter Cox that was with us.”

“We have built a great relationship with dog owners around the state to help us ensure a clean recovery of all deer shot. As we sat waiting on the dog with our nerves still rattle from the action. Jeanthony continues to thank us and the organization for all that we do. We have a short 75 year blood trail, and with the help of Taylor Sibley and his great dog Cash, my man has recovered his first deer and the celebration began!”

*Smiles and high fives were showering
own!"*

Jeanthony ended the night with a Facebook post that read like this:

"Shot my first deer today. I really had fun and I am ready to go for it again. Thank God for allowing me to have positive people in my circle to help a dream come true. I am looking forward to hunting again."

In a time where the first thing we often do is over analyze the trophies we pursue and size our success by inches of antler score, it is important from time to time to get back to the root of the adventure, and though I can't speak for Jeanthony, I'd bet if you asked him the score of his trophy he would proudly state, "you can't measure of a memory!"

Truth is, you can't put a measure on a memory. You can't put a number on the rush of adrenaline as the moment of truth is presented to you after countless hours of hard work finally culminating into a shot opportunity, nor can you rank a smile in celebration with your best friends after a successful harvest when the emotions of gratitude are expressed to the fullest. You can't put a tape to that.

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To the HFMC organization, I thank you for reminding me what the sport of hunting is all about. I thank you for selflessly investing in others the same way others invested in us. I thank you for doing something bigger than yourselves, and for making strides to leave this place better than you found it. I thank you for allowing others to have the opportunity to encounter God's beauty in His creation as one sits in the stillness of the outdoors.

To Jeanthony, and all the other hunters that have been involved with the HFMC, I thank you for reminding me that it is not about the size of the antlers, nor the number of kills, but rather the size of the memory. You all inspire me to be a better man and a better caretaker and steward of what I have been given. I pray you will continue in your outdoor adventures and continually thank God for each opportunity provided. For as the Bible implies, *we are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes*. Make the most of each opportunity, in the outdoors and in life itself. Always remember to give thanks. For those that have helped you along the way, I ask that you do the same for others so that the torch is passed on in this relay of life for the better of all mankind.

And to all my fellow hunters out there, I hope you have a blessed season. May you as well provide someone with an opportunity they will cherish for a lifetime. Because after all, if not you, then who? It is my hope that as you sit in the calmness of creation, you give



thanks to God above for the blessings you've been given, and know that it is not about the size of the trophy, nor the number obtained, but rather the thrill of excitement and the memories gained!

-Blake Reece

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"..Have the greatest time of your life, keep your radar on high alert, aim small, miss small, be safe and be the best conscientious reasoning predator you can be every day afield. A big thank you to all the volunteers and my friends at the Mississippi division of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks on this magical Mississippi super hunt! Make every hunt a super hunt! May the Great Spirit be forever at your side. Godspeed!"

-Ted Nugent and Family

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"To all of our supporters and the people that have assisted us with making these kid's dreams come true, Hunters For Mississippi Children would like to thank you for your donations through supportive funds, time, and the availability to hunt farms across the state.

As a nonprofit organization, we strive to provide opportunities for children that may not have the means otherwise. We focus on our participants gaining knowledge through teaching, the opportunity to hunt if drawn during that season, and simply enjoying the great outdoors through fellowship amongst a great team. This organization would not be able to do this without you!"

-Michael Berry

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