

STORY BY SUMMER STARNES
PHOTOS BY MELANIE STARNES

When I first moved to Mississippi I was not what some people would call a “huntress.” No way. My father and two younger brothers often went hunting, so I thought hunting was a man-thing. I could not see what was so fun about getting up very early, loading up a bunch of gear, and then sitting in the cold woods trying to shoot an animal. I was obviously

missing something.

Fast forward five years. I was smitten with a young man and he began trying to change my view of hunting. He hunted all the time! His whole family would load up and go to “deer camp.” He convinced me to come to their deer camp because he knew I would love the sport of hunting if I only gave it a try. I just wanted to spend time with him and if

that meant going to deer camp, well a girl has to do what a girl has to do. I mean, how bad could this be? Let’s just say that first experience did not radically change my mind. Let me describe his beloved deer camp.

It was an old yellow school bus converted into an odd little living space, complete with bunk beds, a little sink, a small table, and a TV. I drew the line in the sand when I



the woods. They were beautiful on that cold crisp fall day. On the other hand, sitting there trying to be quiet and still for a very long time was not so beautiful. I left deer camp still not understanding the passion this guy had for hunting and what kept him going back. After dating this guy for a while and eventually marrying him, I realized I had no choice but to try this hunting thing again if I ever wanted to see him during hunting season.

By then, the deer camp had been upgraded a bit. They had built a “bathroom” right behind the bus, complete with a shower and a real toilet. Thank goodness no lawn chair.

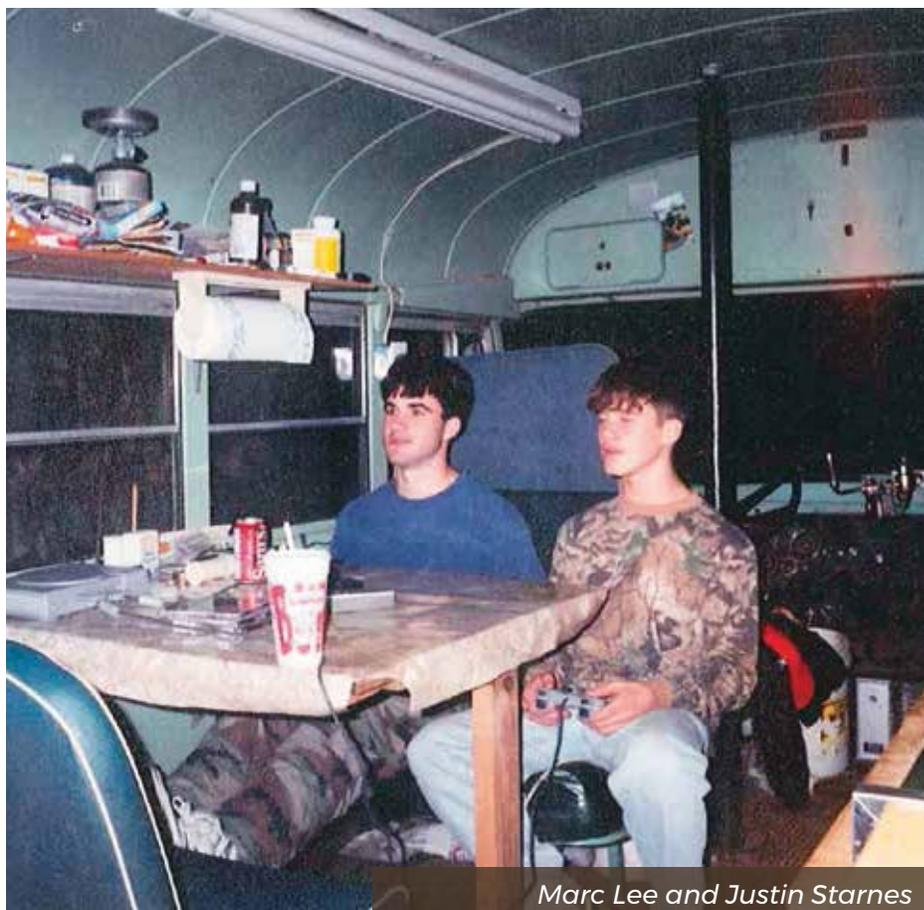
And this time I saw deer. I still wasn’t ready to be the one with the gun, but I loved sitting in the woods.

I continued to follow my husband into the woods for several years, enjoying the beauty and peace of the

woods, not to mention some of the best naps of my life. His excitement and passion for hunting was becoming contagious. He taught me how to look for deer tracks, scrapes, rubs, bedding areas, and travel patterns. He taught me about shooting a gun, how to be safe with a gun, and safety in a tree stand. I started to get excited about going hunting. I took my hunter’s safety course and got a hunting license. That deer season I was ready to carry a gun and shoot a deer. Wes, my husband, had us set up on the ground by a fallen tree. I remember hearing those deer coming through the woods and my heart began racing so fast I thought it would explode. I kept thinking, am I going to remember how to shoot this gun? He told me to get ready, so I checked to make sure I was set and ready to shoot. I propped up and when the doe

asked about a bathroom and I was pointed in the direction of the woods. I followed a small little trail behind the bus to find an old lawn chair with a toilet seat attached to the top of it. This was the ladies room. So in this age of modern utilities, I did not have a shower, a place to blow-dry my hair, or a proper toilet. This was deer camp.

Don’t get me wrong, I enjoyed



Marc Lee and Justin Starnes



Wes, Summer, Kenzie, Austin, and Caden Starnes

got close I aimed and shot. My first deer! I was shaking and so excited. I think Wes was even more excited. That did it. I was hooked.

Then Wes began teaching me how to shoot a bow. It was hard for me

to even try to pull the string back at first. I would sit in the living room and watch TV while holding my arms straight out with 8 lb weights just to build my arm strength. I practiced shooting my bow all summer in the

backyard.

Then in early fall, on my birthday, Wes took me to a spot where he thought I would have a great chance of seeing some does. It was late afternoon and we had set up two stands in one tree so he could video me with my bow. In no time, a doe came in and was headed straight for me. I had to wait for an opportunity to stand up and get my bow ready. I remember it all happened so fast. Then I had to wait patiently for a good shot and when she gave it to me I released an arrow. I got her and Wes got it on video. I was so excited and Wes was about to jump out of the tree with excitement.

I understood at that moment what it was that kept him going back year after year. It is exciting to scout an area, get up early, load up all of your gear, set up in the right spot, and have all of the things you had worked, hoped, and wished for fall into place in that perfect moment. My husband's passion and love for hunting and the outdoors changed my view of the sport of hunting.

We are passing on this passion and love for the outdoors to our three children by taking them in the woods time and time again. For me, it took many trips and many years before I began to understand and appreciate hunting, so don't be afraid to share your passion of the outdoors with others and be patient.

Go ahead, call me a huntress, I will admit it proudly. I am the girl who did not understand why my father and brothers went hunting, but I was the first one of them to take a deer with a bow!