



*My Hunt with*  
**MY GRANDSON**

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by John Antonucci

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The hunt was anticipated for thirteen years; well, almost thirteen. Ever since my oldest grandson, John, was old enough to talk, he dreamed of going big game hunting with his Papa. For Papa, the dream was larger and probably more anticipated than for John.

To be able to properly introduce a fine young man like John to all the benefits of the outdoors and to have a group of guys such as Western Lands Hunting there to insure that happens was absolutely priceless!

So the hunt commenced after months of preparation and a long journey from Ohio. The remainder of the story just gets better!

On September 12, 2011 we arrived in Utah with a trophy mule deer tag, an elk tag and a management deer tag. We let John pick before we applied and he chose the elk tag. Little did he know how much work was in front of him. It was determined by all that the team would put its efforts into harvesting the elk before filling the rest of the tags. As a result, John had two professional guides, Wade and Shawn Shults, and two, old, beaten-up, lifetime hunting partners, Larry Hamilton and John Antonucci, scouting for him.

The first day we arrived we had an afternoon to go scout and Wade was able to call in a bull to about thirteen yards away. The bull was young and needed a couple years' maturity but it sure was thrilling to watch him come crashing down the mountain and end up just "a stone's throw" away from us. Back at the camp, we were full of adrenalin and ready to hit it hard the next day.

After settling into camp and getting a lousy night's sleep due to pure excitement, we left camp the first morning around 5:00 a.m., John, Wade and Papa in one Ranger and Larry and Shawn in another. John was so visibly excited that he was, one, not talking, and two, at times shaking with adrenalin as we crossed the ranch and began our ascent on a mountain that had been known to hold elk. It was the beginning of the



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rut so we knew the bulls would be active. After an hour's ride, the Ranger came to a stop and the three of us exited very quietly. We wanted to get into position before sunrise and we climbed to the summit where the glassing would be most advantageous. The other Ranger was positioned on the mountaintop adjacent to us with the same goal in mind... help John find a big bull.

As the sun came over the mountains the bugling began to scream out. We all agreed that it was two different bulls approximately a half mile away and on the next mountain over. After glassing for about 30 minutes we decided to move closer to the bugles so we could get a look at both bulls.

As all who have hunted elk before know, when you hear that first bugle in the hunting season your hair stands on end, but for John, a city boy from Cleveland, Ohio it was the first bugle he ever heard in the field. You can only imagine the excitement and tumult that was raging through him.

Wade, John and I put our backpacks on and started our trek to the other mountain, leaving the four-wheeler behind. Once we got in our secondary position we looked for a good vantage point to glass and start our stalk from. The sun was now up, and having found an outcropping of rocks we began to listen and stalk. Wade made a couple of bugles and the bull immediately responded. We figured we closed at least half the distance and the bull began to come our way. We moved ever so cautiously toward the bull to get John a better shot. As the bull appeared, John got set on the shooting sticks and we all stayed totally silent but for an occasional bugle from Wade.

John was now ready and the bull turned broadside, 312 yards away. With the .270 Short Mag made by Gunwerks, we felt comfortable John could make the shot after hitting a lead plate back at camp from 500 yards away. When Wade gave the okay to

shoot and Papa had him in the binoculars, John squeezed the trigger and the bullet soared right over the back of the bull... miss! The bull whirled and started a full run for the timbers and we all watched him disappear.

We then collected ourselves and began to head toward where the bull went into the timbers, all with a sense of disappointment but also with sheer determination to find that bull again. As we climbed back up the mountain to take the crest line over to the mountain where the bull was last seen, we jumped a trophy mule deer buck and Plan "B" was now in effect. It was determined that Papa would fill his tag so we began to track the deer.

I have never seen a mule deer cover so much ground in such a short amount of time. After about a half hour of stalking him we sat down and glassed the mountain across from us, hoping to catch another glimpse of this beautiful deer.

Sure enough, Wade caught a glimpse of his antler sticking out of a bunch of rocks, 537 yards away. Lying down and waiting for him to present a shot, we waited about twenty minutes and the deer stood up. I was able to knock him down with two shots. One in the back quarter because I hadn't calculated the wind properly and one to the lungs which did him in...one tag filled!



**John will receive an Bino System and Backpack Trail Lights from Cooked Horn Outfitters for his story. See page 40 for more info.**

After field dressing him and hanging him in a cool spot, it was back to the elk. We went back to the spot where we last saw our wapiti and began to move slowly down the mountain. As it became high noon we settled in on the mountain for some lunch and more glassing, but also to rest Papa's sore and tired legs. We ate and hydrated ourselves then John practiced dry firing and Wade began to bugle again. Then right around the third bugle we got a response and our energy level soared to new heights. Off we went chasing that strident sound like we've done so many times before. Walking very slowly toward the bottom of the mountain, the bull kept bugling back at us. We asked, "Could we be so blessed as to have another chance at this majestic 6x7 we missed earlier?"

The bugle was coming from the woods and we could just see the top of one antler. We got in position as John set back up on the sticks and waited. Two cows appeared and then the bull. As Wade calmed John and made sure he was totally settled, we waited for the bull to totally step out and give John a broadside shot. When the bull stepped out we saw that it wasn't the same bull but another magnificent 6x6. John stayed focused and the bull was now in his crosshairs. As Wade gave the instruction to shoot, one cow stepped right in front of the bull and John had to pull down the

gun. The look on his face is one I'll cherish for eternity-disappointment, despair, along with any other adjective that would describe a total letdown.

Wade immediately sensed that and got John re-focused as he got his crosshairs back on the animal. The cow stepped forward and the order to shoot was given. John took a deep breath, exhaled just as he had practiced 1,000 times, and squeezed the trigger. The bullet hit him perfectly in the heart from 257 yards away...what a SHOT!! Wade yelled to John to shoot again and the second bullet hit the elk about an inch and a half away from the first one. As we watched the animal go down we all stood and couldn't believe the elation we were feeling. What an accomplishment for such a young man, and the memories John and I will share together for the rest of our lives are just pure bliss! Two tags filled...WOW, what a day!!

Thanks so much to Wade and Shawn Shults who work for Western Lands Outfitters, Larry Hamilton and my grandson, John, for making this truly a hunt of a lifetime! 🍷

