

Her First Deer at 72

It is a crisp November afternoon when she walks to her deer blind behind the old dilapidated chicken coop. She catches a faint scent of chickens from years past as the wind blows towards her. She walks slowly on the wet grasses, glancing up at the soybean fields for any movement while zipping up her blaze orange coat and pulling up the hood.

There is no snow now as it has been warm for a Michigan winter, but there is still a chill in the air. She starts searching for a dry spot to set her chair upon, which is difficult since it is so close to the marsh. She looks east again towards the fields but sees nothing for now and notices the sun slowly setting.

In her right hand, she carries her 20-gauge Winchester shotgun filled with slugs. In her coat pocket is her doe/buck tag. She's never taken a deer with this gun or any other gun for that matter, but she's used it on the occasional pesky woodchuck that happened to dig too close to her vegetable garden.

She sets her chair down and scans the fields over and over until this time she notices movement. She counts seven deer that come from the marsh to feed for the evening. Two are out in front and lift their heads to sniff the wind. They look in her direction. She thinks by their behavior that they have wind-ed her so she decides to take a shot.

She misses and the entire bunch takes off over the top of the field and heads towards the lake. "Damn," she thinks to herself. In the past 50-some years while living on the farm, she has seen her sons, grandchildren, neighbors, friends, and her husband bring in deer. "Just once, I'd like to take one," she tells herself.

As the sun begins to set, she notices a lone deer standing at the top of the soybean field. She thinks it might be a spike but she is unsure. The deer meanders behind her and lies down under some tall brush. She can't see it and anxiously waits for it to reappear by the marsh. She looks to see where the sun is. Father Time is against her today, as he

has been so many times in the past. The deer finally gets up and she can tell now that it is a doe, a big doe. She feels her heart begin to race. The deer comes down the lane and heads for the fence line, away from her.

Her heart slowly returns to its normal rhythm as she watches the deer walk away. The deer then turns and begins to head closer to her, coming to within 35 feet. "I want this one," she tells herself. Standing up and figuring it is now or never, she

quietly slips the safety off and takes aim.

There is a flash when she shoots and the deer bolts. By now the sun is setting, but she feels she made a good shot.

Her son and husband are nearby and hear the shot. "That must be Ma," they figure. She comes back to find them both and to lead them hopefully to her



The author's aunt was 72 when she tagged her first deer. Photo by Rob Drake

first deer. They go back to the house to get the lanterns and flashlights and begin the search. Her son heads towards the marsh and she points to where she was sitting and the direction where she shot. Her son walks 10 feet from where she points and finds the blood trail. With the light, he walks a few feet further and finds the doe. It hadn't gone far.

Her husband tells her he will dress it out for her, knowing she could do it herself but allowing her this moment for now. Her son looks up and says, "I'm proud of ya, Mom." She smiles with pride while glancing back at her deer.

I guess you could say my Aunt Joyce didn't catch the fever until later in life, but I don't think it matters. It doesn't matter whether you are seven or 72, as long as you don't give up.

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