

**MORE THAN
INCHES!**

French Toast & Pancake

— Story and Photos by Stephanie Rainey —

When I mention the words French Toast and Pancake, you probably picture in your mind a delectable breakfast meal that's served with big slabs of butter and gobs of maple syrup. Well in this story, French Toast and Pancake aren't something most people normally eat for breakfast. In fact, French Toast and Pancake are names given to two bull elk from central Arizona.

Ryan Urie was the young man who named the bulls. Ryan and his father, Kevin, drove out from Denver, Colorado for Ryan's Arizona Hunt of a Lifetime archery hunt. For those of you not familiar with Hunt of a Lifetime (HOAL), it's a non-profit organization that fulfills hunting and fishing dreams for youngsters 21 years and under who have a life-threatening illness.

Ryan is 17 years old and has Cirrhosis, which was caused by an auto immune disorder that attacked his liver. The upside to this story is that Ryan is in clinical remission.

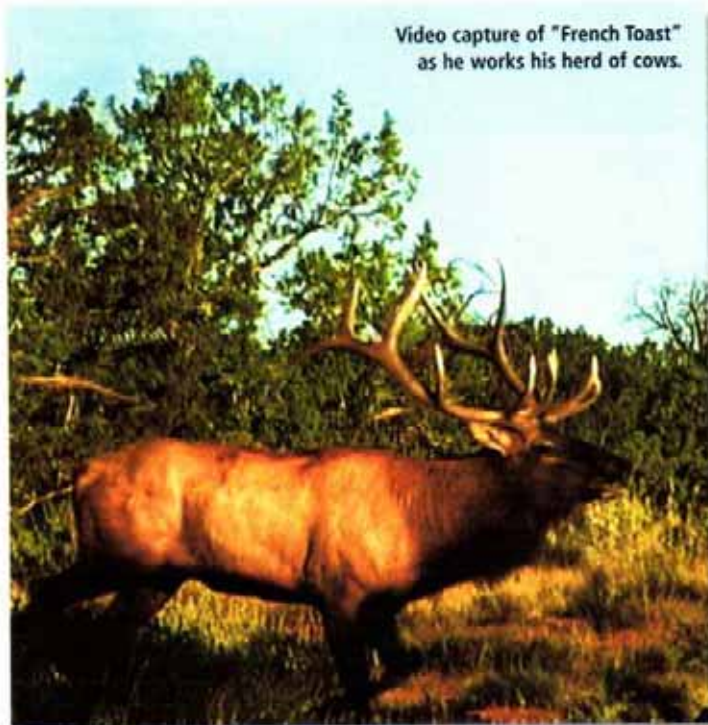
You wouldn't know Ryan is any different than any other boy his age. He's athletic, loves to hunt and fish, he's smart, does well in school and in fact, after he graduates from high school he wants to go to college to become a small animal veterinarian. He has big plans and a bright future.

I was lucky enough to be Ryan's shadow during his hunt, filming his every move. This is the ninth HOAL hunt I've filmed in the past seven years and these hunts are always the highlight of my year. I host an outdoor television program in northern Arizona called "Stepping Outdoors" and I look forward to the end of my television season each year as I know elk season will be right around the corner and soon enough it will be time to film another HOAL hunt.

Ryan's hunt was a lot of fun for sure, but it was a little different than other HOAL hunts I've filmed. Instead of everyone staying at a hotel, we camped out under the stars in canvas wall-tents for six glorious nights. Well I guess I should say four glorious nights; the other two nights were bitter cold, wet and damp after a rain-storm dropped over an inch of rain on us. My toothpaste even froze those nights. But even after dealing with muck for two days and getting soaked to the bone, we always knew there'd be something to smile about when we made it back to basecamp.

You see, back at camp we were blessed with having a group of strangers who came together to help with Ryan's hunt with only one goal in mind, and that was to see to it that Ryan had the best hunt possible. There were no attitudes or egos at this camp. When Ryan came into camp every night he could count on a lot of laughs, funny stories and good times. Some of the people

Video capture of "French Toast" as he works his herd of cows.



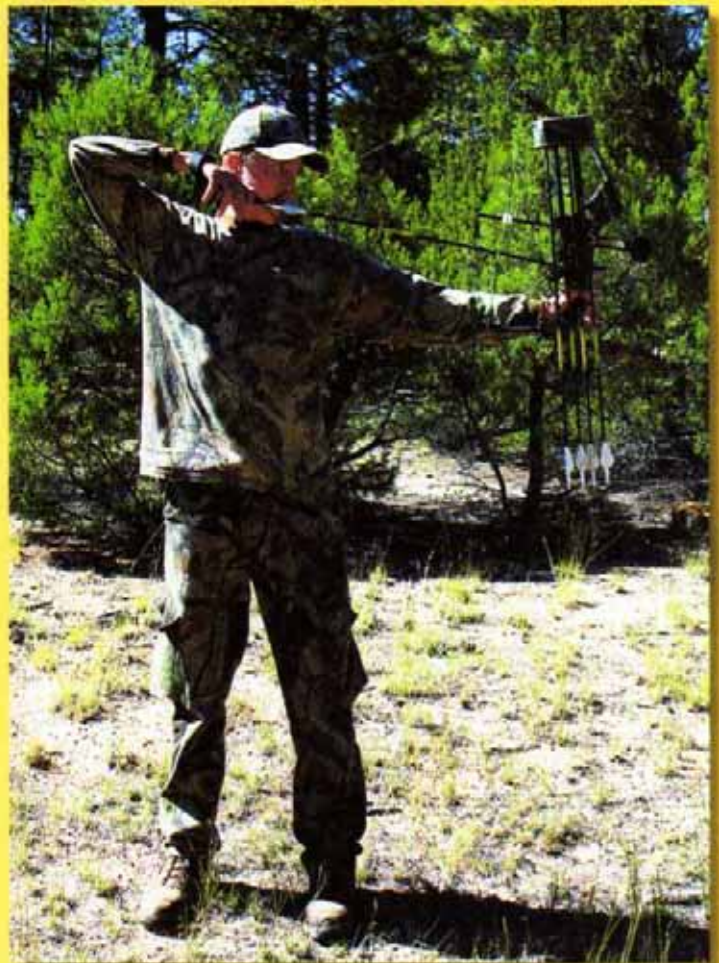


Ryan's Hunt of a Lifetime team meets outside the cook tent to discuss the options for an upcoming evening hunt.

who made Ryan's hunt memorable were Gary Barcom from the Mogollan Sportsman's Association, Val Nitzsche from Payson, and Norvin and Craig DeSpain from Snowflake. *Western Hunter* magazine's graphic designer, Randy Stalcup, came up to guide, along with help from Steve Sutherland, John Koleszar and our mascot, Shadow the dog.

This story wouldn't be complete without mentioning our cook, Ignacio Beltram. If it weren't for Ignacio, French Toast and Pancake would have never gotten the recognition they now have. One early morning at 3 a.m. when we were about to leave camp without eating any breakfast, Ignacio told us that he was going to fix french toast for us when we got back after hunting that morning. Well the sound of those scrumptious words made Ryan and I lick our lips in anticipation. Right then and there, Ryan and I made our itinerary. I said, "Well Ryan, if you kill a bull by 7:10 a.m., make sure you kill him near a road so the guys can dress him out and haul him into the bed of a truck and then we can be back to camp eating french toast by 9:30 a.m." Ryan agreed to our pact and off we went.

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Ryan practices with hopes of sticking a fork in "French Toast."



Ryan's HOAL team included from left to right: Shadow, John Koleszar, Steve Sutherland, Gary Barcom, Ryan Urie, Kevin Urie, Val Nitzsche, Randy Stalcup, Stephanie Rainey, and Ignacio Beltram.

We had scouted and found a herd of elk out in a meadow the day before, so we went to the same spot hoping the elk would repeat their behavior from the previous day. When we got to our spot, sure enough, the elk were there and they were coming our way. The elk started coming over a knoll and we could hear what sounded like a good bull bugling to the west. The bull growled and growled so loudly that we knew he was the one we wanted. We made our way over towards the bull using the juniper trees as cover, but as luck would have it, we ran out of cover. The bull was close; we could smell him but we couldn't see him yet and the closest way to get to him was to cross an open area. Ryan, Randy and I lit out.



Craig and Norvin DeSpain made Ryan's team complete.

Then it happened! There he was, one of the largest monster 6x7 bulls I had ever seen. The bull snarled and raked the trees in front of him. He was definitely worked up by all the other bulls in the area that wanted his cows. The only problem was that there was a hot cow in the herd and the bull didn't want to leave her. She walked out in front of us, and then moved around behind a tree. The bull followed her, which was good for him but bad for us. He was within 35 yards, but behind the tree so Ryan couldn't get a good shot. For the next five minutes the bull stayed within 75 yards as he chased the hot cow around. He remained worked up and continued to bugle in response to Randy's cow calling as well as the distant sound of other bulls. Unfortunately we were pinned down by other cows and calves and could not move in on the bull. Finally, the bull began to push the hot cow off toward their bedding area, looked back in our direction, bugled, and then disappeared into the woods. The adrenaline that ran through our bodies was still pumping when we got up to discuss what had just occurred. We were disappointed at not being able to get Ryan a shot at that impressive bull, but we felt grateful for having been able to even see such a magnificent beast.

After our encounter we headed back to camp. When Ryan and I arrived at camp, we headed to the breakfast table and after eating our two large slices of Texas-sized french toast with butter and syrup, Ryan said, "You know, we didn't get a shot at French Toast this morning but I bet we can try to get Pancake, the smaller 6x6 bull that was with him." I looked at Ryan, chuckled and said, "Yeah, I think if we can't have French Toast then Pancake will do."

Ryan never got another shot at Pancake or French Toast again. The elk herd changed their pattern and never came within bow range again, but because of the efforts of some very special people, Ryan went home with some memories of a lifetime.

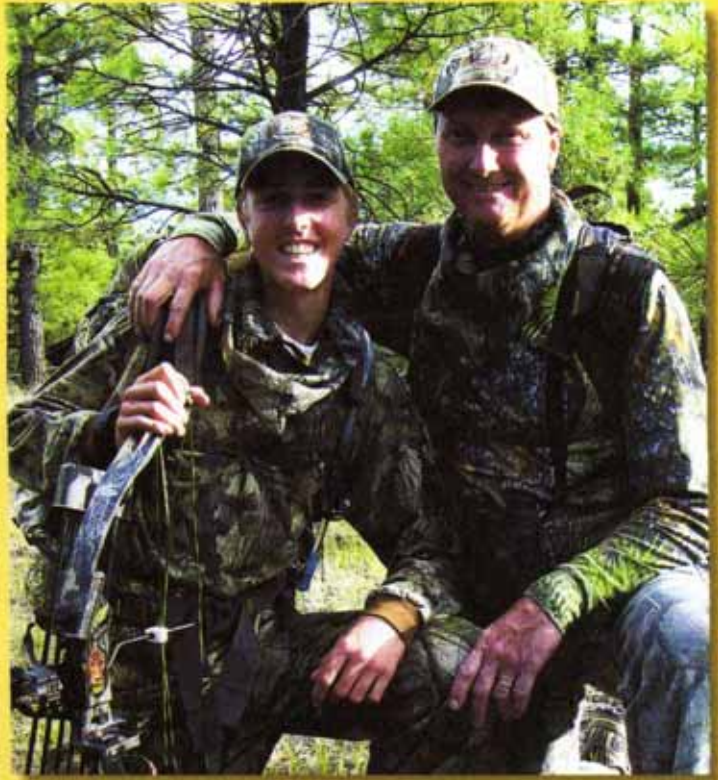
A special thanks goes out to Katie Wilcox. Katie donated the hunting tag that allowed Ryan to go on his hunt. Katie's husband, Bill Wilcox, passed away in April before knowing he had drawn a coveted Arizona archery bull elk tag in unit 4B. Katie donated the tag to HOAL in Bill's memory. I also want to thank all the other people behind the scenes who made this HOAL hunt possible. They are strangers no more. 🍌

Author's Note:

If you'd like to know more about the Hunt of a Lifetime organization, contact Tina Pattison at www.huntofalifetime.org or call 1-866-345-4455.

About the Author:

Stephanie Rainey is an outdoor freelance writer and host of an outdoor television program in Pinetop, Arizona called "Stepping Outdoors." Her articles and photos have appeared in magazines that include *Bugle*, *Western Hunter*, *Big Game Adventures*, *Arizona Outdoorsman*, *Sportsman's News*, *Bow & Arrow*, and *Michigan Out of Doors*. She can be reached at raineyproductions@frontiernet.net.



Ryan and Kevin Urie enjoy a moment on Ryan's 2007 archery elk hunt.

"French Toast" acted like he wanted a fight, but retreated as the French always do.

