

I grew up hunting with a rifle. I don't think I even knew anyone who hunted with a bow. All that changed when I met Paul from Velva, a left-handed bow hunter. That fall I found myself up a tree in Paul's stand with his bow, on his property, and in walked a deer. Houston, we are go for launch.

The second year I was still pretty green but I had me one of those new lightning-fast compounds, with sights and trigger. I tried the more traditional approach. It's not ethical for me to shoot at something with a recurve or longbow. Fact is, after countless weeks of disciplined practice, I could just pass for a hunter the deer would consider a vague threat.

There is no substitute for experience and first year archery for me was filled with questions, only answered by time. Where to set up? How high, what tree, won't they see me? How do you know when to draw? I've since found out that many questions have nothing to do with first year hunting. I'm still asking myself those same questions.

The trail camera helped me the most. Having a picture of a buck gave me confidence and while I never really figured out a pattern, I always went out knowing there was at least one good buck in the area. He came by one night and alerted Houston that I was ready for lift off. Too late, too dark, too excited.

I started paying more attention to details. Picking the best wind and what I hoped would be a good night to sit. One of those nagging questions I asked, and still do is, "Won't I scare him off by over hunting?" I decided once a week at most would be my best strategy.

One of the best aspects of archery hunting is waiting. Silence and stillness bring out the best in nature. From birds to squirrels, clouds to leaves, it all takes on new meaning. Maybe we don't do enough of that, just sitting, being still and waiting. Just maybe sitt'n and wait'n brings out the best in people too.

It's Sunday, late November and we have a warm up with SE winds 10-15. Perfect. There is at least 16 inches of snow on the ground but the air is warm. I climb into the stand and follow my routine. Draw back, check for branches, sit down and wait. My rule in those days was ½ hour before sunset I would stand up and stay standing, just in case.

I'm an hour from standing when I notice a great set of horns moving my way through the trees, just like a TV hunting show. Glimpses of horns, testing the wind, cautious, silent, slowly moving my direction. He is at least 50 yards out yet. Slowly I stand, bow ready.

I'm certain he will hear my heart pounding. Mr. Big Buck sends reconnaissance ahead. I hardly remember the spiked scout as I was focused on a bigger target. Draw? Wait-- not yet-- easy-- wait. By now I'm not even sure I will be able to get my bow back.

Finally broadside, 11 yards, head down and slightly turned away, I make my move. I'm not that good of a shot and even 11 yards is no sure bet, particularly in my advanced stages of buck fever. Looking back everything was perfect. Broadside, head turned slightly, wind in my favor. Even the shot was perfect. The arrow sliced through and stuck deep into the snow.

Someone else was on launch sequence with Houston. I have never seen a deer move faster. Out of the trees, up the field edge, gone from sight in 2 seconds! Certainty and doubt meet in a head on collision.

Finally, I get a breath of air and realization begins to take effect. Snow is splashed red as far as I can see. Waiting for that necessary half hour is completely forgotten.

With a blood trail the color blind could follow, it was no challenge. 20 yards into the trail I remember my bow is still hanging in the tree. I still have symptoms of the fever. Back on the trail, through the deep snow, I see antlers on the ground. Deer Down!

Soon as I got home I told my wife, "Those guys who snort coke have no idea what a rush is!" Houston we are go for launch!

That set-in motion a series of lift offs. Jesse, age 9, my oldest, was in a tree 30 yards from my observation post. In walked a buck that turned broadside at 12 yards, his first. Now was my son's turn to run through the questions. We were quietly standing together at the base of his tree after his first encounter. Suddenly he exclaimed, "Dad, there is something wrong with my legs!" Looking down I could see the problem. Severe knee knocking had set in. Turns out the fever is contagious.

The next shot into space was a father, son team. Levi inherited his brother's bow. We were together in a pine tree. I silently whispered, "Easy, get your bow ready, draw, now!" I have no idea if the fever got him as I was too busy trying to manage my own symptoms. Levi, age 9, first buck.

All that family building adventure was the result of baiting. The extent of my permission was the outer edges of town on small 10-20 acre parcels. Baiting turned poor habitat into endless weekend adventures. A bonus was the flowers and gardens got raided a little less.

I won't get to decide if I introduce my grandkids to archery hunting. Big government has taken that privilege away from me and the landowners who used to let us hunt.

Coming up in a week or so is House Bill 1151. It would restore my right to choose if I want to hunt with bait or not. I know some won't bait, just not something that sits right with them. I'm ok with that. Choice is what gives us color, helps ourselves, and others see who we are. We are created unique, one of a kind, for a purpose.

I am, however, asking for something that will be hard for all of us. Some need to stand up and fly your colors. Others need to lower their flag to half-mast and let uniqueness have a chance.