

# FUTURE SPORTSMAN

Meet Bailee Graves... our featured Future Sportsman this month! Bailee has been hunting with her dad, Russell, since she could walk. Here is her story, as told by her dad, of growing up surrounded by the outdoors.

## My First Deer Hunt By Bailee Ann Graves

IN A LOT OF WAYS, SHE'S BEEN PREPARING FOR THIS DAY SINCE SHE WAS BORN - MAYBE EVEN BEFORE. SHE IS THE FIRST CHILD OF MY WIFE, KRISTY, AND ME AND A DOTING SISTER OF HER TWO-YEAR-OLD BROTHER, RYAN.

BEFORE BAILEE COULD WALK, I'D SIT ON THE FLOOR AND HOLD HER IN MY LAP WHILE WE WATCHED FOOTBALL AND HUNTING SHOWS. I CAN'T RECALL THE CHRONOLOGY OF HER WORDS, BUT I AM CERTAIN THAT "DEER" WAS AMONG THE FIRST THINGS SHE RECITED.

AS SOON AS SHE COULD WALK, I STARTED TOTING HER AFIELD WITH ME. ALTHOUGH SHE NEVER HUNTED, WE'D SCOUT FOR SIGN, LEARN ANIMAL TRACKS, AND SPEND TIME TOGETHER. MY WIFE WOULD CHIDE ME ABOUT HER BEING RAISED LIKE A BOY. IN A LOT OF WAYS, THAT IS TRUE. ON MY SIDE OF OUR FAMILY, BAILEE IS THE YOUNGEST OF SEVEN GRANDDAUGHTERS AND, AT THE TIME OF HER BIRTH, MY PARENTS HAD NO GRANDSONS. NEEDING A HUNTING BUDDY, I STARTED TEACHING HER THE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT THE OUTDOORS.

I'LL ADMIT THAT I AM UNABASHEDLY BIASED. WITH THAT SAID, SHE IS AMAZING. HER SPIRIT AND ENTHUSIASM FOR LIFE AND THE OUTDOORS IS INSPIRING. SHE HAS ENOUGH OF ME IN HER TO BE ADVENTUROUS AND CURIOUS, AND ENOUGH OF HER MOTHER TO BE GENTLE AND LOVING. SHE IS THE PERFECT HUNTING COMPANION. THE OLD RHYME SAYS THAT LITTLE GIRLS ARE MADE OF SUGAR AND SPICE AND EVERYTHING NICE. I'LL AGREE WITH THAT IF THE "EVERYTHING" INCLUDES CAMOUFLAGE.

WHEN SHE STARTED KINDERGARTEN THIS YEAR, I KNEW THE TIME WAS RIGHT TO TAKE HER HUNTING. SHE'D ALREADY EXPERIENCED EVERYTHING ABOUT DEER HUNTING EXCEPT THE ACTUAL HUNT, AND GOING OUT WITH ME WAS THE NEXT NATURAL STEP.





ON FRIDAY BEFORE THE TEXAS OPENING DAY, WE GOT OUR GEAR READY AND SHE WENT TO SLEEP EARLY. THE NEXT MORNING SHE SPRANG OUT OF BED AT 5:00AM. BECAUSE OF THE GENEROSITY OF A LOCAL LANDOWNER, WE ARE BLESSED TO HAVE A PLACE ONLY FOUR MILES FROM OUR HOUSE IN WHICH TO HUNT, SO WE DIDN'T HAVE FAR TO TRAVEL.

HUNTING FROM ELEVATED BLINDS IS COMMON IN TEXAS, SO WE CAREFULLY CLIMBED THE LADDER IN THE DARK AND SETTLED IN. EXPECTEDLY, IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE SHE ASKED, "DADDY, CAN I TAKE A NAP?" SHE WOKE UP JUST AFTER SUNRISE AND WE SPENT A PERFECT MORNING TOGETHER EXPERIENCING THE OUTDOORS. SHE WAS HAPPY SEEING DEER AND TURKEYS AND EVERYTHING ELSE THAT CREPT AROUND THE MESQUITE SCRUB OF NORTHWEST TEXAS, AND I WAS HAPPY THAT THE BLIND MUTED HER NEAR-CONSTANT CHATTER.

WHEN WE GOT HOME, SHE WROTE ABOUT HER ADVENTURE:  
 FRIDAY NIGHT I GOT MY HUNTING CLOTHES READY.  
 WHEN I GOT UP ON SATURDAY IT WAS STILL DARK.  
 WE DROVE TO THE LAND AND GOT IN THE BLIND.  
 WE HUNTED ALL MORNING AND WE SAW 6 DOES, 2 BUCKS, AND SOME TURKEYS.  
 I HAD A GOOD TIME.  
 NEXT SEASON CAN'T COME SOON ENOUGH.

'FIRST HUNT' BY RUSSELL AND BAILEE GRAVES  
 PHOTOS BY RUSSELL GRAVES

The End

If you are a Future Sportsman, aged 17 or under, and would like to tell your hunting or fishing story, then send your pictures and story to:

The Sportsman Channel  
 Editorial Department  
 2855 S. James Dr, Ste. 101  
 New Berlin, WI 53151-3662  
 OR email us at:  
 sportsman@thesportsmanchannel.com

Sorry, pictures are non-returnable.