

Dreams Do Come True



Story By Mark Beason
Photography By Ricky Flynt

You don't have to have a rabbit's foot in your pocket, pick a four-leafed clover or toss a penny in a well to have your dream come true.

Dreams are as individual as the people who make them. For some it may be meeting a sports star while for others it's going to Disneyland. For Nick Grubbs it was a deer hunting trip with his dad and taking a big buck. Nick's dream came true and he didn't need Tinker Bell's magic dust.

Not long ago Nick was your average 10-year-old boy. He liked sports, the outdoors, collecting rocks and giving his little sister Hannah a hard time. Everything seemed normal in Nick's life until Dec. 2008 when he was diagnosed with synovial sarcoma – a rare form of cancer. This type of cancer normally affects the joints and soft tissue areas, but in Nick's case it's near his throat and chest area.

"Getting news like that is hard to take," said Roger Grubbs, Nick's father. "You always want your children to be healthy. Hearing Nick's diagnosis was hard to take."

While getting the news was difficult, it also meant the beginning of a long road battling the disease. Nick's endured surgery along with radiation and chemotherapy treatments. Through it all, he has kept his spirit and held on to his dream of hunting with his dad and not letting the big one get away.

"Since he was a little boy he's always wanted to go deer hunting," Roger Grubbs said. "When I had the time I'd take him, and he'd always keep asking to go again."

The making of a wish

Randy Clark, attorney for Roger Grubbs, got the ball rolling on Nick's deer hunt. Annette Clark, Randy's wife and Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks employee, told MDWFP Alligator Program Coordinator Ricky Flynt about Nick. Flynt went to visit Nick at Blair Batson Children's Hospital in Jackson and Nick told Flynt about his dream to go deer hunting.

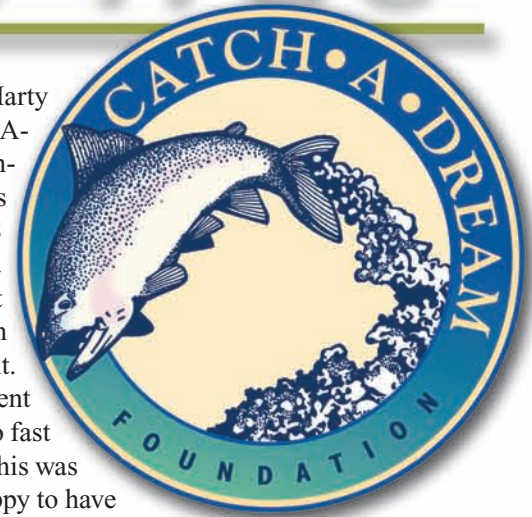
"I knew then that if Nick wanted to go deer hunting I was going to do everything I could to make it happen," Flynt said. "For a young man to have gone through so much I felt like the least I could do was arrange a hunt for him."

The initial plan was for Nick to participate in the annual Wheeling Sportsmen hunt. This hunt is set up each year to give children with disabilities an opportunity to go hunting. Despite Nick's desire to make the hunt, he was too ill that specific weekend and wasn't able to go.

What Nick didn't know was another hunt was already in the works.

Flynt got in touch with Dr. Marty Brunson, director of the Catch-A-Dream Foundation. The Catch-A-Dream Foundation is designed to help children 18 years and younger who have a life-threatening illness. They set up dream hunts for the children and Nick's case was a perfect fit.

"After talking with the different people involved we were able to fast track things," Brunson said. "This was a wonderful trip and we are happy to have been a part of it."



A dream come true

Nick's hunt was set to take place at Woodburn, a property owned by Billy and Mollie Vandevender in Claiborne County. Mrs. Vandevender, an avid hunter, said the hunt was an uplifting and emotional experience. She feels blessed to have been a part of.

"It just brought me to my knees and warmed my heart," Mrs. Vandevender said. "I had no idea the impact it would have on my life. Being around Nick has been a blessing. He's one of the most humble, grateful and well-mannered children I've ever been around."

Because of Nick's condition special measures were put in place. The doctors would not release Nick to shoulder a firearm so a special gun was brought in for the hunt. The gun had a digital scope and an external screen so Nick could see through the scope during the hunt.



While the hunt was for Nick, the whole Grubbs' family was involved. His father, step-mother, brother and sister were invited to be a part of the experience. Brunson said including the family is a big part of the Catch-A-Dream experience.

"An illness like Nick's is a family illness that involves everybody in some way," Brunson said. "We want the family to be a part of the experience too. It means so much to everyone when they are there for special moments like these."

After some target practice, a scavenger hunt and even a little fishing, Nick and his dad were ready to go hunting. The hunt started Nov. 16 and while they saw a lot of deer, they didn't see the right one. This was a special hunt and it had to be a special deer too.

The Woodburn staff and guide Adam Quick were able to do some scouting work and found a good set for Nick's next day of hunting. After positioning themselves in a blind that overlooked a field, Nick and the hunting group didn't have to wait long.

"We saw lots and lots of deer – I've never seen that many at one time," Nick said. "We had deer just walking all over the place."

Finally, Nick's buck stepped out in the field. Like any good hunter, Nick waited patiently for a good shot. Before the deer could get out of the field it turned just right and Nick made his shot. Nick knew right away he'd made a good shot as everybody waited with anticipation.

"We were able to stand on the back deck of the lodge and see the field they were hunting," Flynt said. "It was about one-half mile away, but we could easily see them. We heard the shot but didn't know if he had taken the deer. It seemed like a long time before we got the call that he'd made a good shot." The big buck weighed more than 200 pounds and had nine points.

"I just could not believe how big that buck was – I've never seen one so big," Nick said. "I've seen huge deer like that on TV before, but I never dreamed I'd get a chance to get one that big."

Nick's father was in the blind during the hunt. He said experiencing it with his son was truly a blessing. After what

Nick had been through during the last year, he's grateful that they had the opportunity.

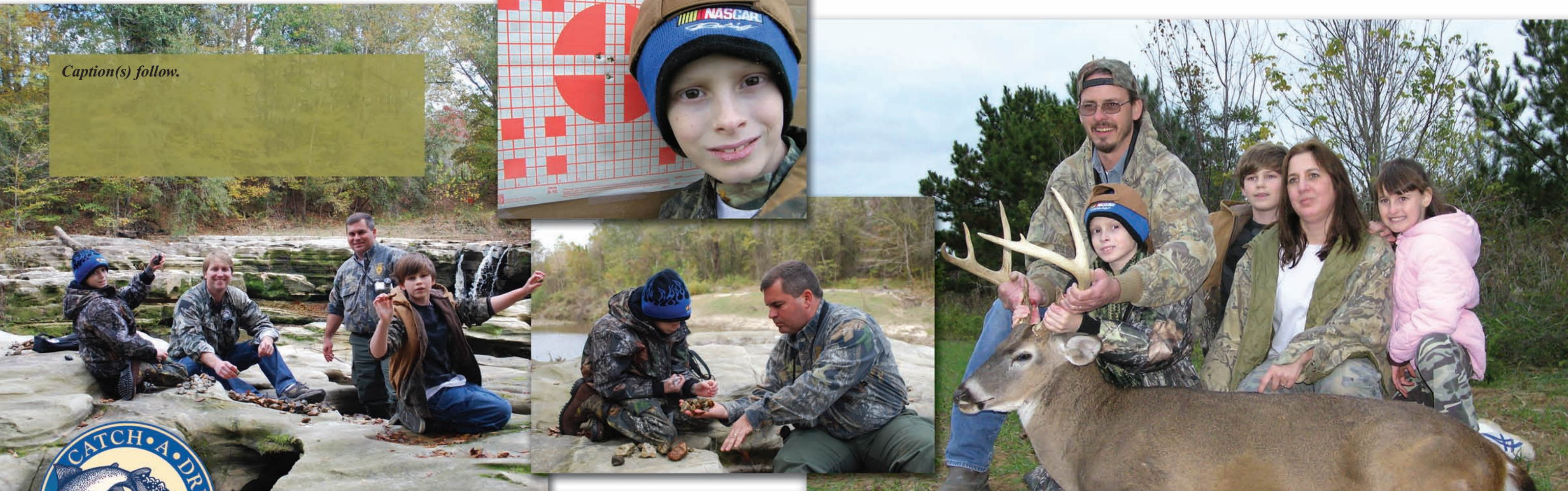
"I know a lot of people with the Catch-A-Dream program and many others worked hard to make this happen for Nick and our family," Roger Grubbs said. "They'll never know just how much this has meant to us." Nick's hunt marks the 197th dream granted by the Catch-A-Dream Foundation. There are 30 more adventure dates scheduled soon for other children like Nick. While the hunt was for Nick, it ended up touching the lives of everybody involved.

"Everyone involved came to support Nick's dream hunt," Flynt said. "In the end, we were all blessed with an experience of a lifetime by Nick's courage, strength and character."

Mark Beason is editor of Mississippi Outdoors.



Caption(s) follow.



But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. Isaiah 40:31