

Noah's Bear by Joseph Koback

Safari Club chapters around the country take a lot of disabled and terminally ill children on their Dream Hunts. Most of these are brought to us from other organizations looking for help to make these dreams come true. Central Wisconsin Chapter's biggest partner is United Special Sportsman's Alliance (USSA) and their founder Brigid O'Donoghue. USSA sets up hundreds of hunting and fishing trips for Terminally Ill and Disabled children each year. They can only do this through the generosity of their many volunteers, other organizations like SCI and Outfitters. This past June Brigid contacted me with a special request. First, she asked if we were bringing our Sensory Safari Trailer back out to their Summerfest, which is a gathering of hundreds of disabled or terminally ill children from around the country. I reassured her, these events are what these trailers are built for. Then she told me she had 40 plus bear tags donated with more than that many children wanting to go. But, she had two specific children she would like me to take personally.

These two children were a high priority because this could easily be the last chance for each of them to go. The first was Noah, a 12 year old boy from Mississippi who is terminally ill and the second was Samantha, a 17 year old young lady from southern Wisconsin who would not qualify for this program after this year. Brigid asked if I personally could take these two children. I didn't know why and I didn't ask. I just knew she felt most comfortable with me taking them. I find it essential to form a good comfortable working relationship when setting up these hunts. Gaining each other's trust and respect is crucial, so I was honored that she called me for these two children.

The first thing I did was call Andy Becker, one of the guys I bear hunt with. I've been hunting with Andy and his father Mark for years. With us hunting bear, hogs, and bobcat with dogs is not a business, but a year around passion; one I hope to pass down to my own children. This group is usually family and friends only, so when I asked Andy if the guys would like to take one of these children on their Safari Wish hunt; I barely got the question out and I got my answer, a definitely! Andy called me back in a couple days and said the rest of the guys are really excited to take Noah, just let them know the days and they would arrange their schedules to make sure he was the priority while in camp.

Noah is a twelve year old boy from Gulfport, Mississippi whose dream is to go on a hunt. He chose a Black Bear hunt because he wanted to have a bear rug to put across his bed. Noah is bound to a wheelchair, unless he is being carried by his father. I called Lester, Noah's father, and after a long talk we got all the logistics down. Lester, Noah, and their Pastor, Wallis Williams were all going to come up for the second weekend of the season to share in Noah's experience. Their parish bought their airline tickets to Madison, Wisconsin. I would pick them up at the airport and drive all of us about five hours north up to Minong, Wisconsin, near the area we would be hunting.

They arrived in Madison at about 11:30am on Thursday. I picked them up and after stopping for a quick lunch; I asked Noah if he would like to see a F-16 fighter jet up close. His eyes lit right up, so our first stop was at the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison for a personal tour. First, I took them out to see the jets, and then they were given a tour of all the different weapons that can be loaded on the F-16 by Chief Master Sergeant Jim Schiferl and Technical Sergeant Andrew Brickl. Of course, none of the missiles were

live. Next, I took Noah over to the Egress trainer where Lieutenant Colonel Doug Reed, one of the F-16 pilots, put Noah in the cockpit and went through the functions of all the controls. We spent over an hour with Col. Reed answering all of Noah's many questions. I would like to personally thank the friends and co-workers of mine, CMSgt Schiferl, TSgt Brickl, and Col. Reed for taking time out of their busy schedules to make this an extra special experience for Noah.

After a quick stop at my house to pick up Bryce and our gear we were on our way. Bryce is my eleven year old son who was going to accompany us on this hunt. I figured Noah would enjoy the company of someone his own age, and leaving Bryce home on any hunting trip is a difficult thing to do. Bryce will jump at any chance he can to get in the woods, and after spending a couple hours with Noah, I knew the two of them would get along great. Well, we didn't need a radio for the long ride up because we found out both Noah and Bryce read a lot about wildlife and nature in general. They played the "did you know" game and I think the three adults were the students in the vehicle.

It was going to be late before we got to Minong, so Andy got us rooms at a local Motel, The Wilderness Inn, which gave us a 50% discount when they found out what we were doing. After a short night's sleep, we were ready to start hunting at 6:00am. Andy met us at the gas station where we filled up the vehicles, picked up some snacks and met up with Riley Christenson and his father. Riley is the one who donated his bear tag to Noah to make this whole hunt possible. Riley waited eight years to draw this tag and then donated it to Noah so when he asked to go along we welcomed him and his father to join us.

Friday was a long day; we met up with the rest of the guys who were all there to help Noah fill his dream of getting a bear. We started numerous tracks but in the end it was too many people trying too hard and messing things up. There was also just some bad luck but that's hunting. We all tried hard but just couldn't get a bear going or had to pull dogs off because of private lands, other hunters or highways we didn't want the dogs to get near. Noah was enjoying the experience but I could tell the long trip the day before and then the whole morning in the truck was taking its toll. We called it a day, went for supper and let them catch up on some rest.

Saturday we regrouped and it was a whole different story. We split up to find a good track and get a bear going for Noah. This worked because we had multiple people in camp with tags even though Noah was our priority. We stuck with Andy and it wasn't long before we had old Trapper on a nice track but it was a pretty cold one. Trapper is without a doubt the best hunting dog I've ever seen. He is a legend among us that have hunted with him and see him work. Trappers a pretty old dog now, but the only thing he has lost is his endurance. We let Trapper cold trail this bear for about an hour through this section that was just littered with acorns. This bear must have been just wandering through this section all night feasting on acorns because there was no rhyme or reason to its path. This is a nice side benefit to GPS collars on the dogs. Besides being able to find your dogs, you can see the route they take. While Trapper was cold trailing this bear Cody had another bear going about four miles away. We decided that whoever would jump their bear first would call over the radio and we would get Noah over to that chase. While trapper was still trailing this bear Cody called and said they had jumped their bear and the dogs were running hot.

I looked at Andy and we both knew as soon as we left Trapper was going to jump this bear too but Cody's bear was more of a sure thing so we raced over to where that chase was on. We no sooner got there and we got a call over the radio that the dogs treed the bear. We got Noah out and to the bear as fast as we could. Noah is only 40 some pounds so his father carried him in. This bear couldn't have picked a better spot to tree up for us. It was about a hundred yards off the road in a stand of HUGE White pines. It would take two men to reach around the pine this bear was up in. This was good because the bear felt real comfortable up there which gave us all the time we needed to get Noah all set up and explain the whole situation to them. Noah sat on his father's lap with the 243 Win rifle up to his father's shoulder and the rifle also supported by his father. This allowed Noah to squeeze in , line up the sights and pull the trigger. I explained to Noah that there would be a Back-up shooter for safety but he needed to take his time and make a nice clean one shot kill. We had everyone moved back including the dogs and the backup shooter, which would be Cody, was ready. Noah was having issues getting lined up with the gun on his dads shoulder but he didn't shoot until he had it figured out then Noah took the shot. The bear exploded up the tree but only made it about five feet before coming crashing down. No backup shot was necessary, Noah made a perfect shot. The excitement in Noah was unbelievable; he never stopped talking about his bear all through the picture taking and all the high fives. I don't think he could believe he actually took a bear. This was phenomenal; I've never seen so many people actually make it in to the tree. Everyone wanted to be part of Noah's hunt there must have been over fifteen people at the tree. Every one of them helped make this a memorable experience for Noah along with the other ones that were still running the other bear.

Like we predicted Trapper jumped that other bear just about the time we reached the other area. By time we got Noah's bear out of the woods they called to let us know they got that bear also. That bear was a much larger bear but it was good that we took Noah to this one because that bear wouldn't tree it got into a thicket and turned on the dogs so they had to get in there quick before one of the dogs got hurt. Noah's bear also was the perfect size for what he wanted and had a real nice coat of fur.

We headed for town to register the two bear and then headed out to Greg Michael's place to skin and butcher the bear. We got Noah into this also to understand the whole process and the work involved. He got a little bloody but loved it and kept running his hands through the bear's fur telling us how nice it was going to look on his bed. We cleaned up the two bear, put them in the freezer and went for lunch.

That evening we headed back out again but Noah was spent so we took Samantha out that night, even though she couldn't shoot her bear in this area we would give her the whole bear hunting experience. Samantha was the 17 year old we were taking out. My daughter brought her up on Friday night. We got another bear that night but that and Samantha's hunt is a whole other story. This is Noah's story; it was a great hunt and a great experience from start to finish. Noah, Lester, and Wallis made it clear from the start they wanted the full experience and they got it and appreciated it. They were all a pleasure to have in camp, we will send his bear hide down to their taxidermist and we will be processing the meat into bear bacon for him.

This hunt touched the lives of a lot of people, all of which I don't even know names of. Noah thanked us numerous times but it is us that need to thank him for the experience of taking him. We are already

making plans to take another hunter next year. Noah is scheduled for another spinal surgery in October. We will all keep him in our prayers and ask all of you to please do the same. He is a great young man, with a phenomenal family and pastor to help him through life's challenges. It was my privilege to get to know all of them. The following is just a partial list of people that helped make this happen.

SCI Central Wisconsin – Sables Division -Sponsor

Joseph Koback -President of SCI Central Wisconsin Chapter

Bryce Koback (Son) - SCI Central Wisconsin

Bridget O'Donoghue – Founder of USSA

Riley Christenson - Donated his Bear Tag

Andy Becker – Bear Hunter

Chad Barth - Bear Hunter

Cody Barth- Bear Hunter

The Many Other Bear Hunters

Lt. Col. Doug Reed – 115FW

CMSgt James Schiferl - 115FW

TSgt Andy Brickl – 115FW