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The 2019 South Carolina Wildlife Outdoor Writing Contest top five entries have been selected and are featured right here on SouthCarolinaWild.org! The top five student writers include: Kassie Burkett, Madison Greer, Gracie Howard, Caleb Reed and Emily Thigpen.

In South Carolina, there are plenty of opportunities to go outside and make memories that will last a lifetime. Those opportunities include hunting, fishing, boating and even bird watching to just name a few. The great outdoors is open year-round to those who wish to partake in the activity they choose. Out of all the seasons that are open at their respective times, I can only think of one that rings true to my family and me. The season that has made so much possible for me is no other than deer season. I have countless memories of deer hunting with my father and other members of our family and friends. After about twelve years of hunting with my father, I took note of everything he taught me and kept it in mind just in case I would need it one day.



The dew that had settled on the surface was shining in the bright sunlight.



It was getting close to the opening day for deer season in 2017. My father and I had our rifles sighted in. His weapon of choice was a 30.06 and mine was a .243. After putting corn out and preparing the tree stands for our near future hunt, I was nothing but excited and ready to go. When opening day came, we got up early that morning and climbed a tree near our house. As we sat in the peacefulness of the dark, I could not think of anywhere I would rather be. We were sitting in a snowy white cotton field and the smell of nature was nothing but refreshing. The sun was rising, and I could see the world around me come to life. The birds were chirping and singing their morning songs. The dew that had settled on the surface was shining in the bright sunlight. The only thing missing was the presence of a deer that my father and I could share in the moment as well.

As time went by, so did the vehicles of our relatives, who live on the farm, that were heading to work on that beautiful morning. Not too much longer, after my mother left, the most wonderful surprise occurred. My dad tapped my knee and whispered, "Emily, look over there under that oak branch." When I looked under the branch of the oak tree in the corner of the field, I saw a nice-sized buck without looking through the scope. My dad told me to take my rifle and take a closer look. I told him what I saw, and he told me to take a shot when the deer turned broadside. When the time was right, I squeezed the trigger slowly and hoped for the best.



I could not have been happier. I had just killed my first buck!

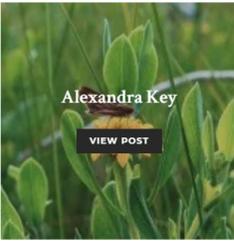
After the gun fired, I turned to my dad, and he was grinning the hardest grin I had seen in a long time. Neither he nor I could see the deer to know if it had fallen to the ground. We waited a moment to see if anything else would happen. Just as we were getting ready to climb down from the tree, an unbelievable thing occurred. I scanned the field one last time, and I saw something move within the edge of the woods close to where I shot the deer just moments before. I paused and told my dad to be still because I saw something and needed to take a closer look. I lifted my rifle once again and took a look in the area where I saw the movement.

When I focused the sights on the creature, I was beyond belief. I saw what I thought was the same exact deer! I said, quietly of course, "Daddy, it came back!!". We were both shocked and rattled as we watched the deer walk back into the field for the second time.

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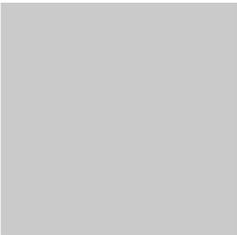
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FEATURE PHOTOS



He told me to once again wait and take the shot when the time was right. So, I waited until the deer was broadsided and took another shot. This time though, I paid special attention to what happened after I pulled the trigger. I knew for certain that the deer dropped right then. I could not have been happier. I had just killed my first buck!

My father and I climbed down from our tree stand and walked around the edge of the field and across the dirt road. Once we reached the edge of the woods, my dad asked me where the deer was laying. I lead him the way until I spotted the deer in the edge of the cotton. We high-fived, and I went to pick it up for a picture to be taken. After my dad snapped a picture he said, "Emily, are you sure it was the same deer?" I was pretty positive it was indeed the same deer, but I was not one hundred percent sure. My dad walked about fifteen feet ahead of where I was and then told me to come to where he was standing. I followed, and my jaw just fell to the ground. Laying not even twenty feet from the deer I was just at, was another deer. I could not tell a difference between the two. My dad and I each grabbed a deer and dragged it to the edge of the road. I was literally shaking from the experience.



Being in the outdoors is a special privilege that I am forever thankful I have.

We loaded the deer into the back of my Dad's Tacoma and headed to the processor near our house. Upon arrival, there were not many trucks there with deer to be cleaned. I guess since I had killed both deer before 7:30 a.m., it was pretty early to compare to other hunters. First, we weighed the deer, then measured the spread of their antlers. Believe it or not, they were less than five pounds apart. One weighed 108 pounds, and the other weighed 111 pounds. Their spreads were less than an inch apart. I was quite astonished by what I had done that morning. I could not wait to get back home and show off my accomplishment.

One thing is for sure, any day in the outdoors is an incredible day. On the other hand, however, a day spent hunting with my dad on the farm is a day that will always be special to me. The memories made that morning I will never forget. Being in the outdoors is a special privilege that I am forever thankful I have. The beauty of nature and its surroundings are all taken in when I am in the bright sunshine enjoying time spent with the people I love and doing what I love.

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