

FATHERS KNOW BEST

the woods, and the deer seemed to be enjoying the cool weather. Several small bucks filtered by my stand, and a shooter 8-point thrashed one of the smaller bucks in the hayfield. None of the deer detected me in the stand.

Climbing down late that morning, I figured it was time for my son to take another Field Trip, and hearing of my observations, Jonathon agreed. In fact, he was so excited about the next morning's hunt, he shot his bow until dark that night.

On Wednesday, October 15, Jonathon was not in school but was strapped into the Land Bridge stand well before shooting light. After we'd checked our two-way radios, I headed to a stand 300 yards away.

The first hour of daylight, neither of us saw anything, but about 8 o'clock I saw a buck. For this part of Arkansas he looked very large, and if he continued on course, he would pass by my stand at 12 yards. I was already standing with bow in hand, ready to shoot. But when the buck came within 25 yards, where he was screened by low-hanging limbs, he stopped and did not move for several minutes.

Then, seemingly unalarmed, he started backing up slowly, turned, and calmly walked in the general direction of my son's stand. If the deer continued across the oak flat, Jonathon would surely see him, so I got on the radio.

"Jonathon, a good buck is coming your way. Keep your eyes open."

Ten minutes passed, and then my radio clicked. "Dad, I just saw the biggest raccoon I've ever seen!"

I almost fell out of my tree. "Jonathon, a big buck is wandering around in here somewhere. You might watch for something besides raccoons!"

Two minutes later, Jonathon's voice crackled back over the radio. "Dad, I just shot Magilla. I've got to sit down!"

When I reached his stand minutes later, he looked as if he'd seen a ghost. After recounting the details, he guided me to where the buck had been standing. Seeing no sign, we followed the tracks and found first blood about 50 feet along the trail. Blood sign increased from that point on, and we found the buck lying 80 yards away. The arrow had entered high and had not exited the brisket, which accounted for the lack of immediate blood.

One glance told me my son had taken his second Pope and Young buck in less than 12 months. The heavy, chocolate-colored, symmetrical 10-point antlers later netted 139% P&Y inches. I tried to verbalize to my son the reality of what he had accomplished, but my words seemed inadequate for the occasion.

We loaded the buck into the truck and were home before 10:30. Word of Jonathon's accomplishment spread quickly, and when we arrived at his school at lunchtime, many students and teachers crowded around to see his great deer. Even the high school principal came out to congratulate Jonathon. Clearly this patron of learning recognized the educational opportunities and rewards to be gained from the occasional Field Trip. ♫

The author and his son are avid bowhunters from Gentry, Arkansas.

The High Road

*For a young man and his dad, it was more than a bowhunt.
It was a desert homecoming. By Zack Walton*

THE DESERT OF SOUTHERN ARIZONA in late December means only one thing to me — rutting male deer bucks. And last year I found myself there for the first time in several years, because high school had taken a severe bite out of my hunting opportunities. Archery practice had turned to baseball practice, early-season scouting had turned to scouting for parties on Friday nights, and hunting in the fall had given way to hunting in the halls. All year seemed like autumn for me, and I had a new quarry to pursue during this "rutting" period of my life.

While my time spent away from the outdoors during high school was awkward for me, it was perhaps more difficult for my parents, and especially for my father, Jim. My entire life I had been his little hunting buddy, his apprentice, his son; most of all I was his friend and companion in the field. As I struggled to find my path through the teen years, he struggled along with me. He graciously accepted the changes in my priorities, and he

supported me. But to him, things were not the same, and I know a part of him wished things would return to normal. Even though I never admitted it at the time, I wished the same thing.

Like most people after high school graduation, I faced a turning point, a fork in the road. Knowing what I had always yearned for, I chose the high road and a pursuit of wildlife with my bow. I had been too long removed and was relieved to be back in my rightful place, toting archery equipment through the wilderness with Dad.

AFTER TWO FULL DAYS of hunting we had seen several nice 3 and 4-point mule deer, but all of these bucks received undercard status when compared to "Main Event." He was a long-tined, barrel-necked brute with antlers stretching nearly half a foot outside each ear. A shear glimpse of him would make even the most experienced hunter quake in his boots. And a few glimpses nearly sent this young buck into cardiac arrest.

On our third morning, as the endless desert sky filled with



My dad, Jim, and I were doing our best to make ourselves invisible behind a skimpy bush as this mule deer approached within 28 yards. A whirlwind of over-sized teeth and bristling hair surrounded us as I took this 46-pound javelina to complete an extraordinary father/son season.

brilliant orange, Dad and I trekked toward our favorite glassing point. The past two days, we had seen the monstrous buck within the same square-mile of rolling desert just north of our hill-top glassing point.

Two routes led to our glassing point — one through a large wash, the other across a plateau. The previous morning, I had taken the plateau route to the summit and had spooked a 4-point buck that caught my scent on the swirling wind.

Experience should have educated me to make a better decision the next time, but as I prepared to head across the plateau that third morning, it clearly had not. I needed further guidance in decision-making skills, and that guidance came when Dad posed the age-old question, “Do you take the high road or the low road?” I stood there with a blank stare on my face, much as I do when one of my college math professors asks me to solve an advanced calculus equation. To get some response, Dad reiterated the question, “Well, Son, which way do you think?”

“Uh, stay up top?” I answered in a tone that reflected far more question than statement.

Wrong answer! Suddenly I had flashbacks to a college English final I had taken just a few days prior — and for which I did not know the answers! Now it was clear that even though I had been bowhunting since childhood (I received my first bow at four months of age) and had taken seven big game animals, my education as a bowhunter had barely begun.

“The swirling winds on the plateau are impossible to predict, so I would suggest we sneak up the wash where the wind will remain more consistent,” my hunting partner, known as Dad, pointed out.

“Yeah, that’s what I meant,” I chimed back quickly, feeling



confident that my new decision was truly what I intended to say all along. So, we proceeded along the low road.

AND, BOY, DID IT pay off. Sneaking quietly along the wash toward our glassing point, we had visions of crossing paths with Main Event. But before we ever reached our vantage, a thrashing noise halted our progress. Dad and I inquisitively looked at one another, and hearing the noise again we dropped to our knees behind a skimpy shrub far too small to conceal two grown men. Searching feverishly for the source of the racket, I peeked over the shrub and made out the white rump of a mule deer.

A buck!

Excitement poured over me. With the buck less than 100 yards away and a stiff breeze blowing from him to us, we remained hunkered behind the short bush, and I used my laser rangefinder to check distances to surrounding cacti.

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Suddenly, the buck cruised toward us like a bloodhound, nose to the ground, looking for scent. Glancing at Dad, I noticed he had not nocked an arrow. This buck was mine for the taking.

At 40 yards and still closing, the buck went behind a mesquite tree. As he went out of sight, I brought my bow to full draw, nestling my index finger to the corner of my mouth.

When the buck poked his head past the tree branches, he immediately gazed in our direction. The 18-inch-tall bush we had put our faith in for concealment was failing us. My eyes darted across the mesh of branches and found an opening the size of a pie plate.

When my secondary rangefinder, affectionately known as Dad, whispered "28 yards" in my ear, I settled the 30-yard pin on the bottom of the opening and relaxed my fingers.

Because of the uphill angle, the arrow passed through the buck's chest and up into the bottom of the spine, dropping the buck instantly.

In the moments that followed, Dad and I were transported back in time to the celebration of my first bull's-eye. He had hoisted me in the air as our enthusiasm consumed us. At this moment we shared the same feelings, but due to my six-foot height, we settled for firm embraces and hearty congratulations.

As we approached the buck, we felt an unspoken connection in our souls, one that many fathers and sons regrettably never experience. That bond remained unspoken, because words would only diminish its value. A shared smile and handshake said it all.

THREE DAYS REMAINED until January 1 and the opening of the archery season for javelina. That gave me time to scout out several javelina herds. I even videotaped a large herd at less than 10 yards. Encounters like that had me counting the seconds until the ball dropped on New Year's Day.

When January 1 arrived, Dad and I had no trouble relocating those herds, but then the reality of bowhunting really sank in. I missed a couple of easy shots, and by the third day I still had not connected.

When we set out early that morning, we spotted a group of nine pigs feeding and soaking up the sun. Quickly we closed the gap to 70 yards, but the open terrain then forced us to slow considerably, and at 35 yards we completely ran out of cover.

Knowing we could get no closer, and knowing I could convert, my dad once again told me to take the first shot. To my surprise, my quarry jumped the string like a whitetail, leaving a vacant spot for my arrow to enter.

That's when things got crazy and my lack of experience again came shining through. As black-and-gray blurs streaked around us, I got rattled and fought to focus on a single animal amid the whirlwind of over-sized teeth and bristling hair. After another clean miss, I looked to my left and saw my dad at full draw, zeroing in on a hog only 11 yards away.

As he sent a carbon shaft cleanly through the javelina, I quickly nocked another arrow just as a hog popped out from behind a small mesquite tree less than 10 yards away. Calming myself, I anchored and released a fatal shot.

Having one memorable experience in the field with my father was something I would cherish for the rest of my life. But having two such experiences in the same week was extraordinary.

ALTHOUGH I HAD TAKEN a hiatus from the life I had known as a child and had chosen the low road for a period of time, these hunts with my father served as a homecoming and put me back on the path I was meant to travel. I may not have bagged a record trophy, but the deer and javelina helped set the record straight in my life by bringing me back to life in the outdoors.

From this I must make two observations: To fathers whose sons are about to enter the teenage season of loneliness and awkwardness, allow your sons to attempt to find themselves, but keep them turned on to the great and vast experiences that nature holds. To sons, don't let go of what naturally burns deep in your soul, the thrill of the hunt. Take the high road. ♫

Author's Notes:

On this hunt I shot an Xi Intrepid bow, Super Slam XX78 2317 arrows, and Thunderhead 125 broadheads. I also used Nikon 10x42 binoculars, Realtree camouflage, and a Bushnell Yardage Pro Scout rangefinder.

My 3x2 mule deer had a 19½-inch antler spread, and my javelina weighed 46 pounds.

The author makes his home in Los Banos, California. This is his first feature story for *Bowhunter Magazine*.

The Legacy

Lessons in hunting go far beyond the killing of a trophy buck.

By Alejandro Gonzalez de Cossio Septien

IF I HAVE LEARNED ONLY one thing in life, it is to give time a chance. Many of the things that we strive for arrive by themselves at the proper moment, things like love, wisdom, maturity, experience, and, finally, the acceptance of one's self. Sometimes meaningful goals do escape and fade away, but many also come to fruition.

Trying to explain this to my children is difficult. They want to eat life in big chunks, and when they cannot they despair and lose patience. To them it seems that time is running out. If only they knew that time elapses very slowly at times, and that young people vainly squander the happy moments of childhood and youth by desiring to be adults, always expecting a quick reward