

Barbary Robin
February 21, 2015 New Mexico

2 Corinthians 12:9-11

**“But he said to me, ‘...for my power is made perfect in weakness.’
Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that
Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in
weaknesses...in hardships...in difficulties.
For when I am weak, then I am strong.”**



It was actually a friend of mine who put the idea into our heads. His first comment after hearing that Robin had bagged a javelina was “Game & Fish should give her tags for Barbary and bighorn sheep so she could get every New Mexican hooved species in a single season!” Bighorn tags are so highly coveted that the odds of drawing one are measured in tenths of one per cent, so I doubted we could convince anybody to cough one up...but Barbary sheep tags are available over-the-counter. These tags are only valid for areas with marginal sheep populations, and the harvest success rate is less than 20-percent, but odds mean nothing to us given Robin’s streak.

Barbary sheep hunting isn’t easy, and trying for one as her seventh animal in one season would be a supreme challenge. The number seven in the Bible represents divine perfection, totality or completion and is mentioned at least 490 times, as in the creation week in Genesis one. I didn’t know if a sheep hunt would make a completion or if Robin would be stopped at six.

Laurie would be out of town for a triathlon camp, which gave us a free weekend just two weeks after Robin’s javelina hunt, so I began putting the bug in her ear that she had an opportunity that would likely never come her way again. Probably a chance to make history as far as hunting in New Mexico is concerned. I explained that the success rate was low and we might not even see any Barbaries. I went on to tell her that if she actually got one we would know it was from the Lord, because we couldn’t possibly expect to get one on our own: six animals was a miracle; seven would be shooting for the moon.

I touched base with my hunting partner Jason, whose daughter Emma already held a Barbary tag, to see how their calendar looked for the weekend. Incredibly, their schedule would permit them to join us!

We wouldn't be going in blind: Jason & I had each killed sheep in the area nearly a year ago, so we had a good idea of where to look, but in hunting there are no guarantees and even less so in areas with an unlimited number of tags.

I texted the friend I mentioned earlier to let him know that Robin had decided to try for sheep and his reply was simple: "Poor Barbary!" We chuckled and hoped his message would prove to be prophetic.

Just days before our trip, Laurie informed us that Robin's Friday evening and Saturday morning swimming practices had been canceled. Immediately I had a feeling this trip was meant to be.

As added reinforcement, Emma's soccer commitment for Friday evening was also canceled, which meant we were able to leave town at the incredibly reasonable hour of 4pm; unheard of compared to our typical hunting trips. Jason and I joked that it felt surreal knowing we wouldn't be pulling into camp in the wee hours of the morning. Not that we wouldn't be setting up camp in the dark, but it was refreshing to crawl into our sleeping bags before 10pm.

We set our alarms for dark-thirty and awoke to see truck headlights meandering in our direction. We would have competition. Not necessarily unexpected, but certainly as we would have preferred.

We geared up for the day and headed out to begin glassing. We decided to split up in order to cover more ground and at the same time reduce the hullabaloo of trying to get both girls organized simultaneously for a shot, should we happen to find some sheep. We charted courses with plans to meet at a particular spot around lunchtime to discuss plans for the afternoon.

We agreed to touch base at regular intervals in hopes that one of us might happen upon an opportunity where waiting for the other party might result in two sheep on the ground.

Robin and I spotted a threesome of nice mule deer bucks and one huge bull elk; not quite sure what he was doing hanging out in sheep country, but it was pretty cool none the less. But no sheep, and here and there we found spent bullet casings, indicating hunting pressure.

Robin suggested we eat a snack, at which time I realized I had forgotten to grab our lunches from the cooler. I had one serving of mac and cheese, my Jetboil stove, a bag of fresh strawberries and one bar for Robin; one bar and a bag of nuts for me. Meager rations for an all-day excursion. I relayed the news to Robin, and although she wasn't thrilled about it, she didn't complain or make a fuss. I worried how her energy level would be later in the day, but the truck was far behind us and returning would signify the end of our hunt.

Robin wolfed down her strawberries and we continued toward our midday rendezvous point. The weather was wonderful, with almost no wind, which is

almost unheard of while hunting Barbary sheep. We found occasional sheep sign, but none fresh.



A good sign



My little huntress



Neat shell fossil



More fossils



Still more fossils – there's a limit to how many rocks daddy can carry home!



Big country



Are there any sheep down there?

By noon we still hadn't spotted any sheep. We met up with Jason and Emma about an hour later and they had seen two other hunters shoot at animals below their line of sight, and then watched a small band of ewes bolt out of the drainage below them. The hunters appeared to have killed one sheep, but Jason and Emma were unable to relocate the remaining group.

I cooked up mac and cheese and we consumed our Spartan lunch as we discussed options for the remainder of the day. Robin preferred to stick together, so our group headed in the direction where the sheep had last been seen.

Robin and I intentionally held back and let Jason and Emma take the lead. We knew it would take Robin longer than Emma to get set up for a shot. I whispered to Robin that God was in control and if He meant for her to get a sheep, it would come together one way or another. This was a team effort; not a competition or race to see who could spot or shoot a sheep first. If Emma killed a sheep and Robin didn't, the trip would still be reckoned a huge success.

We sat and glassed periodically, but came up empty time after time until late in the afternoon when Emma saw a sheep stand up and scoot over a rocky knob below us. We scoured the area with our optics, but didn't see any others. I recommended that Jason and Emma climb down to peek below while Robin and I remained behind. Initially they didn't believe it possible to scramble down the rocky face, but I pointed out a passable route and they were off.

Robin and I watched their progress and glassed for any sign of Barbary. After the two disappeared from view I suggested that we move several hundred yards horizontally to obtain a better view. Soon I picked out Jason and Emma, along with two ewes below them on a rock outcrop. I couldn't tell if Jason had seen the sheep, and Emma appeared to still be looking around. I mounted my binoculars onto my tripod so Robin could watch the sheep. Suddenly she announced that the sheep had bounded out of sight and Emma began climbing uphill as if to get our attention. The problem was we were no longer where they had left us and Emma never looked toward our new location.

We quickly shouldered our gear and hustled to meet her, where she informed us that they had found the two sheep within range and she had come back so Robin could also try for one. We were grateful for their spirit of teamwork, although our intent in sending them off was for Emma to shoot one if she got the chance. Selfless partners are worth their weight in gold.



Descending toward sheep!

We began our descent, but encountered Jason climbing upwards. I thought the sheep had bolted, but it turned out he was just coming to check on us; they had been feeding below him when he left. But the sheep had moved and he was doubtful that we could safely get within range. Robin and I had gained a better view of the terrain below, and were fairly certain it could be done, so I took the lead. Soon we reached an outcrop that allowed us to peer below and after a short time I picked out a handful of sheep in a different place than where Jason and Emma had seen the two. We were over 300-yards away and needed to drop more elevation to get the girls into shooting position.

The terrain was extremely rugged, reminding Robin and me of hunting ibex instead of Barbary. We eased down the steep face until we reached a huge table top rock slab. I lay on my belly and crawled to the lip – the sheep were within range straight below us! The herd was traversing a rocky shelf and it would be an extremely difficult shot. Because the sheep were moving, we thought it best to get the girls lined up on a bench where we anticipated the sheep would appear. We soon realized just how difficult it would be for the kiddos to aim their rifles over the cliff. Emma is a little older, and strong enough to maneuver her own rifle, but it was far more difficult for Robin.

Jason and I sat beside each of our girls and frantically scanned below in anticipation of the herd moving into the girls' field of view. Minutes passed. Given their pace, we should have spotted them by that time, but the bench below was empty. I expanded my search area and suddenly picked out the herd. I frantically shifted Robin's position as I pointed out the new location to Emma and Jason. Emma quickly adjusted her aim and asked if Robin was ready, but Robin was having trouble finding the sheep in her scope. A minute passed and again Emma announced she was ready. After another minute I made the call to let Emma shoot without Robin; we did not want to further jeopardize Emma's opportunity. I instructed Robin to try to line up on a sheep and to shoot after Emma if she felt good.

Emma shot. Jason and I scanned the sheep for any indication of a hit, but could tell nothing. Emma asked if she should shoot again and we gave her permission, but again it appeared that she had missed.

Robin turned to me and lamented that she was just about to squeeze the trigger when Emma's second shot scattered the band of sheep. I told her I was sorry, but she might still get a chance.

I quickly scooted Robin to where she could aim to the bench directly below where I expected the sheep to reappear. This time I set her shooting sticks about one-foot above the ground and had Robin stand to shoot. It was still awkward, but much better. Robin rested the front of her gun on the sticks, I made sure the barrel was clearing the rocks (and her toes!) and she bent at the waist to get the butt against her shoulder. I stood alongside to ensure she kept her balance and

to watch for sheep. I reiterated that she would have to aim directly between the shoulder blades, as they were something like 500 vertical feet straight below us.

The sheep had calmed down after the two prior shots and were moving slowly and feeding when they appeared. Emma had also repositioned herself and indicated she was ready to shoot, but Robin told me she was having trouble holding steady. I asked Emma to let Robin shoot first this time, but to stay ready and fire as soon as Robin did.

Emma kept asking if Robin was ready, but each time I reiterated that Robin wasn't steady. To help Robin, I held the tripod steady with one hand and wrapped my right arm around her waist. I whispered a prayer into her ear and told her that if she didn't feel comfortable with the shot we could let Emma shoot. She whispered that she was ready and flicked the safety off. I asked which sheep she was aiming at and she quickly let me know so I could watch for any sign of a hit.

Boom! Her sheep stumbled and immediately began to roll. Once, twice...then over the cliff! Boom! Its impact below echoed to our ears - there was no doubt that Robin had killed it! The remaining sheep charged off without giving Emma a chance to shoot.



Yellow: our route to shoot Red: sheep route, including fall over cliff

I hugged Robin in disbelief. She had pulled off an incredibly difficult shot in stellar fashion. Robin had kept her cool and waited until she felt comfortable before sealing the deal on her incredible seventh animal in one season!

We were several vertical benches above her fallen sheep, the sun was setting, we were out of food and a long way from camp; it didn't seem wise to try and reach her sheep that night. We risked losing some meat by not getting it cooled immediately, but better that than risking injury or worse to any of our party. Emma was a tad upset with herself for missing, but congratulated Robin. Jason and I offered consolation that misses are part of hunting: we've all done it at one time or another and the best thing to do is learn from the experience and move on. It was a long, tough hike back to camp. Along the way we came up with a plan: it would be easier to retrieve Robin's sheep from below, so we would pack up camp and drive to the bottom of the rim and climb up to it in the morning. I mentioned that future plans might go more like this: Jason and Emma drive the trucks around while Robin and I hike down for the meat and join you at the bottom - the girls are growing up all too quickly and before long they'll be driving. It was nearly midnight by the time we ate dinner and relocated our camp.

Morning came early and after breakfast we loaded our packs (with lunch this time!) for our upward assault. Emma and Jason had volunteered to come along to help, but they hadn't given up; they would bring Emma's rifle and we would glass for sheep in hopes of turning up another opportunity for her.



It would be a long, steep climb to Robin's sheep



Photos don't do the terrain justice: it was steep



My hard core girl!



Still going up, but getting closer



Still climbing!

What had initially appeared to be a modest climb ended up taking the better part of the day, but we finally reached the base of the cliff from which Robin's sheep had tumbled.



My sheep must be nearby!

I had marked the approximate location on my GPS so it didn't take long to find her sheep, a mature ewe.



Robin's sheep where it had come to rest below the drop-off



Remarkable number seven!



I'm proud of my girl!

We snapped trophy photos and butchered Robin's sheep while Jason and Emma glassed for more. At one point we heard rocks tumbling from a bench, but we couldn't see any sheep and attributed it to erosion. We stashed the bags of meat

in the cool shade of the cliff and continued to glass, but by midafternoon we reluctantly had to drop toward the trucks to head for home.

We chatted and enjoyed the evening on our way down. During one rest break I teased the kids that there better be a couple of rugged future husbands out there somewhere or the girls would have to buy them skirts and tell them to stay home and take care of the kids when they went hunting! We were punch drunk from success, physical effort, and lack of sleep. Emma got us laughing so hard we nearly cried "I'll buy him an apron with a sweetheart neckline and tell him to make have dinner waiting we get home from hunting!" Jason and I cherished the moment. Kids hanging out with their dads is rare these days. Most "hunters" miss out by driving around in trucks or on ATVs instead of investing sweat equity from a different type of "quad". It doesn't get any better.

This makes seven animals within seven months for Robin. Toss those statistics from Robin's javelina hunt out the window; this sheep skyrockets her season to something like 1 in 780,000!

I have a lot of friends who fancy themselves to be rugged outdoorsmen and seasoned hunters. Heck, I consider myself to be a pretty good hunter, but *nobody* has a season like this one - certainly not 10-year old girls.

The Bible is filled with accounts of God going out of His way to make it obvious that an event occurred solely by His strength and sovereignty; not by that of a particular person or group of people. He uses the weak to shame the strong.

For example in Judges 7 when Gideon was to confront 135,000 Midianites with his army of only 30,000 men, the Lord said to him, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me'." God went on to direct Gideon to take various steps to eventually reduce his army to just 300 men. There could be absolutely no question that the defeat of the Midianites by the army of Israel was by the power of God!

Or in 1 Samuel 17 when 15-year-old David whips the giant Goliath, a seasoned warrior over 9-feet tall. David did not boast in his own strength, but rather challenged "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied." David triumphed by God's power, not his own.

We weren't sure if shooting for the moon would result in a crash landing or something historic. God chose to bless Robin's season with an amazing completion, and his fingerprints are evident every step of the way. We give Him the glory!

To quote the most profound statement ever uttered "It is finished!" (John 19:30)

God Bless, Carl & Robin