

## Deer 2021 January, New Mexico

**Peter 4:8-10 “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”**

This season my sister drew an archery deer tag in New Mexico that coincided with tags Brian and I also held. Since my sister has never killed anything with her bow, I was committed to helping her succeed and Brian selflessly proclaimed he wouldn’t shoot a deer until Jill’s tag was filled.

We scouted and planned, doing everything in our power to increase the odds for my sister’s success. As the season drew near, each time we spoke on the phone Jill expressed her excitement to hunt with me. We’ve hunted together many times over the years, most with me holding a tag and headed to Alaska, but Jill did hunt deer in NM with me many years ago and came oh so close, but ultimately never released an arrow. We hoped to change that this year.



Does during early winter scouting

Prior to the hunt, I was organizing gear in the garage and heard a faint scratching noise. I froze and tried to pinpoint its location and eventually discovered a shrew that had somehow fallen into an open cardboard box and couldn’t climb back out. I told Brian about the shrew and he informed me he had never heard of one, let alone seen this diminutive rodent. I sent him a photo and honestly didn’t put much more thought to it, although it was the first shrew I’d seen in NM and the first I’d seen in decades.

My sister arrived and we geared up for the winter hunt. The weather was unseasonably mild with relatively warm, dry days, a welcome respite for Jill from the snowy winter underway up north. We hit it hard from the get-go, driving, hiking and glassing in an attempt to locate legal bucks to help Jill go after. We had multiple stalks, some just me and Jill, others with all three of us, and although we got close and even within shooting range a couple of times, for too many reasons to count Jill wasn’t able to take a shot. After several days of failed attempts I suggested perhaps Brian should hunt on his own while

the two of us continued to try. Brian refused and stated he wasn't going anywhere until Jill had a buck on the ground. Selfless, positive, upbeat...what a true friend.

One morning when we sat down to glass I looked at the ground and lo and behold, there lay a dead shrew! Talk about long odds! They are tiny to begin with, the odds of one dying and not being eaten are slim, and then for me to stumble across another one literally within a week of discovering one in my garage...just crazy! So Brian got to see a real one first hand, albeit a little stiff.



We're talking serious big game here!

We continued to have encounters almost daily; sometimes barely legal fork-antlered bucks, sometimes dandy bucks sporting 4 to 5 points per side. We got close enough for Jill to put an arrow on the string a couple times, but after nearly a week still no shots fired. Although season continued another week, Jill's flight was looming and it was becoming more difficult to be away from family and work. Something needed to come together sooner than later.



A fine buck



Another nice buck

One day issues arose at work that I couldn't ignore, so Brian volunteered to accompany Jill while I put out some fires. They texted periodically with updates, but weren't having any close encounters. However, when we caught up later that evening Brian announced Jill had a story to tell!! Turns out they spotted a pretty good buck shortly before sunset and scrambled to close the distance. They played cat and mouse in the pinon-juniper as the buck trailed a meandering doe, ultimately resulting in Jill taking a couple of shots. With shooting light dwindling, they weren't certain of a hit but opted to back off and return the next morning to search the area for clues.

With my obligations taken care of, I joined them for the scenario reenactment the following day. We retraced tracks and searched for arrows, but were still unable to tell for certain whether or not Jill had hit the buck. However, as we scoured the vicinity, an antler caught my eye...attached to a carcass!! Jill had indeed killed her first animal with a bow, and it was a dandy 3x4 buck to boot! Whoohoo! Huge thanks to Brian for all of his help!



Jill's first bow kill!



What a great buck as her first archery trophy!

We snapped trophy photos and shared in Jill's success, Brian and me now eager to try and fill our own tags. We had a few more close encounters, blown stalks and missed opportunities, but a few days later a small legal buck offered me a 20-yard shot I just couldn't resist. He may not rank high on my trophy list, but Jill was with me and work was beckoning me back to reality, so it was impossible for me to say "no". And let's face it, lean, organic (and in the case of this young buck - tender!) meat for the freezer is the main reason we hunt in the first place, so I'm not ashamed in the least to have filled my tag with

a small buck. Plus, Jill will always be able to fondly recall the time we hunted together, and she killed a bigger buck than me! Brian reached the point he couldn't spend any more time away from family and work, so ended up eating tag soup, but given how much time and effort we invested in Jill's triumph and our trio going 2 for 3, this hunt was undeniably a fun, resounding success.



The real measure of my buck's trophy value is in the freezer!



The three amigos

We couldn't have done it without Brian's help and the team camaraderie really made this hunt memorable and filled with friendship and love.