

# Outdoors

## Jeannie's first buck

or, how I got a wife who loves to hunt

Many male friends have told me how lucky I am to have a wife who understands and enjoys hunting. Judge my “luck” for yourself.

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When the alarm rang at 3 a.m. on Dec. 29, 1962, I awoke to the sound of hard rain, on the roof like a billion buckshot.

My heart sank; that day was supposed to be my wife's long-awaited first deer hunt.

I'd explained to her before our wedding that hunting was as essential to me as oxygen. I was going to hunt — a lot — but she would always be welcome to join me.

However, I wanted her to feel no pressure. I hoped she'd want to, but made it clear that it wasn't expected of her.

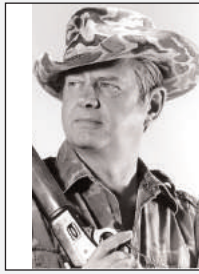
It took 11 years for that invitation to bear fruit. In the meantime, she tagged along with me and found that she enjoyed sitting in the woods, as a spectator.

Finally, Jeannie announced that she wanted to make a real deer hunt.

I planned the trip for just the two of us on a place we called Holly Springs, a family-owned 800-acre wooded pasture in Freestone County. All our gear was ready, car was all packed ... and now it was raining catfish and little toad frogs on the big day! I hit the alarm clock and rolled over.

Later in the day, the rain was slowing a bit, and I figured we just might make the 50-mile drive to Holly Springs in time for a brief evening hunt. We made it, but just barely. At least the rain had quit, leaving the woods dripping and the sky

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cloudy.

Jeannie would hunt our premiere stand, imaginatively named “The Oat Patch.” It was five acres of winter oats and vetch sown in the sandy soil of a natural clearing. All the trees and some thickets had been left, so deer entering the clearing would feel comfortable about leaving the woods. There was no blind or stand; a hunter sat on the ground under an eastern red cedar whose branches drooped almost to the ground all around, forming a living blind.

Dusk was closing in when I got Jeannie to the Oat Patch. I sat her down against the cedar tree, loaded her rifle, and told her I'd come quickly if she fired. Walking to the Jeep, I was thinking that we had maybe 20 minutes of shooting light left, in spite of our frantic rush to get here.

But I'd gotten only a few hundred yards when I heard the crack of my wife's .257 Roberts, loud in the gathering dusk.

I raced back to the Oat Patch, and as I entered the clearing the first thing I saw was a white deer belly stretched out on the ground in the twilight. The second thing was a little figure dancing and skipping around the deer in celebration. She saw the Jeep coming and ran to meet me.

“I got him! I really got a buck, all by myself!” she gushed, trying to hug me before I got out of the Jeep.

The Red Gods of hunters had smiled on me.

The little buck had four points, but Jeannie was as proud as if he'd been a B&C candidate ... as all of us were of our own first bucks.

The joy was dampened a little when we found that somebody else had shot the buck in the hip some days earlier and the wound was nasty. I dug the bullet out later and found it was from a .222 Remington factory load, inexcusable, especially in the hands of some jerk who knew no better than to shoot deer in the rear end with a varmint rifle ... I was sincere when I told Jeanie that her bullet in the buck's heart had been merciful.

For once, my plotting had worked out. I'd let her discover the pleasures of the



John Wootters photos

This is Jeannie Wootters with her first whitetail buck, shot in 1962 as described in the text. At the time she was unaware that she was in the vanguard of a women's hunting movement in Texas.



Jeannie — shown here with her all-time best buck shot 28 years later — has come a long way since her first deer hunt, not only in trophy quality but in experience and hunting skills.

out-of-doors in her own way, and decide for herself if and when she wanted to hunt.

Then I planned a trip with just the two of us and left her alone on stand to shoot — or not — with no coaching from me. She did it all on her own, so her sense of accomplishment was justified, and a failure would have had no witnesses.

Granted, I was taking some risks. This scheme might be wrong for another novice hunter (and definitely wouldn't be recommended for a kid). But it worked for us and we've shared the excitement of hunting in Africa, Mexico, Scotland and all my Texas deer leases for nearly 50 years. Last month

we celebrated our 58th anniversary, and, without children, I believe shared memories of hunting adventures have been a major element in our bonding over the years.

**John Wootters is a semi-retired outdoors writer with more than 30 years experience. He was editor of Petersen's Hunting magazine and author of the monthly column “Buck Sense” and has written the all-time best selling book on deer hunting, “Hunting Trophy Deer.” He has served on the Board of Directors of the National Rifle Association, and written for Shooting Times, Rifle, Handloader, Guns & Ammo and Petersen's Hunting magazines.**