

# Generation Next: Essays

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Trophy Type: Non-typical mule deer Location: Lander County, NV

## My Nevada Success Story

It is hard to believe the excitement that one mule deer can bring into your life. My father owns a guide service called Black Mountain Outfitters, and we spend a lot of time in the mountains riding four-wheelers and looking for wildlife. I started hunting with my family at a very young age, harvesting my first pheasant when I was just 7 years old near my hometown of Battle Mountain, Nevada. I learned the proper way to handle a gun and became pretty good at shooting.

In 2009, I took my Nevada hunter safety course and applied for my first junior tag. In Nevada, you can hunt the archery, muzzleloader, and rifle season with a junior tag. This is a great thing for young hunters because you have many opportunities to experience the different hunts, and a junior tag allows you to harvest a buck or a doe. My first year, we only went out during rifle season because I didn't turn 12 until October, and that was the only season left to hunt at that time. Luckily, they still had some junior tags left in an area close to home. I shot a forked-horn that season. He wasn't huge, but it was my first buck, and I was very excited about it. My second year, I decided I would try to get a bigger buck. Between school and playing football on Saturdays for my junior high team in Battle Mountain, we usually only had one day a week to hunt. With the rifle season only four weeks long, we only got to go out a few times. But on the last weekend, we found a nice three-point and I took him with my .270 at 150 yards. My goal was accomplished; I harvested a bigger buck than last year.

The following year, I once again applied for a junior tag in April. By the time the results were posted in early June, I had almost forgotten about the draw. When we looked up the successful tag winners, we were surprised. My mom and dad both drew a cow elk tag, my brother drew a mule deer archery tag, and I had drawn a junior mule deer tag in area 15. It is exciting to draw a tag, but then you have to wait so long before you can hunt! My brother's archery season would start in early August in the same area as my tag, so I thought we could do some scouting. I could have hunted during archery season with my tag, but I was not comfortable shooting a bow yet.

My brother's hunt went well. He did not get a deer, but he did get some good video of some very nice bucks. I decided to try the muzzleloader season, which started on September 10th, after seeing all the bucks my brother had chased around with his bow. Our first day out with the muzzleloader, my dad took four of us with him. Another junior hunter, Calvin Goddard, went with us, along with my friend Shailey and Calvin's friend Layne. We had a lot of fun that day, and we saw some very nice bucks.

Calvin and I stalked two different bucks. One of them was a 6 x 4 and was right around 30 inches wide. Calvin missed him at 91 yards, and was a little bummed. A little later in the day we snuck up to within 20 yards of a 4 x 4—not quite as big as the earlier buck. After waiting on him for a very long time, he stood up and took off straight away from us. Obviously, we did not get this buck either. It was very frustrating, but as we found out later, sometimes it is okay to let one get away.

The muzzleloader season ended without harvesting a buck, but we had a fun time hunting. My next chance to hunt would not come until October 23rd. Our football schedule was pretty tough, and I was playing away every weekend. This particular morning, I will admit, I did not want to get out of bed. My dad woke me up at 4:30 a.m. and told me to hurry because we had a long way to go. We picked up Calvin and his father, JJ Goddard, then we headed south for the Fish Creek Mountains. We arrived right at first light, but things were pretty slow. We spotted some does, but did not see a buck. We glassed and moved around until about 7:30 a.m. when my dad suggested a nearby spot he knew about. He said it was a place to catch the deer moving up to where they bed down for the day. We arrived at the spot, and immediately my dad spotted a deer. He looked it over with his binoculars and said it was a doe. Just a few seconds later he said he saw some antlers in the creek bed just behind the doe and that it looked like a pretty good buck. JJ, Calvin, and I planned a stalk, and my dad got to a high spot to watch us. We got to within 300 yards, and the deer caught wind



Kylie S. Sondermann with her father and brother who were along on the hunt for her non-typical mule deer. The buck—scoring 218-4/8 points—was taken in Lander County, Nevada.

of us—busted! We could not get a clear shot because the deer was moving, and he was with 10 does. We did not want to risk hitting one of the does or injuring this buck. Once the deer cleared the brush, they crossed an old two-track road and disappeared into a ridge saddle. We were bummed. The buck was big! I did not realize how big at the time, but judging by the look on my dad's face when we got back to our truck, we knew it was worth going after.

Because my dad had watched from a high vantage point, he knew where the deer had gone. We made another plan and turned off onto the two-track road where we last saw them cross. We dropped into the saddle and I could not believe it, the deer were standing right there on the side of a hill. My dad ranged them at 300 yards. The sight of this buck was amazing! I could see he had a lot of points; his drop tine was very visible against the skyline. My dad kind of lost it for a minute. We finally got set up for a shot, got a shell into the chamber, and I fired. I missed!

I heard my dad say it hit low. I put in another round and fired again. I hit behind the deer. At that time, the buck started to move away from us following the does. We had to reposition ourselves, and my dad was a little calmer now. He told me to make sure my rest was solid and to breathe out slowly when I squeeze the trigger. The buck was now standing in the back of the herd, clear of the does. I put my gun on the rest and settled the crosshairs on his chest. I squeezed the trigger and the gun went off. My dad yelled out, "You hit him!" He moved behind some rocks, and we could not see him, but the does would not leave

so we knew he was still there. We went up the hill a little farther to get a better look at him. He was hit hard and could barely stand. One more shot finished him off.

Everyone was yelling. My dad and JJ were running around like little kids. We ran up the hill to look at the buck. I knew right away this was not like any other buck I had ever seen. My dad told me that in all his years of hunting and guiding, he had never taken a deer this big. We sent pictures from the mountain to friends and family to let them know the good news. By the time we arrived home, there were several people waiting to see the deer. It soon became clear that this buck would qualify as a trophy. After the drying period, it ended up scoring 218-4/8. Amazing! I think it is safe to say that I met my goal of getting a bigger mule deer than last year.

I would like to thank my dad and good friends JJ and Calvin Goddard for all the help and for hunting with me. This was an awesome experience I will never forget. The buck of a lifetime is mine. ■