

Tyrone R. Robinson

Photos Courtesy of Author

**My 2016 story is different from most. It started back in 2013 when my boys and I started hunting a different area that I believed had elk in it but wasn't exactly sure, so we decided to check it out. Yep, the elk were definitely in the area, but due to lack of public land, having access to hunt them was going to be very challenging.**

As we got a feel for the area, we kept bumping into a certain landowner who was very concerned about trespassing and any illegal activity taking place on his land. He was never mean to us, nor did it bother me or my sons to get long lectures or to listen to his stories. I told them to think of how they would feel about all the people invading their private property if they owned land around this public area. So we treated him with respect and friendship. We mostly stuck to hunting our original areas (on public land), but once in a while we would go back to this small special spot and give it a try mainly just for something different.

In 2015 I didn't draw an elk tag, but I helped my sons nonetheless. (It's hard calling them "boys" still—both of them are taller than me and well over the 200-pound mark!) One night my favorite team was playing Sunday night football so I stayed home, but I told my sons it was worth a shot to try that special spot. As I watched the football game, I noticed that it was getting pretty late. Finally, they both walked through the door; they said they got tied up listening to that landowner again. We had a chuckle. This is where my

story gets different than most and makes a huge impact in my life!

The next evening the phone rang, and my wife answered. On the other end of the line just happened to be the landowner of now one of my most-cherished places on this earth. He stated that he was very impressed with our two sons, and because they have always listened to his stories and treated him with respect, he invited them to hunt on his property for the rest of the season. Wow! They showed some excitement, but I was doing just about everything to contain myself from shooting to the moon. They had no idea what an exceptional opportunity they were getting. They would soon find out.

I asked the landowner if I could tag along with my sons and he and his wife said, "You bet." I knew they should get a bull of some kind. There were so many bulls in there, and a couple of big ones, too. The season was dwindling away, and we learned that hunting is still just that: hunting—even on private land. Nothing in life is guaranteed. As I kept watching my sons try and try again at all those elk, the landowner and his wife both stated I could hunt, too. I explained that I hadn't drawn a tag that year but truly appreciated the offer. The 2015 season ended with a few missed opportunities for my sons, but I can't even describe how cherished all the memories are.

In 2016, all four of us drew elk tags—even my daughter, who had not shown much interest up to that point. We went out and visited that

wonderful landowner and received permission to hunt again. We sat and chatted several times; it truly was amazing how much information he knew about elk in general. We set up blinds and did some scouting like every other hunter. The major difference was we were hunting exclusive private land. The beginning of the season started out kind of slow with not much elk activity. A couple herds here and there were roaming the place, but nothing really big like the year before, nor were there as many elk. I was a little concerned, but as we continued to visit the landowner, he reassured us that this is typically how each year starts off until the rut kicks in. I did not care about size of the elk for my three kids, because just harvesting a bull is quite the accomplishment, especially with archery equipment, and they all understood. But I knew the opportunity we had been given, and since I have harvested three bulls over the years with my bow, I told everyone I was holding out for a big bull.

On Saturday, September 10, my son, Hunter, and I went out to hunt from the blinds we had set up earlier. A late start that morning greeted us with the sights and sounds of elk all around us as

I stopped the truck. I dropped Hunter off then got back in my truck to head to another spot. But as I was traveling, I had a feeling it was too late. I saw a few elk heading up the canyon toward Hunter, and I could tell that one bull was a monster. I so badly wanted to tell him somehow to wait for the big bull, but first, it's against the law, and second, he's never shot an elk (he was only 15!), and he doesn't need to pass anything up. So I sat and watched the huge bull in awe and I told myself I really need to hold out for him if I could.

Over an hour had passed and sure enough Hunter got to a high spot and sent me a text to come help him out because he had shot a bull. I instantly texted back, "Was it the big one?" He said no, he had already shot a small six-point before that bull had come by at 50 yards—though he got a few pictures. I thought that was too bad, but quickly forgot about it because we were on a blood trail after my son's first bull ever. What a God-given morning; a day I'll never forget.

Five days later on Thursday, September 15, I had taken off work that morning to try my luck again. I had had the chance to be picky, passing up many bulls in search of my monster. This morning

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**This column is dedicated to the system that supports the public hunting of public wildlife for all fair chase sportsmen, and the stories and trophies that are the result. Theodore Roosevelt strongly believed that self-reliance and pursuing the strenuous activities of hunting and wilderness exploration was the best way to keep man connected to nature. We score trophies, but every hunt is to some extent a way of measuring ourselves.**

proved to be no different when an elk herd began watering right in front of me. I just soaked it all in because I knew what a truly amazing gift I had been given by such a wonderful man. I sat excitedly. I watched and listened as elk came in, and then I heard a different, low-pitched growl. That's exactly how Hunter described it to me the morning he shot his elk. I was sure that's what I heard, but I looked all around me and could not see the bull making that growl. I can't hear very well, so they have to be close for me to hear them. Then I heard it again and saw him come out of the canyon of trees heading straight for the other elk.

I readied myself and ranged the trail he was traveling down at 44 yards. As he got within range, I pulled my bow, but he must have noticed because he veered off and stopped at 60 yards. I knew the distance because I had previously ranged certain spots all around me just in case one came in too fast to range; this has worked for me in the past and paid off this time again. Sixty yards was my max, and there he stood, so I let one go. The arrow connected him in the back part of the ribs. He took off and ran 200 yards into the trees, standing sickly. I couldn't believe it had all happened. I don't usually get all that excited while hunting anything—I've spent 30-plus years in the field and have had many, many close encounters. I have truly been very blessed. A bull has to be big to get me going. This one was just that...big...I knew it! I tried to text Hunter, but the reality of what just happened began to set in. My legs started to shake along with my

hands a bit. It took me what felt like five minutes but more likely 30 to 40 seconds to type; "I got the big one!" I love to prank on occasion, so Hunter texted back and said, "Did you really?" I said yes and sent him a photo of the bull standing. I asked him to miss school, gather stuff up, and drive out with Mom to give me a hand. After photos and stopping by to chat with the landowner and show him the magnificent animal he knew he had on his land, we headed to town.

Boy, does news travel fast. We never texted or called anyone, but people had seen it on the trailer. Let's just say people were waiting for us as we arrived in town at the taxidermist!

After all the visits with the landowner, I knew it was a battle for him to allow elk hunters on his land. He holds such a high respect and love in his heart for the elk. He may not hunt them all that often, but he studies and spends more time with them by watching them and picking up sheds than anybody else I know. My family and I have a very, very high respect and love in our hearts for him and his wife. They both are in my thoughts and prayers often. I can never say thank you enough. ■



Tyrone R. Robinson took this typical American elk, scoring 383-3/8 points in Carter County, Montana, in 2016.

