

FAMILY TIES

Courtney Hatley grew up within proximity of a big city. She was raised by a family deeply rooted in the outdoors and interactions with nature. With adulthood still in its early innings, family customs, traditions, and faith all play strong roles in her approach to life and her experiences.

Readers have long known that the moving panorama of civilization blurs lines between city and open country, between the secular world and mother nature's abundance. Change is a constant. It's almost impossible to ignore encroachment upon places that in a lifetime's memory were far more open and wild.

Visit the Hatley family homestead, not far from that even bigger city and you find a pond, hardwoods, rolling terrain, farm animals, a shop, and a very warm sense of home. Courtney's father Bobby traces his roots back through his own parents and grandparents. This clear sense of place and tradition is a breath of fresh air on this remnant island of calm.

What brings us here to

speak with the Hatleys? Well, Courtney's a young lady who hunts, and she has hunted with her dad and fished with her grandfather since she was a very young child. This is a family that understands and deeply respects the best of these outdoor pursuits.

Bobby and his wife Lisa have two daughters. Although they were not blessed with a son, Bobby quickly realized that his two daughters are not incompatible with adventures in the woods or near the water! Courtney and her older sister Kyndall started going on hunts with their dad at a very young age. Initially they were observational in their roles. Bobby, though, knew right off the bat that the girls were engaged and soaked in the wonders of entire days.

The Hatleys were raised to understand and appreciate all that comes from the world around us. Whereas John Muir may have marveled predominantly at the trees and the terrain, nature's myriad other inhabitants provide so much of the feature show in life's daily performance. Whether the animals involved are pets, livestock, or managed wild

species, respect for their care and their lives comes naturally to Courtney and Kyndall.

In addition to being surrounded by animals, the family's home offered room to roam and explore. Courtney says that while growing up, many of her city friends found a new world of opportunity and occasional escapes from indoor-only living. Playing outside and camping were built-in features at the Hatley house. Both Bobby and Courtney laugh when thinking and talking about those times.

Through their grandfather and father, the girls learned about ethical behaviors and safe practices afield. A strong sense of respect for their quarry demands the minimization of inflicted suffering and the full use of harvested game meat. Taste-ful field photos and quality taxidermy mounts round out this rich experience and family inheritance.

Both Hatley girls harvested their first deer at the age of eight. Along with their father, they have hunted in both Carolinas, as well as Ohio. Courtney is accomplished with firearms and crossbow. To date, she has taken five deer and two

gobblers. She's recently been drawn to skeet shooting, and duck hunting is what she'd like to take on next. In addition to box stands, she's also experienced with ground blinds, self-climbing stands, and ladder stands. Courtney also knows to text her dad once she's safely in a stand—otherwise he'd show up to check on her!

QUICK STUDY SOUTHPAW

This brings us to a father-daughter hunt in November 2020. Bobby and several close friends belong to a hunt club in southeastern Ohio. The property encompasses some 1,500 acres of hardwood-studded rolling hills interspersed with ag fields. Situated along the Ohio River, it's prime whitetail and turkey habitat.

The members practice a hunting ethic that includes identifying bucks at a young age through sightings and trail cam images, and then attempt to follow them to maturity. In this heavily-hunted whitetail country, they all know there are no guarantees any of them will successfully harvest one of the bucks. Despite the challenges and variables involved, they adhere

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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.

BEYOND THE SCORE

Hanspeter Giger
Photos Courtesy of Author

to a hunting standard focused on older age-class bucks with antlers scoring 130 or more.

The state's extensive archery season runs from late September to early February and permits the use of both traditional archery equipment and crossbows. Most of the Hatley's deer hunts have occurred between Thanksgiving and the opening of the first one-week gun season. During the fall of 2020, after several years of observing one of the older bucks, Bobby knew what time of year a really big buck started to prowl the daylight hours.

After Thanksgiving, Bobby and Courtney drove the six hours to the hunt club's property. Bobby decided that Courtney would hunt out of his climbing stand, and he'd stay back to check in with the landowner. He also let her hunt with his new crossbow, which she hadn't used before. After a quick operation and safety drill, it was off to the woods.

Bobby got her situated in the stand at 2:30 p.m. It was a sunny afternoon with virtually no breeze. The temperature was about 40 degrees. The first 90 minutes in the stand passed without even

a squirrel moving. That changed abruptly as Courtney caught sight of a deer moving toward her location. It was about 60 yards distant over her right shoulder.

Before she could adjust her position, the deer stepped into some thick vegetation at 25 yards. At that point only its antlers were visible. Familiar with whitetails and their habits, Courtney knew the deer could easily evaporate back into the timber. It didn't.

As luck would have it, the buck moved out of the thicket and stopped broadside at 30 yards. It was standing behind a large tree, but its vitals were exposed just enough for a clean shot. As she gained her composure and made the move to line up her shot, her life of woodlore and family-inspired confidence came together. Her shot felt good, and she was confident the buck wouldn't go far.

After contacting her dad who was startled by a phone call so soon after leaving his daughter in the stand, the buck was quickly recovered. Any skepticism that Courtney had connected on a different buck was immediately dashed when

Bobby saw the giant lying on the ground.

Clearly, this hunt came together remarkably well. What has not been mentioned so far, however, is that Courtney is left-handed. That may be the primary reason she was able to turn at the waist and take the shot without having to reposition and risk spooking the deer.

But maybe not. Courtney had lost her beloved grandfather (Bobby's father) just a month earlier. She's convinced he played a part in this family affair, and she told her father this. Proud, tender, and bittersweet memories collided on that day. It's tough to imagine those memories and feelings will ever fade.

Back at camp, Courtney was already something of a legend with club members. During two prior seasons, she took bucks on her first trips out of camp, and neither of those deer had been seen by any of the other members until then. Although her 2020 buck was known to all, the female hunting legend had returned and dashed the dreams of the fellas. Good natured ribbing followed in abundance. All we can say is, go girl! Go family! ■

By the time Bobby had reached out to have Courtney's buck officially measured, a story was already in the works for *North American Whitetail* magazine. It was published in the November 2021 issue. In addition, as of this writing, Bobby and Courtney are anticipating a trip back to Ohio for the Buckeye Big Buck Club's awards. It is likely that she took the largest buck harvested by a female with crossbow in 2020.



ABOVE: Courtney with her buck. BELOW: Official Measurer Hanspeter (far right) enjoyed meeting the family when he scored Courtney's 164-4/8-point whitetail.

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