

Joe Stassi, Age 12
Dutchtown Middle School

Duck Hunting at Dawn

It's 3:45 a.m. My body is telling me to go back to sleep, but my mind says, "No". In the next room I can smell the coffee that Dad has just made. I slowly walk to the kitchen and open the fridge. Inside there is the container of orange juice. I take it out and pour myself a glass. During the first sip I can feel it running down my throat like a liquid wake-up call to my body. After the next two sips I finally am awake.

Now it is time to get dressed. Warm pants, a t-shirt, and then a long sleeved shirt. All of the clothes feel hot, but if I don't put on my waterproof waders and my thick hunting jacket I will freeze in the 30 degree weather outside. I put on my waders and jacket then Dad says it is time to go.

4:45 a.m. We head down to the dock where our boat is tied up. Now Dad is starting the engine on the boat. It takes a few turns of the key before the

thunderous motor roars to life. We put on our life preservers and then we are on our way.

Before we get out on open water we must go out of the canal, because we are staying at someone else's house. We have not been able to use our camp since it was completely destroyed during the monstrous hurricane Katrina. We take a few minutes getting out of the canal because it is a no wake zone, but afterwards we are on open water going as fast as the engine will carry us. It is still very dark so Dad must use a powerful light to see where he is going.

5:30 a.m. We have just finished crossing the open water and I'm trying to warm up now that I don't have the treacherous winds blowing into my face. We come to another canal where we must go to get to the blind. We turn in and follow a winding path with many turns to get to the blind.

Suddenly Dad slows down. We have made it to the pond where the blind is hidden. He points out to me two red spots on the water a few yards away and tells me that it is an alligator. We then open the giant bags that hold our decoys. They are plastic ducks that are painted to make real ducks think it is a good pond.

Dad and I have to unwrap the weights that keep the decoys in place. I don't like doing this because my hands are cold and start to hurt a lot, but finally it is done.

6:00 a.m. We are finally in the blind. The only sounds are birds chirping and the click of the guns as we load them. When the guns are loaded we must sit and wait. To begin shooting we must wait until sunrise which isn't for 10 more minutes. We reach into a bag that we have and get out two packs of Nature Valley bars. When we finish eating them it is time to hunt.

We are seeing plenty of birds, but not ducks. Finally we see some farther away over the marsh. Dad begins to blow his duck-call. We wait. Nothing. The long wait continues as we search the clear skies for more ducks.

7:20 a.m. Dad says to not make a sound. He picks up his gun and turns off the safety. He waits for two ducks coming in across the pond. Then... BOOM!!! He misses. Click. Click. The gun is reloaded BOOM!!! He misses again. By then the ducks are too far away. He puts two more ammunition shells into his 12 gauge shotgun and we wait.

9:00 a.m. We have waited and waited for hours now and have not seen any more ducks. We decide it is a bad day and start to pack up our gear. After that comes the worst part, picking up decoys.

We have to pick up all of our decoys, wrap them, and put them back into the giant bag. At this point I am tired and every time I reach my hand into the water is like sticking my hand in ice. Eventually, after 10 minutes (It seemed like half an hour) we had it all picked up.

9:25 a.m. Now that it is light I am allowed to drive back to the house we are staying at. It takes a while, but it is not too bad. We get back and tie up the boat. We will leave it here until next time. We unload everything else and put it into Dad's car. Inside we pack everything that needs to come home and put that in Dad's car as well. Soon we head home, but the trip isn't over yet. Every time we go hunting, on the way back I ask for meat pies for breakfast.

9:45 a.m. We stop at my favorite place to get meat pies, Time Clock. We each get two meat pies to go and eat them in the car. After I finish eating, I put my seat back and get my much needed sleep.