

Brock Blackwell
Age 16

The Buck above My Bed

It's the morning after Thanksgiving, prime time for deer hunting. Where else would I be but in a deer stand in the woods? I'm no stranger to waking up early, but sleep overpowers me due to the sheer amount of food that I ate at dinner with my family last night. I rest my head on the rail in front of me and drift off while waiting for dawn. The sound that wakes me breaks the songs of the birds and the movement of squirrels through the leaves: a gunshot. I open my eyes, still facing the ground below me through the railing of the stand. A few thoughts flit through my mind: "Who was that? Could it have been my brother, or my father? Maybe my uncle ..." I lift my head to see which direction it came from. That's when I see the largest buck of my life. Now a million thoughts are racing through my mind: "Did it see me move? Can I grab my gun without spooking it? It's in between two trees ... that's a tough shot." I realize it's eating acorns, so I grab my rifle. It's been dead-on accurate at one hundred yards this whole season – will it fail me now?

My thumb flicks the safety off without me having to think about it, and I peer through the scope. Most of the buck is obscured by trees, but there's an area about two feet wide that allows me to see the shoulder. This is perfect for me. The adrenaline pumping through me makes me nervous, but seems to focus my skills. I aim at the spot just behind the shoulder and squeeze the trigger just like my father taught my brother and me. I hardly even notice the kick of the gun, the sound of the explosion from its barrel. I raise my head and see the buck running off apparently – hopefully – wounded. My right hand automatically operates the bolt action immediately after I fire. The bolt ejects the empty shell and replaces it with a new one. My thumb clicks the safety back on, I pick up the empty .270 caliber shell from its resting place on my seat, hoping and praying that this is the shell that will get a wall-hanger for me. After waiting for a few minutes, I climb down the ladder eager and nervous about what I might find. My feet find the ground and I set off towards the nine-point buck that was waiting for me in the middle of the woods.

That was almost three years ago. Now that buck is right above my bed, keeping watch while I sleep. Many things hang off its antlers, such as turkey feathers from last spring's youth hunt, a baseball state championship medal, and the empty cartridge that's responsible for the buck being on the wall, the date of the kill written on the brass.

Deer seasons come and go. Some are successful, others not so much. Still, the nine-point is fixed on my wall, a monument to my greatest kill. One day my children will ask about each head that hangs in my house, just as I have asked my father. I will tell them many stories: stories about my first deer, my first buck, and the biggest buck I've ever killed. But the nine-point will be my greatest, the first true testament to my skill as a hunter.