

Joseph "Scooter" Hayes
Age 10

From Baby Bottles to Busting Big Gators

On a windy Friday in September 2013, our family took off in our go devil boat to set five lines in hopes of catching my first alligator. We passed through the cypress tree swamps looking for signs of alligators nearby. We carefully selected a cypress tree for each of the hooks we set. We used very tough string with large hooks. We baited the hooks with chicken that smelled like rotten cabbage and used a clothes pin to hang the hooks about a foot over the water. Then we returned home and worried if we were going to catch anything.

My family started alligator hunting in 2004, the same year I was born. While picking up her tags for the 2013 season, in Opelousas, my mom found out I could get a helpers license. She returned home so excited. I was impressed to find out that I, at only 9 years old, could become an alligator hunter like my uncle, parents, and grandparents. My mom, Jessica Hayes, had been chosen for the three tag alligator lottery at Spring Bayou WMA, where we live. She proudly gave me the chance to harvest the three alligators.

There was no need to wake me Saturday morning. I had been awake most of the night. As we walked out the house; disappointment came over my family because the temperature had dropped over night. We motored carefully through the cool fog at daylight because it was also opening morning of teal season. As we got to the first line, we noticed a man had set up his teal blind right next to the tree where our first line was set. We apologized for messing up his hunt and explained what we were doing. He did not mind as long as he got to watch the action. The first line was covered and wrapped with marsh grass. My mom filmed very nervously, while my daddy, Douglas Hayes, began pulling the gator up to the boat. I busted out my new twenty two single shot Cricket rifle that I won at the NWTF banquet. I walked up to the bow of the boat and shot the gator. He rolled over and all I saw was the one foot of the gator sticking up out the water. After a few high fives, together dad & I rolled the gator into the boat and began to lock the cities tag on when mom noticed that my first gator was missing a front leg.

Once we got to the next line, I could not believe my eyes! There was one of the biggest gators I have ever seen. He was tearing up the water and struggling to get away. Dad tried to grab hold of the line but the gator still had too much fight in him and ripped the line from dad's hand. We waited a little longer for the gator to settle down. My mom was scared and wanted me to back out on the shot but, I said "No, I'm not giving up!" It took me, dad, and the gator awhile to get situated, but I did it. The first shot stunned him and put him into more of a rage. He was so mad he was flipping and flopping and water was splashing everywhere. Mom stopped filming and helped me reload another shot. We were both shaking terribly and dad was yelling for us to hurry up. The gator finally calmed down and kept still so I put the sights on the small kill spot and pulled the trigger. In a sudden flash, the fight was over and the gator was floating with that one big foot up in the air! I felt so happy, I was shaking as if I were scared but I had done it! A nine year old boy and I had harvest a ten foot plus gator! There were lots of high fives, laughter, excitement and I think mom may have even had a few tears. It took all three of us to load him in the boat. We took guesses at how long he would measure but guess what? We forgot the tape measure.

We ran the next two lines and found them still hanging in the wind. As we approached the fifth line, we found another smaller worn out gator wrapped in weeds. He did not give me

much of a fight as I carefully took a shot on him. So much for the cooler weather cause we were tagged out. The wondering on how long my big gator was really bugging me. We loaded the boat full of gators on the trailer and with big smiles, hauled them over to Big Mama's Gators in Moreauville, Louisiana. This was just as special to me! I was so happy to sell my first three alligators to my grandma Big Mama Janice and grandpa Wolfman. My family was very proud of my bravery and excited that I wanted to be just like all of them. As my mom says, I went from baby bottles to busting big gators in only 9 short years. I finished my first alligator season with a 6'9", 7'10", and 10'7" gator!