

NEVER GIVE UP

By Caitlin Stanton

I joined 4-H at ten. I didn't really know what activities to do so my aunt Ramona suggested archery. I wasn't so sure about it at first but I figured I would try it. She took me to my very first practice at the Ely Archery Barn. Pete Mangum was the director, he helped me figure out which was my dominant eye, gave me a donated little yellow bow and showed me the basics to get me started. That year I did really well.

The next year my mom asked if I would like to do it again except with my very own bow. I couldn't have been more thrilled; I looked at her and gave her a weird look, like, of course why would you even have to ask me that? My mom and aunt took me down to Sportsworld and back to the archery area. Steve was super nice and asked me how I wanted my bow to be set up. He gave me a smile and told me he would call me when it came in.

About a week and a half later the call I had been waiting for came. We went down to Sportsworld and Steve told me all about the bow, the arrows, safety and how to use it. My aunt and my mom took me home with a target; I was so darn happy! My dad and my brother Chase were sitting on the couch watching an old western movie while me, my mom and my aunt went out in the backyard, set up the target and tried to figure out my new bow. I was the only one in my whole entire family doing archery so none of them knew really what to say. I could barely pull the bow back, but after a while I got better at it. I got Grand Champion at the local 4-H archery shoot that year, and then we went to the state 4-H shoot in Elko and I got Grand Champion there too!

My third year when I would be able to hunt my dad picked me up from school one day and said he had a surprise for me. The whole ride to where we were going I had a smile on my face. When we arrived at Sportsworld I could not figure out what we were doing there. We went back to see Steve again and in his hand was the most amazing brand new bow I could possibly imagine! I also got new arrows and a block to shoot at too. We sort of live in the mountains and we have a huge backyard with a fence around it. We set up my own shooting range for my bow in the backyard. When I started shooting the new bow I was barely pulling back 30 pounds. My dad said I would need to work up to 40 pounds by hunting season. By the end of the 4-H archery season I was pulling back 40 pounds.

When the tags came out my dad told me I had gotten an archery antelope tag for an area near our home in Ely. At first, I wasn't so confident that I was going to be able to do it. My dad and I would go out behind our house and shoot almost every day until the season started, this helped a lot!

About two months before my hunt, me and my dad and sometimes my brother began going down to the area where my tag was every weekend. We looked all over, even by the "little alien restaurant." We put up trail cameras at different waterholes and guzzlers. Right away we found a great big antelope! When my dad showed him to me I knew for a fact that he was the one I wanted to shoot. When my hunt was about a month away we were going down to check on him twice a week. The antelope I wanted was only going to one waterhole so that was where we picked to set up my blind. Every time we went there my dad would have me practice shooting out of it.

We asked a rancher whose property was near where my blind was if we could set up our camp trailer on his property. He was very nice and said go ahead. The day before my hunt my dad and I hauled the camp trailer and my brother and my mom towed our Rhino down. Once we got to the ranch we set up camp. When we were all set up my mom and my brother told us goodbye and good luck. They got into the truck and drove back home. The rest of that day, before the hunt, we sort of just chilled, hung out and had some fun. When it got close to dark my dad made dinner and after that we played cards, had some ice cream and went to bed.

The first day of the hunt we got up at four in the morning and were gone by four thirty. We got into the Rhino and drove to the blind. I was so tired but I tried to stay awake. Once we got there, we put the Rhino down in a ditch and walked to the blind. When we got in we had to be still and quiet, about a half hour later I found myself asleep. This left my dad to keep watch. He woke me up about ten thirty and said "Caitlin put on your mask, he's heading this way, get ready!"

I hurried up, grabbed my bow and got to my knees. He stood broadside right outside of a barbwire fence. My dad whispered into my ear and said if I felt ready to take my shot. I wasn't so sure, but I pulled back my bow and aimed for him outside of the fence. I held it there scared to let go... I let go and guess what... I didn't hit the stinking antelope! The arrow hit the barbwire in front of him! I let out a whisper of a bad word. I was so mad at myself, I felt like throwing down my bow and just going home and leaving it there, but I couldn't and I knew I couldn't. I lowered my head down and then I looked at my dad, all he said was "its ok you'll get him next time." That didn't help at all, my eyes filled with tears as we left the blind since we knew he wasn't coming back for the day.

The next day in the blind I was still discouraged from the day before. That afternoon another antelope buck came in. It wasn't the one I was after but he was still a nice one. My dad tried to talk me into waiting for the one I wanted but it was way hot and by that time I just wanted to shoot something and go. That is how upset I was from the day before. I pulled back my bow and let the release go. I thought I hit it. As it took off running I thought I could see blood. My dad said he

thought the arrow had just nicked it. We waited awhile, looked all over for blood and then went looking for it the rest of the day. We couldn't find him and it was getting dark. My dad said we would look for him in the morning. I wanted to just quit and go home, so my dad took me home. When we got there I walked through the doors and tears started filling up my eyes and I walked into my room, shut the door and lay on my bed. Chase walked in and I told him what had happened. He gave me a hug and told me that on his first hunt he had missed too. He gave me another hug and said not to give up and something good will happen. I went into the living room and my mom just gave me a hug and said don't give up and that it would be okay. I called my aunt to tell her what happened and she said to keep trying and if I give up I will never know what could have happened. So my dad and I headed back up to camp.

That next morning we found the antelope I had shot at and he was running with a group of does and doing just fine. This made me feel better but I was still mad at my shot. We went to the blind and spent the rest of the day there. We both fell asleep for a while when my dad woke me up and whispered that he could hear footsteps. We both peeked out to see a bunch of antelope right outside of the blind. None of them were the good one so we just watched them. A doe came right to the front of the blind. She was so close I could have touched her. Nothing else came that day.

The fourth day we were sitting in the blind when the big one I wanted at first showed up. I had to hurry to put on my mask, get ready and draw back my bow. I held it there breathing deeply. My dad tried to talk to me. But I said, "Dad I can do this." He stopped talking and let me do it by myself. I breathed in and out, looked into my sights and gently squeezed my release...and watched the arrow hit him right in the chest. It seemed like it happened so quietly, once I watched the arrow hit and the animal take off; I fell to the ground. I was way too happy. I couldn't believe what I was feeling. I wish I could tell you what I was feeling but honestly I can't even explain it. My dad jumped up in the blind and gave me a huge hug and said "You did it Boom, you did it!"

The antelope only went about three hundred yards before he tipped over dead. We waited awhile and then we walked toward the antelope. As I saw it laying there I didn't know what to think but this is my first hunt and I did it! My dad and I started taking pictures and after that we started to clean it. My dad is an Indian which makes me Indian. Indians have certain religious things they do when they take an animal. My dad showed me these things.

When we got home and pulled into the driveway, Chase and my mom came out. Chase had a huge smile, and didn't even mind hugging me with blood on me, but my mom, that was a different story.

Before I end my story I would like to thank my dad for everything he does for me, I can always count on him when I need him and he will do whatever he can to help. I love you. Thanks to my brother for giving

me the support to not give up and to keep trying no matter what I do. Thanks mom for getting me my first very own bow. You are awesome and I love you! Thanks to my aunt Ramona for getting me into archery and being so involved with me. I know if I ever needed her she would be there for me in a second. Never give up in anything you do, it can turn out pretty darn cool.

Editor's Note: Caitlin's pronghorn scored 80 0/8 Boone & Crockett points.