Throughout the ages, a sky full of stars has greeted the Texas night. The Rio Grande turkeys have all found their evening's roost. Predator and prey both go about their lives as they have done every evening on this rangeland north of the Rio Grande.

Since the winter nights can be quite chilly, campfires have been a permanent fixture around the Lone Star state for as long as man has inhabited its vast landscape.

Tonight was to be no different; a big-time campfire was crackling, loaded up with mesquite wood and surrounded by friends. Although the vast Lone Star Whitetail Ranch had seen its share of campfires, as well as the ever-present tales that usually circulate around the fire, this was to be a night to remember.

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Michael Traugott and his family had agreed to host a dream hunt for a young man from Kansas whose life had been a "bumpy road" at best.

Brigid O'Donoghue of Bio-Tec Research, Inc. and United Special Sportsmen's Alliance (U.S.S.A.) coordinated the hunt, and soon young Keith Dunavin and his grandpa "Papoe" (an Irish term) were headed to South Texas for the dream hunt of Keith's life. Keith has had cystic fibrosis since birth, and many of the things we all take for granted are a minor miracle for this fine young sportsman.

Michael, his best friend Blane and his helper, Debbie Chisholm, were joined by a sort of "character looking" guy with a very nice cowboy hat and boots sitting across the campfire on this special night.

Texas Trophy Hunters Association (TTHA) is actively trying to encourage young hunter recruitment and promote the community service that these dream hunts create. TTHA sent a film crew, along with this "character looking guy" (otherwise known as the Journal of the Texas Trophy Hunters editor, Horace Gore) to help bring the immense public value of these dream hunts to the mainstream United States.

The last campfire seat was taken up by a friendly lady with waist-length black hair and fiery blue eyes, known to all as Brigid.

Horace and Brigid as it turned out had been razzing each other for about a month on who was the better hog hunter. This "issue of honor" was going to have to be settled Texas style, deep in the brush of the bow's lair.

As the Texas roasting got hotter and hotter, Brigid seemed to take a liking to Horace's boots, and suggested that the winner of the impending hog hunt would get the other one's boots. After a discussion on boot sizes, Brigid looked at Keith and Papoe and they were both quite amused at all the carrying on about Horace's good-looking boots.

Brigid looked over at Horace and said, "Another thing Horace, if Keith shoots a nice buck tomorrow, he goes home with that nice hat you have on!"

Horace turned to Keith and said, "If you get a buck that my Stetson hat will fit in without touching the antlers, I will give you this $400 hat!"

Michael told Keith, "I'd make that bet if I was you." It sounded like a great game plan to Keith and the deal was sealed.

Brigid remarked, "I'm sure Keith will take real good care of it, won't you, Keith?" as the campfire erupted with laughter. Horace could see that it would indeed be possible that he would go home "hatless," but if Brigid wanted his boots she would have to earn them.

As Keith sat by the warmth of the mesquite fire, he visualized Papoe and him getting off the plane back home in Kansas with Horace's fancy white hat perched permanently on his head. Visions of the Lone Star Whitetail Ranch trophy whitetail destined for their living room wall, as well as the smell of fresh venison in Papoe's frying pan, made these evening "daydreams" quite a pleasurable experience. Michael thought to himself the hunt was
already successful since a special young man had already given them all a lifelong friendship!

As the glow of the fire started to fade, Michael's guests headed off to bed. Keith and Papoe were full of anticipation, and sunrise couldn't come too soon for them. Brigid, on the other hand, couldn't resist one last chance to razz Horace, and told him, "I heard a rumor that stock prices at the Stetson hat factory are going up tomorrow since an increase in orders is anticipated." Horace returned the volley, "Well, that may be so, but I don't think those thick socks you're wearing will protect that big toe of yours from all the mesquite thorns and prickly pears we'll encounter on the hog hunt."

Long before sunrise, the Lone Star Whinetail Ranch was alive with activity. Steve Grams, from TTHA, made last-minute preparations on his camera equipment. Keith and Papoe rechecked their hunting equipment. The Ruger Model 77 6mm bolt action had been fired the previous day to confirm accurate shot placement when the need eventually would arise. Keith marvelled at the gun's silence, "for now," he thought. Brush Country Camouflage would help make visual detection virtually impossible for any deer, as well as improve the chances for a good, clean shot.

Michael loaded Keith and Steve Grams, the TTHA cameraman, in his ATV and headed out in the predawn foggy darkness.

A tower stand with four senderos was the stand of choice for the day's dream hunt. This stand was quite unique in that each sendero actually doubles as a nutritious food plot, and foraging deer often move out of the adjacent heavy brush for much of the morning. As was usual, a windless, foggy morning severely restricted visibility and it was practically impossible to tell what was moving out on some of the senderos.

As the saying goes, "back at the ranch house," Horace and his "early bird" friend Brigid were providing the morning entertainment for Papoe and Debbie. Brigid "doesn't do mornings" in her words and Horace was able to regain some ground he had lost the night before in their battle of wits. Papoe was taking it all in and just happy to be there that fine, foggy morning.

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