Three men and a woman ran across the grassy field, the darkness around them complete but for the moving beams of their Head-Lites (www.head-lite.com) and cordless spotlight. On they ran, towards the sound of the barking dogs and grunting hogs. The woman carried a spear with a long wooden handle and a meat-looking black steel blade. Two of the men directed the hunt and shouted directions to their dogs, which had zeroed in on an incredibly big hog on this moonless night. One man stopped whenever possible, steadying the tiny video camera to capture what action he could, before again sprinting to catch up with the fight. I was that man.

The other two men, the ones running the show, were Kenny Banaciski of Slaughter Brothers Wild Hog Hunts at B4 Ranch (where this hunt took place, www.slaughterbros.com), and Clint Wood, a friend of Kenny’s with a lifetime of hog hunting experience. The woman was Brigid O’Donoghue, a wild gal from Wisconsin come south to sample some Florida hog hunting in the heat of the night.

The hunt had started sooner than expected. Brigid and I were accompanied by my father, and we sat in Ezmerelda (my Chevy pickup). Kenny and Clint headed down the road in Clint’s truck, to see what hogs were out and about at this time of night. Minutes after they’d left us, they called on the radio to beckon us forward; they had seen a hog that had to go four hundred pounds or more.

As I motored on down the bumpy dirt road, Kenny’s voice crackled from the radio, telling us to hurry the heck up! I stomped the pedal and Ezmerelda surged forward, jacking up my heartbeat at the same time. We rattled down the road and soon slid to a stop next to Clint’s truck, where he and Kenny were hurriedly readying their dogs for the fight to come.

We had expected a swamp brawl, but it was starting to look as if we might catch the big porcine out in the open. We needed to get it in gear if that was going to happen. Brigid quickly donned a sweatshirt as I switched the video camera on and checked the settings; there would be no time for that during the thick of the fight.

Soon, we were trotting down the dirt road into a grassy field, loping through tasseled Bahia grass, fresh adrenaline filling our veins. The dogs spotted their quarry and were loosed, passing some smaller but still large hogs as they zeroed in on the huge one before them. One hog, weighing more than two hundred pounds, stood uncertainly near the dirt road as we galloped past, earning a glance from me and an excited comment from Brigid. But the dogs beckoned us forward, and there was no time to waste. The activity ahead was rapidly becoming more intense.

Suddenly I paused to aim the Continued on page 38
“My life has had many dead ends, twists and turns,” Brigid told me in an interview. “I have overcome childhood illnesses, epilepsy, brain surgery, permanent disability, an extremely abusive relationship, no child support, no money and no line of credit!

“I’m a single mother of two wonderful children, Lindsey is 15 and Kenny is 13. I love any outdoor sport. I love to hunt, fish, weight lift, run, hike, swim and water ski. I love photography, fashion designing (11 years experience) and traveling.

“I grew up in a very large 100% Irish Catholic family with 6 brothers and 2 sisters. One of my brothers is physically and mentally disabled.

“I founded Bio-Tec Research, Inc., in 1999 and with its success I started donating funding and 50% of my life to charity in 2000 and then later on developed United Special Sportsmen Alliance in 2003.

“What made it all work was the unbelievable amount of donations from my customers at Bio-Tec Research, Inc. (customers being deer and elk farmers as well as [hunting] property owners).

“USSA has grown overnight and now it has become my favorite career because it is the most rewarding thing (besides raising my children) I have ever done!

“I’m dealing with terminally ill and disabled children daily, and because of my past health, I am able to stay strong and vibrant. I try to bring joy to families who have lost all hope!” And with the help of many other good folks, she is doing just that.

Up until February of 2003, Brigid’s company Bio-Tec Research, Inc. (which manufactures deer and elk foods) covered all incidental expenses related to the dream hunting and fishing trips that were granted to sick and disabled kids. That’s when Northland Cranberries, Inc. came on board to help out, along with Mathews, Inc., an archery company well-known to bowhunters. Hunting and fishing trips are all donated and 100% paid for by generous folks like owners of the hunting preserves where many of these dream trips take place. The only costs incurred by the hunters are transportation costs, unless they can’t afford it, in which case USSA steps in to help out.

Organizations like USSA are needed because certain high-profile “wish-granting” groups have ceased honoring America’s hunting heritage. Says Brigid, “Our nation’s terminally ill and disabled children have both physical and emotional mountains to climb. Often, they dream about experiencing our outdoor heritage, but unfortunately many politically correct activist groups have successfully shut the door to these children’s dreams in many other fine wish granting charities like ‘Make A Wish.’

“United Special Sportsmen Alliance (USSA) was created to help fulfill the dreams of those special children that dream about an outdoor fishing or hunting experience. Our outdoor sporting heritage has been part of the nation since its inception, and must continue to thrive in the future. Our nation’s great natural beauty should be enjoyed by all Americans including the terminally ill and disabled.”

During 2002 and the first half of 2003, Brigid’s project provided over 150 dream hunts and other outdoor activities for the disabled and terminally ill, and she said that as of June, 2003 she was getting an average of two to three new “clients” per day. Talk about a worthwhile pursuit growing by leaps and bounds - wow!

If the past and present provide any indication of what USSA will be doing in the future, things are looking up indeed for this worthy endeavor. If you or someone you know would like to help out by sponsoring this project or doing a hunt, please contact USSA or Boar Hunter Magazine. Also you can read more about them at About.com’s Hunting and Shooting site.

USSA 7864 Shotwell Rd. Pittsville, WI 54466 Phone: (715) 884-2256 Fax: (715) 884-7388 Email: biotec@tds.net or bhmag @bellsouth.net http://www.deerfood.com

To read about just a few of the dream hunts that USSA has granted (and see some more photos of happy kids), please visit the online forum where they post hunt reports. I will soon be experiencing one of these hunts for myself, and I will be sure to let you know how it turns out. I can’t imagine it being anything less than a life-changing experience… helping kids is its own reward, especially when you’re helping them to enjoy our American hunting heritage.

Brigid O’Donoghue, wearing a jacket of her own design. The fabric features some of the biggest whitetail bucks taken in the wild.