One Snowy Day

Ever since he was a young boy, Brandon always wished to go on an elk hunt.

Like so many of us, the call of the outdoors has a tremendous appeal and cannot be ignored! There are things in life that often make little sense to us and disease is one of those issues that can rock the world we live in. A couple months ago, a 24-year-old young man was diagnosed with stage 4 brain cancer.

The news was shocking to his friends, family and too many of his lifelong aspirations, including his dream of an elk hunt.

Brigid O’Donoghue of United Special Sportsmen’s Alliance was attending a Wisconsin Commercial Deer & Elk Farmer’s Association meeting (WCDEFA). After speaking about her dream wish granting charity, Brigid was approached by several members of WCDEFA who wanted to get on board and help her charity. She told the story of Brandon’s challenge, and immediately struck a chord of compassion with everyone she spoke to.

By the end of the next day, Richard Spanont of Golden Bear Monarchs, and Joel Espe, president of WCDEFA, helped set up a dream wish hunt for Brandon. Rick Sitarski of RC Elk Ranch donated a tremendous elk and Elk Rock Ranch & Outfitters donated their shooting preserve.

We all have hunting partners that help make our hunts memorable ones, and Brandon’s hunting partner was his best friend Shad Loch. When Brandon called and asked Shad to go with him on his elk hunt, he was very happy to go with him.

With high medical bills wiping out his bank account, Brandon needed additional assistance to make his hunt a success. It is times like this when we are all fortunate to have sportsman’s advocacy groups like the Safari Club International (SCI), who understand the importance of all citizens having an opportunity to enjoy our hunting heritage. The Lake Superior Chapter of SCI and Pete Martin of The Bear Paw Co., of Rice Lake, Wis., added steam to Brandon’s hunt by donating a fine deer rifle and proper ammunition to the hunt. To top off the hunt, 16-year-old Jake Arvold guided the hunt and Mike Clark of Broken Arrow Taxidermy volunteered to mount the elk free of charge.

With time of the essence, it was not possible to wait for more favorable weather to conduct Brandon’s dream hunt. Cold, snowy weather greeted the hunters as they arrived.

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at their destination. The inclement weather couldn’t dampen the spirits of the hunters, who were thoroughly enjoying themselves with the hospitality of the folks at Elk Rock Ranch. The rough weather did act to reduce game movement as it usually does, but persistence paid off.

Later that day a nice bull walked out, kicking up the snow in an attempt to get an early supper. As a coincidence, Brandon had a supper on his mind too — an elk supper! Shaking off the numbing effects of the cold, Brandon leveled the Bear Paw rifle and squeezed the trigger, sending a speeding bullet off to its destiny. The bull lurched and fell over in the snowy meadow. The happy hunters and their guide went out to get a close-up look at the fallen animal. The body size of a downed elk is impressive and Brandon and Shad stood in awe, taking in the magical moment.

Troy Linke, president of the Lake Superior Chapter said, “We work hard to support many local activities in three main categories: protection of the hunter, preservation and conservation of wildlife and education and humanitarian services. Brandon’s hunt fell into the education and humanitarian services, and we were proud to help in such a good cause. The Elk Rock Ranch has been a great partner of the SCI-Lake Superior Chapter for many years. Their support gives us the ability to help people like Brandon and do it all locally!”

Brandon recently lost his battle with cancer, but his courage serves as a reminder to all people and organizations that have worked to make his dream wish hunt come true.

I would like to thank everyone that contributed to Brandon’s dream hunt and the valuable community service it represents. And, a special thank you to Jake Arnold, who proves hunter recruitment supported by youth will only strengthen the next generation of hunters.

Brigid O’Donoghue, President and Founder United Special Sportsman Alliance