Eric Corey loves to hunt, but Lou Gehrig's disease is making it increasingly difficult.

By Jimmy Nesbitt
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Before Eric Corey was strong enough to hold a shotgun, he would chase his father through the flatland woods of Knox, Ind., on all-night raccoon hunts.

"I enjoy listening to the dogs and listening to what they do," said Corey, 18, who began hunting with his father, Doug, when he was 5.

Three years ago, Corey was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, more commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease, a rare, degenerative disease affecting the spinal cord. It usually begins in middle age, but Corey is already showing signs of muscular weakness in his legs.

ALS is usually fatal within five years of diagnosis. Last spring, his grandfather died of it. His father and uncle also have the gene but have not been diagnosed. As the disease slowly spreads through Corey's body, his passion for hunting grows stronger.

Corey hunts almost nightly with close friends in Knox, a town of about 1,600 in northwest Indiana. He has hunted zebra and buffalo in Africa and geese in Canada. Recently, a representative from an Indiana fish and wildlife show who had learned of Corey's condition and love of the outdoors contacted his family and proposed a hunting trip to western Kentucky.

Arrangements were made with Gary Clark, Kentucky Fish and Wildlife conservation officer for McCracken County, to hunt at the West Kentucky Wildlife Management Area. Benton resident Darrel Newton volunteered his all-terrain vehicles and award-winning coon dogs.

Corey's family arrived Monday and began hunting that night. They were rained on one night, but overall the trip has been fun, Corey said. There aren't "as many coons, but it's nice," he said.

On Wednesday, Corey and his parents met Newton and a group of local hunters at the Exit 3 Pilot truck stop. They were scheduled to hunt through the night and then drive to Marion, Ill., today to hunt deer.

Doug Corey, 46, a truck driver, developed a love of hunting from his father, with whom he went on hunting trips. "I always wanted a hunter," he said, grinning at his son.

This week, Eric Corey used an ATV to chase coon dogs through the woods. His legs will only grow weaker, but his spirit won't.

Said his father, "He would crawl into the woods if he had to."