Special kids “bearing” with illness

It was a special day for two very special kids who have long been wishing for a chance to go bear hunting in the deep woods of Wisconsin. The wish for these two kids came true with the help of the United Special Sportsmen Alliance and some very caring people from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Adam Ducat, age 13, from Two Rivers, Wisconsin and Garrett Williamson, age 12, from Trempealeau, Wisconsin were able to take part in this special hunt. Adam has Cerebral Palsy and Garrett has Duchene Muscular Dystrophy. These challenges are not enough to slow the spirits of these two strong youngsters.

“The most exciting part of the whole hunt was getting that bear,” said 13 year old Adam Ducat who made a clean kill on a 221 pound black bear. Adam was accompanied by two guides on the hunt, Mike Derpinghaus (age 52) and Wisconsin Game Warden, Barry Fetting. Adam became a very special friend of Derpinghaus after he (Derpinghaus) took Adam on a previous hunting trip. Mike Derpinghaus has overcome physical challenges as well, being wheelchair bound resulting from a double amputation of his legs from a car accident.

Warden Barry Fetting got as much out of the hunt as young Adam did. “I could not have had anything more gratifying in my life then to stand next to a young man like Adam with my hand on his back while he took the shot. I could feel his heart pounding on my hand. He did a great job, he stayed calm and made a nice clean kill on the bear,” said Warden Fetting. He added, “I have children of my own and I can’t wait for the day I can experience that same feeling I had with Adam when I take them on their first hunting trip.”

Mike Derpinghaus was impressed by the enthusiasm displayed by both youngsters, and by some visible changes he noted in their self confidence. “When we arrived Friday night, both Adam and Garrett seemed shy, they were looking at the ground a lot. They were getting a lot of attention and they weren’t used to it. Now, after their successful hunt they are both walking around with smiles on their faces, walking up to people initiating conversation, you can see a visible change; it’s just amazing!”

Twelve year old Garrett Williamson harvested both a 181 pound black bear and a bonus 8 point buck weighing 178 1/2 pounds during the hunt. Garrett’s father, David Williamson attended the hunt with him and they were guided by Warden Jeremy Perry. The young, wheelchair bound Garrett Williamson was asked if he was nervous at all during the hunt. “I wasn’t nervous, I was ready to go!” He said with excitement. Garrett added, “I called my mom and told her I got a bear, and she said, good for you!”

Garrett’s father said, “He (Garrett) shot his buck the first night out and he was pretty excited. Garrett started seeing all the deer and he couldn’t stop laughing and giggling. He was so excited because it was going to be the first animal he was ever going to shoot.”

Garrett’s father also said that when his son shot the bear, it was a perfectly clean shot to the shoulder, there wasn’t even a blood trail.

The hunt took place on the property of Bill Rands, located 15 miles north of Bruce, Wisconsin. Rands had a serious accident nine years ago in the same area, falling out of a tree stand. Rands was asked what he thought the most impacting moment of the special hunt was for him. He responded, “It was seeing how these kids change dramatically from the first day they arrive. Friday they seemed nervous, and would not talk much. Now, after the hunt they are confident and outgoing, they talk a lot and they talk about things they could only dream of before the hunt. It was a great experience for everyone.”

Founder of the United Special Sportsmen Alliance, Brigid O’Donoghue, worked in a cooperative effort with Kurt Thiede from the Madison DNR office to obtain the special bear tags for the hunt. Thiede connected Brigid with Warden Jeremy Perry who located the property and assisted with setting up the logistics and the dates.

“These kids, their families and I can’t thank the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources enough for their willingness to help us with this special hunt,” said O’Donoghue. “The cooperation between public and private sectors for this bear hunt was outstanding. When people and government agencies work together it’s a win-win situation. I look forward to next year bear hunt, and I’m sure all who were involved this year are also.”

Local businesses are processing the meat from the harvested animals and providing the mounts for the kids.

The United Special Sportsmens Alliance is a christian organization dedicated to providing hunting, fishing and other outdoor wishes to children with terminal and chronic illnesses. (www.childswish.com)

Article by Troy Jens, USSA Board Member