This time of year many of us take repose and give our thanks for the things and people in our lives for which we are grateful. It is a time of reflection and appreciation.

You remember the old saying, "If you have your health you have just about everything." I would agree with this assertion and know quite a few people who would agree as well. One of those people would be Johnny Furtick of Cordova.

Several years ago (1993), Johnny was living a normal life and enjoying a measure of health and happiness in his family, his work at Okonite and his love of deer hunting. He fell ill and was soon diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia (type MDS), a disease that destroys the bone marrow. At this point Johnny has lived longer than anyone ever thought he would live.

His one chance was for a bone marrow transplant and his little brother Keith matched almost perfectly. In order to receive the transplant in 2001 both Johnny and his wife, Wendy, had to quit working and move to Charleston for 8 months. Johnny’s aunt Jackie Bolten moved with them to help take care of the couple.

The procedure was performed and Johnny was in critical condition in the hospital for seven and a half weeks. Weeks after the transplant and after the couple’s son Cory, Johnny told four other patients who were treated with the same therapy died while they were in Charleston, but he fought back to come home.

He not only beat the odds of living through the transplant, but he beat malignant melanoma in late 2001 and survived a stroke in 2002.

Needless to say, the hospital and doctor bills were devastating.

Johnny refused to give up on trying to recapture as much of a normal life as possible. He wanted to fulfill a lifetime dream and go on a trophy deer hunt while he was still physically capable, but he knew his family couldn’t afford it. He wrote the Make A Wish Foundation along with every other organization he could think of and was turned down.

One day about a year ago, while working part time for his friend Gina Mobley at her store (The Talking Horse), he made mention that he was not having any luck. He didn’t think anyone more about their conversation than Gina did. This little woman is constantly doing things for other people in her community and just sort of latched onto an idea. She began making phone calls, trying to find someone to help her with Johnny’s plight. In the meantime, the Devore Brothers North Carolina Company was raffling a lounge chair to help with some of the Furtick’s bills. Gina stumbled onto an organization called the United Special Sportsmen Alliance and Bridget O’Donnell. She knew of a ranch in Texas called the White Ghost Ranch that would welcome Johnny with a fully paid trophy hunt. All he had to do was pay for his plane ticket, lodging, meals, and transportation.

The rest would be taken care of by ranch owner and operator “Doc” Gail Halpin.

This picture is of Johnny Furtick’s deer taken in Texas in October. Left to right are Cory Furtick (his son), Wendy (wife), Johnny and his brother Bobby.

The Hunter’s Prayer

SPECIAL TO THE T&D

Johnny earned a ten point buck and he didn’t waste it. That deer is now at the taxidermy shop and he is so very grateful for the trip that the Shriners went to in helping him achieve that dream.

A week later his family surprised him as they all loaded up the plane to Texas and a new adventure unfolded. His doctor carefully adjusted his chemotherapy so that he could travel and enjoy his time with his family while on his trip, but he still had waves of weakness come over him every couple of days.

However, Johnny was determined not to let it affect his hunt.

On arrival, Brett surprised the group by telling Cory he would be allowed to take a deer as well and Brett himself would take Johnny’s hunts. Brett Geitweit oversees over 40 pizza houses, three ranches (two cattle ranches and one hunting lodge) as well as trading stocks and bonds for a living.

Despite this schedule, Johnny was floored that Brett took the interest in him to take off of work for the duration of his hunt and go with him. Not only that but Johnny would be allowed to take any deer on the ranch he chose to shoot. Johnny assumed that because this was a charity hunt on a commercial operation he would only be able to curl management deer.

Nothing could have been farther from the truth. Brett and Johnny hunted as long as they could Sunday, Saturday, and Monday for several hours in the mornings and evenings. They saw a dozen or so bucks every session, but Brett wanted Johnny to take a mature ten-point they’d seen a couple of times.

Another big deer – a young 11-point – showed himself flyingly, but Brett thought this deer to young and with too much potential to shoot.

They focused on the big ten-point, but he became elusive and didn’t give them any opportunities. Brett paid a videographer to come film Johnny’s hunt and they were on their last evening of hunting on October the 17th. Things were getting a little tight for daylight when the 11-point walked into the edge of the clearing a hundred yards away.

Brett asked Johnny if he wanted to take that deer and Johnny settled his nerves for the shot.

The 215-pound, 11-point walked off and Johnny could have dreamed of taking it. It scored a whopping 161 6/8 in Boone and Crockett points. Johnny was later told by the farm manager than Brenda had turned down $20,000 from a paying customer to shoot this deer a few weeks earlier.

Can you imagine the generosity exhibited by this gentleman?

Brett is now in the process of organizing hunts for degased and sick children and disabled adult hunters on part of his holdings to go along with his paid outfitted hunts.

Brett and his family are busy in Cordova now and Brett has his deer mounted and shipped to him in the near future. The Furticks just got the bad news that the bone marrow transplant did not work and Johnny is undergoing clinical trials with new drugs to prolong his life. He has to be very careful and can only hunt every few