

## Louie

I am a 35-year-old mother of a happy-hearted 4-year-old boy and wife of a wildland firefighter who only works to support his hunting habit. We have 5 German Wirehaired Pointers that my 41-year-old husband, Trent, can run ragged while they're hunting chukars for him in Northeastern California, where we live. I like to believe I'm in pretty good shape for having a desk job, and really like to think I'm tough.

It was a Tuesday at the end of May when my husband met me at the door with a wild-eyed look on his face. "Do you feel lucky?" My mind scrambled as to what in the world he could possibly be talking about. What was the California lotto up to these days? Was there something wrong with my truck that he found in the nick of time? Did our son almost crack his skull open on something while pretending to be Thor? Imagine my relief that it WASN'T a near-death experience, only an elk tag.

"This isn't just an elk tag! This is a once-in-a-lifetime BULL elk rifle tag for eastern Nevada!" Now, any of you hunting widows, tell me; how often have you heard these words: "But honey, this is a once-in-a-lifetime tag! I HAVE to go"?

"OK," I said, "Where again?"

\*\*\*

My husband spent months doing research between fire assignments. I'd hear him talking about it to his dad or friends about it and I'd try to get engaged.

"What can I do to get in shape for this?"

"Hiking. Up mountains. With weight on your back. Oh, and there will probably be snow."

My husband, a former Lassen Hotshot, also repeatedly hikes 20-year-olds into the ground on their PT hikes for work. I haven't hunted in the snow since I was 23 and after a long day of hiking in the mountains, wrote myself a note: DO NOT CHUKAR HUNT IN THE SNOW. So I sighed, picked up my workout clothes and went to my Zumba class.

Later I found out I had 7 preference points for this tag. For 7 YEARS, my husband has been putting me in for this tag and I never knew it. Did I want to elk hunt? Sure! In theory, it sounded fun. Camping- I camped in high school with our Explorer troop and survived; Hiking- I haven't chukar hunted since our son was born but I love a walk in the woods as much as the next gal; Shooting- I can shoot OK.

We borrowed a .300 short mag from a friend and my father-in-law spent the better part of the summer and fall with 5 brands of bullets, a lead-sled, a gun-cleaning kit, a shooting chronograph, a spotting scope, and several pieces of cardboard demonstrating how the gun was shooting over that period of time. By the time I got it, it was a work of art that could be predicted.

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Two weeks before my season, my husband took a scouting trip to my unit. With two buddies, Nate and Noodles, and in 60-degree weather, they had the elk patterned and a pretty decent plan laid out that sounded feasible to me. Two nights before my season, el Niño sent moisture, complete with 6-12" of snow, and High-Wind and Winter-Weather advisories for my unit. I brought every piece of cold-weather gear except my duck hunting waders, and my husband and I drove the 10 hours to our camp spot west of The Tallest Mountain in the unit. Nate joined us and the hunt was on.

We followed the plan from two weeks ago; arrive before dawn to the ridges above the private alfalfa fields and wait for the elk to move up and bed at higher altitudes. That morning I saw nothing but an impressive amount of rabbit tracks in the new snow, and heard at least 3 coyote packs around us. There were some elk tracks, but from a day ago.

We drove on a designated route into the wilderness and stopped twice to hike up some ridges and glass as much as we could. We drove to the "chained area" (where 2 dozers dragged a huge chain between them to rip the trees out and allow more brush and grass to grow) and toward dusk finally spotted a bull and a cow... about 6 miles away.

The second day we hiked above camp at dawn and got to a ridge where we could glass from when the guys spotted a nice bull I dubbed "The Front 9" because his front tines looked about 9" longer than typical. Nate stayed to glass for us and Trent and I began the trek up The Tallest Mountain to The Front 9. To stay hidden, we stayed on the north slope, which, unfortunately, had the worst of the snowdrifts. Just when I was thinking I'd finally figured out

that the plan was to hike me to death for the insurance money, Trent stopped behind a juniper tree and glassed the hill in front of us. He turned back to me after I recovered my breath enough to hear him. "There's a raghorn bull on that hillside. If we spook him, the other bull will bolt too. Wait here." As he hiked around the knob we were on, I heard whispered voices to my right. Nate radioed to confirm we weren't alone in our pursuit. When Trent returned, he couldn't see the raghorn anymore, and he was worried that the other people next to us might spook The Front 9. We proceeded up the mountain for another 1,000 vertical feet until we cut his track on a knob. Trent signaled for me to drop my pack and I waited while he glassed. I just sat down when I heard antlers crashing and got The Front 9 in my scope for a second before he disappeared over a ridge. He spotted Trent before Trent spotted him and didn't stop for 3 miles and 4 ridges. From the top we saw 7 other people glassing us. I untucked my hair and let it wave as we hiked down.

\*\*\*

The third day we decided we needed to go where there weren't other people. We tried to get on the east side of The Tallest Mountain from the Utah side, but the roads were blocked by private property gates. By lunchtime we were far south and west in the unit, driving one bad washed-out road to another until I, sitting in the back seat, was nauseous. We'd stop every few miles to glass the hill sides.

"You see anything?" Trent asked.

"Sure," Nate said, "2 horses, 1 bighorn, 5 coyotes, and an alien."

Clearly discouraged, the guys talked about getting fuel in town. I rested my head on the gear in the backseat and was almost asleep when the guys stopped again and said, "We're here."

"This isn't civilization," I said, looking around, but took the opportunity to steady my stomach anyway. I was looking for a snack when Nate said, "Hey you guys, there's a bull."

After his comment earlier, said in the exact same tone of voice now, Trent said, "Whatever," and kept glassing an old burn.

"No, really." When he got out his spotting scope, we knew he was serious. After The Front 9 experience, I didn't allow myself to get too excited. I grabbed my pack and Trent and I headed up the canyon to him. I followed Trent

and prayed that the wind wouldn't switch further up the canyon. I prayed I could hike fast enough. I prayed that my heart wouldn't jump from my chest and run back down the hill. I prayed.

There was enough cover to keep us hidden on the north slope for most of the mile hike while the bull browsed on the south slope on the next ridge, facing us. I did my best to creep through openings and stay behind trees when I could. When we'd reached our landmark, Trent found the bull where we'd first spotted him. I looked for a shooting rest and found a juniper with an exposed branch 15' up the hill, but we couldn't see him from there. It took Trent a while to find him again. When he did he grabbed me under the arms and plopped me down on the ground like a 3-year-old in time out. He pointed the bull out to me in the trees and I found him in the scope after resting my elbows on my knees. I saw his antlers shining behind the trees as he fed, oblivious to us in our anxious state.

"Can you make the shot?"

"Yes."

"174 yards. Crosshairs right on him. Breathe..." The echo of the rifle shot is all I heard. Then, "Put another one in him." I chambered another round and centered on his neck. Another echo. I only heard him as he crashed into a tree. Trent's whisper shook as he said, "Mama, you rock! You got him!" Trent ran to our packs and grabbed the radio.

When we reached him, we saw his club antler. Nate soon joined us with the extra pack. Trent dubbed him "Louie" because of the Louisville Slugger baseball bat-like club on his right beam like a drop-tine. I helped skin him and quarter him. My first shot shattered his shoulder blade into his lung. The second bullet resulted in all the blood painting the side of the hill. According to my wishes, the guys loaded me down with the head, antlers, and cape. We hiked out at dusk.

We found the good roads on the way out and had cell service by 8:15 for the mass picture text:

"Mama got it done."

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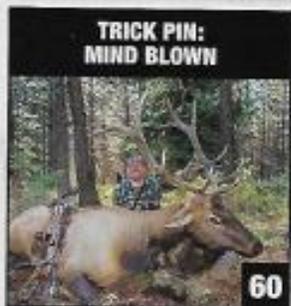
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# ELK HUNTER

MAGAZINE



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Elk Hunter Magazine is firmly committed to fair chase hunting and conservation of wild, free-ranging elk. Our mission is to educate, inspire, entertain, and share, as well as to make our readers better hunters, more thoughtful sportsmen, and dedicated conservationists.

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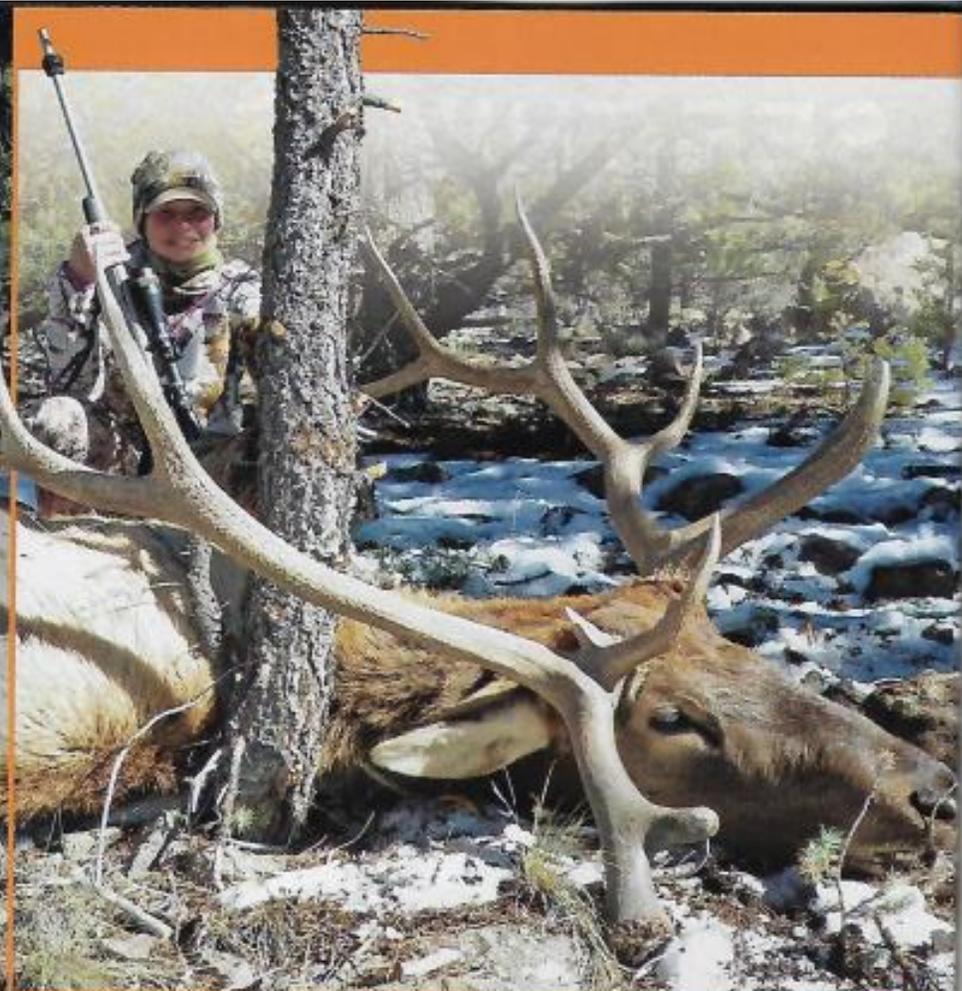
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# ELK HUNTER MAGAZINE



## MAKING THE MOST OF AN UNEXPECTED ADVENTURE

**I**n the mother of a happy-hearted four-year-old boy and wife of a wildland firefighter who only works to support his hunting habit. We have five German wire-haired pointers that my husband, Trent, runs ragged while they hunt chukar. I like to believe I'm in pretty good shape for having a desk job, and really like to think I'm tough.

At the end of May, my husband met me at the door with a wild-eyed look. "Do you feel lucky?" My mind scrambled as to what in the world he could possibly be talking about. What was the lotto up to these days? Did our son almost crack his skull open on something while pretending to be Thor? Imagine my relief that it wasn't a near-death experience, just an elk tag.

**Trisha Bauer  
Nevada • 2015**

"This isn't just an elk tag! This is a once-in-a-lifetime rifle elk tag for Nevada! You have to go!"

"Okay," I said, "Where again?"

### *Prep Time*

My husband spent months doing research between fire assignments. I did my best to listen and be engaged. "What can I do to get in shape for this?"

"Hiking...up mountains...with weight on your back. Oh, and there will probably be snow."

My husband, a former Lassen Hotshot also hikes 20-year-olds into the ground on their PT hikes for work. I haven't hunted in the snow since I was 23, and after a long day of hiking in the mountains, wrote myself a note: DO NOT CHUKAR HUNT IN THE SNOW. So I sighed, picked up my



workout clothes, and went to my Zumba class.

Did I want to hunt elk? Sure! In theory, it sounded fun. I camped in high school with our Explorer troop and survived. I hadn't really hiked since our son was born, but I love a walk in the woods as much as the next gal.

My father-in-law spent the better part of the summer and fall with five brands of bullets, a lead sled, a gun cleaning kit, a shooting chronograph, a spotting scope, and several pieces of cardboard to get the rifle dialed. By the time I got it, it was a work of art that could be predicted.

Two weeks before my season, Trent took a scouting trip with two buddies, Nate and Noodles. They soon had some elk patterned and a decent plan laid out.

Two nights before my season, El Niño sent moisture, complete with 6"-12" of snow, and high-wind and winter-weather advisories for my unit. I brought every piece of cold-weather gear except my duck hunting waders, and we drove ten hours to our camp spot. Nate joined us and the hunt was on.

#### *The Front Nine*

We followed the plan from two weeks ago; arrive before dawn to the ridges above their food source - some alfalfa fields - and wait for them to move up the mountain and bed at higher altitudes. That morning I saw nothing but an impressive amount of rabbit tracks in the new snow, and heard at least three coyote packs around us. There were some elk tracks, but from a day ago.



We drove on a designated route into the wilderness and stopped twice to hike up some ridges and glass. We drove to a "chained area" (where two dozers dragged a huge chain between them to rip the trees out and allow more brush and grass to grow). Toward dusk, we finally spotted a bull and a cow...about six miles away.

The second day we hiked above camp at dawn. We got to a ridge where we could glass, and we spotted a nice bull I dubbed "The Front Nine" because his front tines looked about nine inches longer than normal. Nate stayed to glass while Trent and I began the trek up "The Tallest Mountain".

To stay hidden, we stayed on the north slope, which unfortunately had the worst of the snowdrifts. Just when I was thinking I'd finally figured out that the plan was to hike me to death for the insurance money Trent stopped behind a juniper and glassed the hill in front of us. He turned back to me after I recovered my breath enough to hear him. "There's a raghorn bull on that hillside. If we spook him, the other bull will bolt, too. Wait here."

When he returned, he couldn't see the raghorn anymore, and he was worried that some other people not far from us might spook the bull. We proceeded up the mountain for another 1,000 vertical feet until we cut his track on a knob.

Trent signaled for me to drop my pack. I had just sat down when I heard antlers crashing and got The Front Nine in my scope for a second before he disappeared over a ridge. He spotted Trent before Trent spotted him and didn't stop for three miles and four ridges. From the top, we saw seven other people glassing us.

#### *A Mad Dash*

On the third day, we decided to go where there weren't other people. We tried to get on the east side of the mountain, but the roads were blocked by private property gates. By lunchtime, we were far south and west in the unit, driving one bad washed-out road to another until I was nauseous.

We finally stopped. As I was looking for a snack, Nate said, "Hey you guys, there's a bull!"

When he got out his spotting scope, we knew he was serious. I stayed calm as I grabbed my pack, and then Trent and I headed up the canyon. I prayed that the wind wouldn't switch, that I could hike fast enough, and that my heart wouldn't jump from my chest and run back down the hill.

There was enough cover to keep us hidden on the north slope for most of the mile hike. I did my best to creep through openings and stay behind trees when I could. When we reached our landmark, Trent found the bull where we'd first spotted him. I looked for a shooting test and found a juniper



An unexpected elk hunt turned into a difficult but satisfying journey and result.

per with an exposed branch, but we couldn't see him from there.

When we found him again, Trent grabbed me under the arms and plopped me down on the ground like a three-year-old in timeout. He pointed out the bull to me in the trees and I found him in the scope after resting my elbows on my knees. I saw his antlers shining behind the trees as he fed, oblivious to us in our anxious state.

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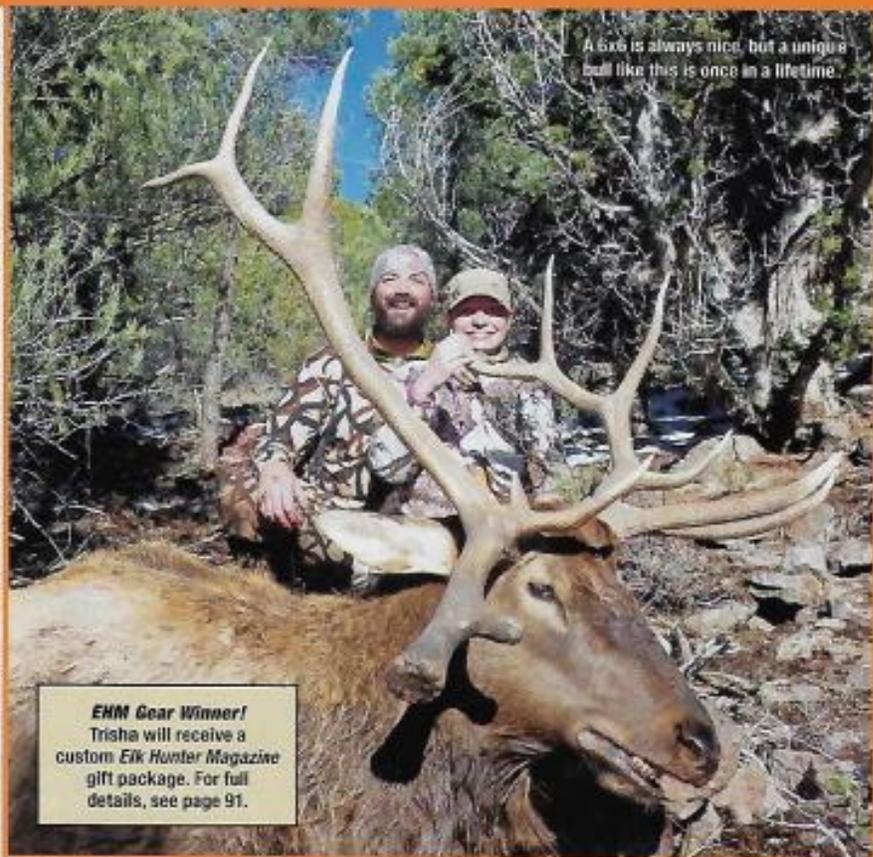
When we reached him, we saw his unique club antler. Nate soon joined us with the extra pack. Trent dubbed the bull "Louie" because of the Louisville Slugger baseball bat-like club on his right beam.

I helped skin and quarter him. Then, according to my wishes, the guys loaded me down with the head, antlers, and cape. We hiked out at dusk.

We found the smooth roads on the way back out and had good cell service by 8:15. A picture and text summed it all up:

"Mama got it done."

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