



Ed Jakubowski

FIRST BUCK *at 49!*

By Thomas Monahan

I started hunting a bit later than many in the fold. My father didn't hunt, nor did his father, nor did any of my friends. That's not unusual if you grew up like me in the 1960s on Long Island.

Instead, I *married* into hunting!

My brother-in-law Patrick is a real outdoorsy guy. He's big on safety, ethics, terrain and scouting. You know the type; he would make an excellent hunting guide. Unofficially, that's exactly what he is to me.

Patrick lived upstate in Ulster County. Every time our family visited, he would set up a target range in the "back ten" to encourage some male bonding. I've always been interested in guns, dating back to my Boy Scout days and, oh, the Crosman 760 Powermaster BB gun I had as a kid.

About seven years ago, Patrick lost his long-time hunting buddy to cancer. Over the decades, they amassed quite a number of stories, some of which are still shared with me a bit too often! Noting the missing element in his pursuits, I decided to surprise Patrick that October and took a hunter

education class without his knowledge. I went to a "big box" sporting goods store and bought a Remington Model 870 pump-action shotgun, a box of shells, some camouflage apparel from an army-navy store, and I was in business for a fall turkey hunt.

Truth was, it was time to hang up my softball cleats. I was in my early

To be honest, buck fever hits me instantly and I begin to breathe as if I had just run the NYC marathon.

40s then and needed a new pastime. While I am truly blessed with three daughters, the idea of spending a couple of days with "the boys" on occasion was plenty inviting.

With my gear in the trunk and the entire family in the car, we drove upstate for a family visit (and, I hoped, an afternoon of turkey hunting). As soon as we hit the NYS Thruway, I was looking for turkeys, so to say I was excited would be an understatement. When I turned into the driveway, I popped the trunk and proudly displayed my hunting gear to Patrick. Wouldn't you know it, rather

than commending me on my choices, he asked to see my license! I can still remember the look on his face when I showed him my current license, with turkey hunting privileges. The hunt was on.

We went to a few hot spots that afternoon and he taught me about turkey sign, habitat, calls, etc. But no turkeys.

And later that month, no deer either!

Over the next several years, Patrick and I spent literally hundreds of hours (more of his time than mine) scouting various state land in Ulster and Sullivan Counties. But after six years of deer hunting, I hadn't taken a single shot. I can only get away four days a year to hunt deer, but I've got plenty of other reasons for not having a successful harvest: the wrong sex animal appears, low-quality shot, rain, full moon, etc. I've got a bunch of excuses after six years! But all along we always saw excellent sign: scrapes, rubs, prints, droppings, etc.



Fast forward to last autumn: November 23, 2010 at about 3:00 p.m. It is the fourth and final day of our deer hunt. The area is hot with rubs and scrapes. We had seen plenty of doe the first few days, and a small buck the evening before. When you come down to it, it's all about being in the right place at the right time.

I'm set up in a folding chair (camouflage, of course) approximately 90 yards from four fresh rubs and an active scrape the size of a doormat. Patrick is sitting about 60 yards from me and we are back to back. He's looking to get a buck that might come up from a small ravine. There are quite a few downed trees and branches in the area, but I can see a good 200-yard deer path sloping downward from a fairly high ridge in the distance. To my extreme right is a road, not far from where we parked the truck, so no shot there. On my left are small white pines and directly in front of me is a small flat ridge about three feet higher than where I am.

I am holding a Remington Model 700 bolt-action with a scope, so I know I have a good chance if I see a buck

here. That is, if I see him before he sees me. I'm thinking that the buck will be coming down the high ridge directly to me, or from the left out of the small white pines. BUT NO! He suddenly appears on my right, but not too far right, approximately 75 yards in front of me, coming from the scrape area, heading right to the area with all the rubs. All I see is his head and antlers! A few large trees are blocking his body and I have a bunch of downed tree limbs somewhat obstructing my view, but they are obstructing his view, too!

To be honest, buck fever hits me instantly and I begin to breathe as if I had just run the NYC marathon. He is standing completely still just looking to see what is making that stupid breathing noise. He can't smell me because the wind is in my favor; that's a big advantage. I adjust my scope to its lowest setting, look for a window of opportunity, and find a triangular opening in the downed limbs about 25 yards out. He is still standing there about 50 yards past the window. I use my scope to check his head and antlers: okay, he's got at least three tines on one



side, so he's a legal buck in this area, which is part of a pilot antler restriction program. But he'll have to take a step or two before I can get a good shot. There he goes: one step, two...BANG! I see him going down in my scope. I chamber another round, keep looking through the scope, listening for any further movement (leaves rustling, branches breaking, anything), but not a sound. He was down. Believe it or not, after six years, it was all over in three minutes!

I was still breathing heavily as I radioed Patrick to tell him "I GOT ONE," though I knew he had heard the shot. The buck was a beautiful, high-racked 9-point, about 150 lbs. He was on my wall after a few months, and I had my first venison meal. My first buck...finally!

Thomas Monahan lives in Deer Park and hunts with friends in Ulster County.

