

How I Became A Hunter

My name is Landon and I am 11 years old. I have been hunting for over 2 years. I had just turned 9 years old when I went with my mom and older brother to take my first hunter safety course. I had previously practiced studying using the online course. The room where I took the course and test was over 90 degrees with no air conditioning. I tried asking questions during the course but the instructor kept telling me "no more questions". After the first day of class, I only had one night to study the booklet. I missed passing the test by one question. I felt very disappointed and sad. I cried on my way back home. After that I studied very hard. I used the hunter safety booklet for my daily reading assignments for school. My mom's boyfriend Joe is my mentor. Joe taught me almost everything I know about hunting. Joe is a great hunter. He hunts many different animals in many different states. He is also a professional wildlife biologist. Joe taught me lots of things. He taught me how to ride a bike without training wheels, how to fish, and how to play hockey. But the best thing he taught me was hunting. He taught me about turkeys and how to identify if a turkey is a male or female depending on the shape of its droppings or how big their footprints are. He also taught me about ducks and how to identify different breeds by their wing marks, feathers, and bills.



Joe created the bagel challenge, where I had to correctly answer hunter safety questions each week, which he got from the booklet. If I answered enough questions correctly, my reward was a bagel of my choice from a local bagel shop for breakfast.

Joe took my mom, my older brother, and I along on a duck hunt to the San Luis National wildlife refuge so we could learn about hunting. We all went with Joe as non-hunters. I learned how the check station worked and I was able to wear waders and help put out duck decoys. Joe signed up with me to take the hunter safety test again at the San Luis wildlife refuge. Joe didn't need to take the course, but he stayed in the class with me anyway. When I first got there I asked the instructor Sebastian if it was ok to ask questions during class. He was very nice and said he would answer any questions I had. Sebastian asked the class practice questions and I answered all of them, and then he asked if I wanted to teach the class, and I said "No, you're doing a good job". I was very proud that I passed the test this time. I learned that if you fail, you try harder the next time and you can succeed. It is important to never give up.

So far I have been on 5 turkey hunts and 5 duck hunts. I have shot 2 turkeys and 1 duck, which was a green wing teal. My first hunt was a turkey hunt in Cosumnes River preserve and the turkey I shot was in a large group about 30 yards away from me. I was under some tree roots and it made a perfect hiding place. I got my second turkey at Canada de Los Osos. I was in a blind and the turkey flew down from a hill. I shot it from 20 yards away. The duck hunt where I got my green wing teal was at Kesterson in a marsh. I was hunting with my mentor and his friend who brought a hunting dog. We had to get to the check station very early. Hunting has positively influenced my life by teaching me about wildlife management and how to get food for my family. I learned the safety of guns and how to load them, the different types of them, and how to use them in the right way. Hunting has also taught me how to sit still because you have



to make sure the turkeys don't see you. It has also given me a lot of work and exercise like hiking and mountain biking. Hunting has taught me how to look for animal signs and what the animal eats. It has taught me mushrooms and berries I can or can't eat. It has taught me what vines and bushes are poisonous like poison oak and stinging nettle. When I am hunting I get very excited because I might get an animal to eat but I also get sad because I am killing an animal. I feel happy to help provide healthy and organic food for my family. My favorite foods we make with the meat we get are elk burgers, venison stew, and duck poppers, which are skewers that have duck wrapped around in bacon and vegetables.

Before I learned to hunt, I would get in trouble a lot in elementary school, and I almost got expelled.

My mom had to meet with the principal. I had trouble sitting still in class and I would get distracted easily. I learned from hunting that you have to be patient and sit still for long periods of time. If you move around too much, animals would notice you and be scared off. After several trips of hunting, I eventually started sitting still and paying attention more in class. I started getting better grades and ever since I started hunting I have had straight A's in all my classes.

I have learned that my favorite animal to hunt is turkey and my favorite time to hunt them is in the spring. I am looking forward to being old enough to hunt deer next year.

I love spending time on our family adventures all around California in the outdoors. I love going hunting, camping and fishing together with my brother, mom, and Joe. I wouldn't be the person I am today without the help of my mentor Joe and my family.



Youth Essay Award ceremony at the 2018 International Sportsmen's Expo, Sacramento



Captain Robert Pelzman, Third Place: Kaylin Campbell (17) of McKinleyville, Joe Chavez, First Place: Landon Sabol (11) of Morgan Hill, Second Place: Danika Dellner (14) of San Lorenzo, Chief David Bess, Deputy Chief Nathaniel Arnold

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Find a Hunter Education class near you, visit
www.wildlife.ca.gov/Hunter-Education*