



# Second Chance

By Jared Hook

It seems solitude and time in a tree stand lend themselves to inner-reflection, which can lead to realizations or lessons that may apply to hunting, as well as life. Several years ago I felt a



strong message being conveyed on how important it is to focus on the heart, which applied to relationships as well as making a good shot with my bow. Last fall, God's broadcasting system, known as nature, seemed to be conveying a message about second chances. I don't know what it is about swaying in a tree and listening to the wind swirl through the branches, but apparently it fosters soul searching and contemplation.

How many of you wish you could have a second chance at something? Maybe you had a conversation that could have been handled better? Maybe you dropped a football in a high school game that could have won the championship? Perhaps you are looking for a second chance to find the right spouse? It's human nature to wish we could have a do-over when things don't work out as we wish they would have, but it's not all that often we actually get that chance.



Some of you may have read, "A Buck Named Y2K", a story I wrote last year for the Spring edition of this magazine. It was about shooting the buck of a lifetime after 37 years of solid effort. That buck was walking at 15 yards and I aimed for the heart instead of compensating a little for the movement; my arrow hit a little too far back and I didn't recover the buck until the next morning. Because of that experience, I vowed to practice shooting even more, to make sure my next shot would be more effective. Little did I know, I would get a second chance at the same exact shot, from the same stand, almost exactly one year later.

Bowhunting for me is a way of life and a year-round endeavor, as I'm sure it is for many. Maintaining stands, shooting lanes, food plots and practicing are all part of my annual cycle that culminates in the fall.

I don't hunt as much as I used to in September and October due to family and work obligations, but I definitely try to get out for several "dress rehearsals" before the rut. It takes several hunts to make sure I have all my equipment in the proper place and am feeling comfortable with all the little details that could make or break the one opportunity that might arrive during the season.

According to my hunting diary, I was averaging 30 to 40 hunts per season before buying my own land a few years ago. That number has decreased the last few years due to having better opportunities on my land, which is great, but I really enjoy my time in the woods. I was over the moon in 2021 when I shot Y2K, but my season ended October 26th and it was only my 6th time out. Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining at all! In a way it was nice to have more time for hunting geese, pheasants, ducks, turkeys and coyotes, but I yearned to be in my stand, especially in November when my buddies were texting and calling to tell me about their close encounters with bucks.

My goal for last season (2022) was simply to enjoy it and hopefully make a solid shot on a respectable deer.

I got out several times in October and was ready to get more serious the last week of the month. Historically, I focused on the first week of November, but in the last few years I've had outstanding rutting activity the last week of October. Isn't it interesting how we all add significance to previous successes; if we harvest a good buck on a certain date that date forever ranks higher as a day to make sure we're in our stand. You can imagine, my hopes were high for October 26th and it almost turned out to hold true. I hunted a stand that afternoon named Pier 1, which is right on the edge of a creek. I saw a lot of does from the stand and had a hard time sneaking out at dusk. It wasn't until later when the glow of my computer monitor revealed a nice 9 pointer had walked past that stand 30 minutes before I got there. He was the best buck I had on the property and I wished I had left work a little earlier.

I had several respectable bucks around the property and wished I could somehow keep them all safe for one more year to see what their potential might be. One of them was a modest main frame 8, but he had symmetrical double drop tines which gave him some great character. Maybe the stars will align and I'll be able to write a story about him this fall, but for now, let's go back to the 9 pointer.



On the afternoon of October 29th I was hunting from the “Pine Perch,” where I had shot Y2K the year before. It was pretty warm the last few days of October so the rutting activity seemed to get bottled up during the day and released with vigor right before dusk. My time in the stand that evening was one of those magical experiences we all hope for, with tons of activity and multiple bucks chasing. It was a 3-ring circus and I had my bow in my hand the whole time, literally not knowing which way to face sometimes. The 9 pointer I was after was close at one point, but unfortunately, he was tipped off by a doe that had too good of a memory.

Earlier that day I made a difficult decision, for safety reasons, to replace the strap holding my stand to that tree. I normally do all of my stand adjustments during the summer so as to not disturb things in the fall. I thought I had checked it. The strap was so tight I had to cut it off. Of course I was trying to be quiet, but about the time I was almost done, a doe and yearling jumped up about 40 yards away and ran to the southwest. They had been watching me the whole time! Later, I wasn’t surprised to see a doe and fawn walking back from that direction at dusk, staring at my hiding spot, even though they couldn’t see me. She ignored all the other rutting activity and slowly worked her way around until she was straight down wind, staring at my location the whole time. Stretching her neck out and bobbing her nose around, she profusely tested my scent control efforts. About that time, I could hear a buck in the pine trees, grunting and rubbing. The doe eventually snorted and took off, taking the 9-point buck with her. As I sat there I regretted my decision to “fix” my stand that day.

Hoping the deer would still be in the area the next morning, I headed back to the Pine Perch. It was cool and slightly foggy, and it wasn’t long before I heard grunting and crashing coming from an area I treat as a sanctuary. It was fun to watch from my vantage point as a doe ran full speed away from, and managed to evade, the buck for a short time. It was the same 9 point from the evening before and he was frantically trying to pick up her scent. I took the opportunity to make one quick bleat call. His head snapped to attention, but he headed south, back into the sanctuary with his nose to the ground. I don’t use calls very often and seldom blind call, but I got the sense he was nervous about finding his doe before another buck did, so I did one grunt and put the tube down. Just like on the TV shows, which seldom happens for me, he came straight in from 100 yards away and was coming down the same path as Y2K the year before. All I could think about was making sure I made a better shot this time. I aimed in front of his shoulder and released the arrow as he walked by at 15 yards in the same exact spot where Y2K had been the year before.

I felt good about the shot; it looked good and was a pass through. I recovered my arrow, red from tip to nock, from the long grass and was encouraged.

As you know, the time between releasing an arrow and finding your deer is filled with mental gymnastics that can be exhausting, re-playing the shot over and over. After waiting a while to sneak out, I changed clothes and started on the blood trail. To my relief, he only went about 80 yards and had fallen near to a large community scrape. I had just enough time to take pictures, field dress and drag the buck, and then load all 200 lbs of him into the truck before heading to my daughters’ (3 teenagers on the same team) soccer game, where friends and other dads were very congratulatory.



The hunt itself was a great experience, but sharing the story with others and talking to those dads at the soccer game became an extension of that experience that is just as valuable. I thank you for reading my story about a “second chance,” as it allows the story to live beyond last season. I encourage everyone to share their story, to talk about the shoulder mount on the wall and to pass on the great bowhunting heritage we have in Wisconsin.

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