

A Look at Life from a Deer Stand - Josh Crawford
1st Place
Romney Middle School, Hampshire County
Grades 7-8

The air was brisk as he walked through the woods that morning. The frostbitten leaves slightly crunched underneath his middle-aged feet, as he walked the familiar trail to his deer stand before daylight. He had walked this path many times over the years. As he climbed the old wooden ladder his thoughts traveled back a few years to when it seemed he had a problem free life. He and his wife had been fighting a lot in recent years, and she had finally left him a few months back, taking the children with her. There was also something else but just as he was about to think about it he noticed the sun beginning to rise. Its rays magically found their way through the trees. He glanced at the sunrise and a few moments later looked back allowing the full colors to sink in and feeling the warmth of the sun's rays falling upon his cheeks melting his stress. The sun's rays glinted off the scope of his rifle. He looked at the sunrise in amazement as he did every year then slowly turned his head and mumbled something about memories. There was sadness in his eyes as a tear rolled down his cheek and was gone. The minutes crawled by slowly as he forced himself not to think, but it was hard to bear. He possessed neither physical nor mental pain, but emotional pain cut him like a knife.

All of a sudden a stick snapped behind him shattering his thoughts. His heart started to pound as it always did when there were deer around him. Maybe it was a buck he thought. He peered behind the tree his stand was hanging on. At first he didn't see anything except the forest floor, but he had been on this stand too many times for that. He eyed the forest floor piece-by-piece. Then he saw the flick of a deer's tail. He didn't dare move. He stayed focused on that piece of the woods. Deer, especially bucks, are real fidgety on the first day of the season. He

examined where the deer was and soon found the curve of its back. He saw where the neck went up but disappeared behind a tree along with its head. He searched to see if there were any more deer in the area but did not see any. This deer was alone and wouldn't show its head. It had to be a buck and probably a nice one. As he raised his gun, the strap caught on his chair making a noise the deer heard. It took *off*. The man groaned as he saw the wide rack on the deer's head. He got the strap unstuck, but the deer was out of sight before he could get a shot off. The man mentally kicked himself. How could he have been so careless?

Reaching to his left he got a cup of coffee out of his thermos. Angry that he let the buck get away, he thought about leaving but decided against it. As the hours passed his thoughts wandered back to the news he had received the other day. Every year he and his father had always enjoyed a week at deer camp. It was the only time they could be together for any amount of time. This year his father's stand was empty. Just a few days ago his father had been diagnosed with cancer having a 1 in 50 chance of survival.

The hours passed very slowly and darkness started to fall. Finally he climbed down the ladder and walked to where he always parked his truck. He drove to the cabin and walked inside to feel the warmth of the fire. Adding wood, he remembered some of the conversations he and his father had had about the big ones that got away. Thinking like that made him miss his father more. He would give anything for his father to be with him right now. Finally he lay down and dreamed of what tomorrow might bring him.

Deer hunting is a lot like life. Excitement and warmth can be around you a long while, but then can be gone before you know it like the flick of a deer's tail. Yet you still go on with hope.

