

TURKEY TALES

From a kid's perspective to warm the hearts of any parent to a young woman's first hunt, these Turkey Tales will inspire you to hunt, too.

Joanna's Turkey

BY JOE WILKINSON

With her "rookie" turkey hunt under her belt, Joanna Kunkel enters this season with a little more confidence...and a wish list about a mile long. She dropped a 23 ½ pound gobbler last spring, after watching him fan, strut and parade to within 25 yards of her. Some hunters wait for years for such a Technicolor spectacle. Hers came on her first weekend in the turkey woods. "He came out in the clearing. His feathers were all fanned out. He was all puffed up. It looked beautiful," recalls Kunkel, 23, of Solon.

It had been fairly routine up to that point. Kunkel had hunted the Friday morning (second season) opener with boyfriend Seth Bartlett. On Saturday, she and her mom, Connie, had gone out. Sunday morning, Joanna and Seth had seen a couple hens from their blind, east of Solon, but they were done for the day. As Joanna took down the blind, Seth walked out to the truck. He never got there. "He came back and said there were a couple toms strutting in the field just over the hill," recalls Kunkel. "We walked along the fence real slow, crouching, then down on our hands and knees getting closer."

She settled in against a tree and readied her 12-gauge. Seth offered some soft yelps on his mouth call. "They were strutting out in the field, so I built up to some pretty aggressive yelps," remembers Seth. "I saw them coming closer and knew they were committed." He rolled the video camera, as Joanna brought her gun up, targeting the base of the neck of the bigger tom.

A squeeze of the trigger and the gobbler dropped in a heap. "I just started shaking like crazy. I had goose bumps; my eyes started swelling up with tears," admits Joanna. The video shows her standing up, then dropping her hands to her knees to catch herself as she let out a loud sigh. "It was an awesome, awesome experience. Full of joy and excitement."

But that was last year. In '08, she wants to crank it up a notch. "I definitely would like to do the calling myself. I have my Grandpa's old box call. It would be neat to (build) that family tradition. It would be a great experience to be out with my dad, too; kind of a father-daughter moment."

She's also recruiting. "I love sharing the story, especially with my girlfriends. I went back to college after the hunt (she graduated from Central College in Pella last May) and my friends saw my camouflage clothing in the car. They were like, 'Oh my gosh! You hunt?' They thought it was great."

As she waits for the full mount to come back from the taxidermist, Joanna's also making plans. "Just knowing how to sit and where; how to blend in and place the decoys," she says, listing a few tips she picked up in Year One.

"I am definitely looking forward to this season."



Nearly a year later, Joanna Kunkel, of Solon, says the experience of shooting her first turkey is still electric. "I love sharing the story, especially with girlfriends. There are not that many women who hunt turkeys."

BELOW: With her tom's tail fanned, Joanna kneels in front of the tree where she shot it in eastern Johnson County. The 23 ½ pound bird had an 8 ½ inch beard and spurs measuring 1 ¼ and 1 ⅜ inches.



A 10-YEAR OLD RECALLS

The Day I Shot My First Turkey

BY ANDREW PAULEY



Andrew Pauley, of Honey Creek, shot his first turkey at age seven. Now wiser at age 10, he shares his first turkey tale. His story will have all parents grinning and thinking of their own children. **RIGHT:** Proud father, Pat, and son.



My name is Andrew. I am 10 years old and I am going to tell you a story about my adventure getting my first turkey. I like to go hunting with my dad. It is one of my favorite things to do. When my dad tells me to go to bed early, I know I am going to go hunting in the morning. I get so excited, I can hardly sleep.

One night after supper when I was seven years old, my dad told me to go to bed right now. I knew right away that I had to gather up my hunting stuff for the next morning. Right before I went to bed, my dad checked to see if I had all my hunting things ready. I needed an orange hat, thick boots, two brown long sleeved shirts, a pair of my camouflage pants, my coverall, and a big coat. Sometimes I get really cold sitting and waiting outdoors. I like being warm.

The next morning at 6:30, my dad woke me up and said in a whisper voice, *"Get all your hunting stuff on and meet me upstairs in the kitchen."* I got dressed fast; my dad was already ready.

"Are you ready?" he said.

"Yes."

We got in the Suburban with my gun, my dad, me and a couple other things that we needed. When we got to our hunting place, my dad told me to be quiet. I am always nervous when we go hunting. When you are little, it is fun to see all the animals that come out and walk through the fields or woods.

It was time to go so my dad got quietly out of the car. I did too. He told me to not slam my door. He was going to shut my door for me so I wouldn't scare the animals away. We have to be quiet.

"Do we have everything?" he asked.

"I think so."

We walked up a huge dirt hill used for farming. We were almost to our spot. We walked across three corn fields. We were finally there. My dad grabbed the things in my hands like a chair, a pad to sit on and some snacks to munch on. We got into our turkey blind. We sat and sat and sat. My dad pulled out a candy bar and I asked if I could have half of it. He gave me half. I was eating it and it sure was good. I am sure my mom wouldn't let me have a Snickers bar for breakfast.

After a while, dad said in a whisper voice, *"I see something."* We both thought we saw a turkey behind a big wad of trees about 125 yards away. The turkey walked closer and closer. It stopped and turned around. It walked faster and faster off into the woods. Dad said something must have spooked it. Dad told me to practice looking out to see if I could aim the gun correctly. I tried several times and then put the gun down. We waited and waited. Dad said he thought he saw a head of a turkey just over the hill. We looked through our binoculars and saw one head...then another...then another. There were a whole bunch of them. I am so excited. I can't wait for them to get closer. We watched the group of turkeys and waited but they just wouldn't come over so I could get a shot.

The flock of turkeys finally came over the hill. They were walking away. My dad took something out of a bag. He picked it up and started to make a sound. It was a gobbler box call. He made a turkey hen sound and the flock started to walk towards us. This is my lucky day. Dad told me to get my gun up on a rest. The flock came closer and closer and closer. My gun was ready. The turkeys came closer. They came to a stop about 10 to 15 yards away. Dad took the safety off the gun. The group of turkeys just stood there looking at the decoys. The turkeys were mostly jakes.

In a whisper, dad said, *"When I tell you, you can shoot. OK?"* I was ready. My dad told me I could shoot. A second later, I shot. The gun made a boom and kicked back into my shoulder. I was so excited that it didn't hurt. I hit the turkey. My dad ran out of the blind. The bird stopped kicking. My turkey was dead. *"Yes!"*

Dad was tickled with me. He told me good job and gave me a high five. We called mom, Uncle Danny and grandma and grandpa to tell them. We put the tag on his leg, took pictures and went home and butchered it. I got to pull some feathers to make a quill pen. I kept the 12-inch long beard. It was a great turkey and a great adventure.

I love hunting with my dad even if I don't get to shoot anything. When I do, it's great! And that is my story about me, my dad and my first turkey.

