

Has a hunt ever changed your life?

My life hasn't been the same after I went on a mountain lion hunt last year.

It was the start of an amazing journey of self-discovery, and a memory that I draw upon for strength during difficult times. It defined me as a person and how I approach life as well as what I stand for.

I was judged based on a picture that circulated the Internet, criticisms were tossed and propaganda was circulated. I decided to take a stand against the cyber bullying and attacks received by myself and other hunters.

This hunt was incredible, extreme and defining, and I wasn't going to let anyone take that away from me. This is the story of the hunt that started it all.

If you are a hunter, there is no greater thrill in life than to track a predator. This is the ultimate use of one's learned skills and knowledge. Hunter versus hunted; predator versus prey.

I had dreamed of hunting a mountain lion since I was a little girl. I am not out hunting for just a "trophy" though; the hunt is the trophy and the more extreme it is, the bigger the "trophy" it is for me.

RELATED: [The Great Debate: Trophy Hunting Versus Meat Hunting](#)

I had no idea I would ever have an opportunity to go on my dream hunt, but nonetheless, when my father presented the idea to Scott Summers with Canyon Rim Outfitters, Scott was very excited about guiding a female hunter.

My dad had hunted with Scott the year before and taken a respectable lion. Scott's wife Sheila often accompanied him on hunts and was successful in harvesting a large tom the previous year. They seemed like they were the perfect fit for my hunt.

There may be some people who think that mountain lion hunting is easy; you put the dogs on a track and the lion trees a few yards from where you started.

I am here to tell you my hunt went nothing like that.

## **The Call**

There is a lot of time and effort put into just finding a fresh track. There are many miles of Colorado canyons and hillsides to cover in search of a mature lion track. Not to mention, the time and effort it takes to train the dogs is significant.

After several weeks of waiting impatiently for the phone to ring, I finally got the call. It was on Saturday February 2, the day before the Super Bowl. My dad was on the other line and said "Thunder cats were a go."

They had found a lion track, the freshest track Scott had found in days. Scott was very excited because the tracks pointed towards an opportunity to hunt a large male. We had been waiting weeks for an opportunity like this. Could this be it?

Of course, real life got in the way, as it often does. Could I convince my husband to watch our two kids during the Super Bowl? We made a trade; he would watch them while I hunted the lion, and I would watch them in April so he could hunt turkeys.

I couldn't sleep the night before. I had dreams of lions. I woke up before my alarm even went off and started my three-hour drive to New Castle, Colorado, in an area where [Colorado Parks and Wildlife](#) is trying to reduce mountain lion populations.

I couldn't stop thinking about what the hunt would entail. I was nervous and excited and knew that if it was a big tom, I was in for long day and an extreme hunt.

### **The Dogs**

The first time I saw Scott's dogs, I thought they were not your typical hounds. I couldn't imagine those tiny dogs treeing a lion. He had three [Plotts](#) and three others that were something I had never seen or hunted with before. Scott called them Arizona Desert dogs.

My previous experience with hounds was they were hot tempered, hard headed and listened like my 2-year-old. These dogs, different in many ways, were obedient and had manners. You could tell that Scott had put in a lot of time and effort into training them.

He told us that the night before, he had a long talk with the dogs, letting them know how the hunt was going to go. You would find this a crazy notion unless you actually met Scott and his dogs. I think they could star in a new reality show (maybe *The Hound Whisperer?*). I truly believe he talks and they listen.

They were like highly trained soldiers that would follow their leader into battle with a no quit attitude.



(Saki Plott)

The first time I saw the lion track, I couldn't believe it. This was the largest mountain lion track I had ever seen.

The track was a few days old and Scott knew we were going to have to cover some country to catch this traveling tom.

My heart sunk, because I didn't want to return home empty handed. Scott decided to let two dogs follow the track to see where the tom had headed.

The dogs took the track, immediately topping the hill in front of us. It had snowed earlier that week, and the drifts were up to my knees.

The dogs bawled and chopped as they followed the cold trail. It brought back fond memories for me of hunting coons with hounds when I was a girl.

Scott left us and headed up the trail after the dogs. It was so peaceful to sit and relax in the beauty of the Colorado high country.

### **The Track**

After about 30 minutes, he radioed back that he had found where the lion had crossed another trail. We met him and learned that the lion had traveled in a more difficult direction, towards rough canyons and private property.

I knew this was likely the end of the road. I had traveled so far and gotten my hopes up so high, only to be denied.

Just when I thought we were going to head back, Scott gave me the option of putting the dogs on the track, but he also warned if we let dogs go we were going to be in for a long rough day.

I asked Scott if he was sure the dogs would find the lion, and I will never forget the look on his face. I am not sure if he thought I was crazy or just trying to be funny. He looked at me and said, "I know they will catch him, I am just not sure where and how many miles it will take."

Before I could even respond, Scott decided to throw caution to the wind and released the hounds. I believe he wanted to get the lion as much as I did.

I could hear those hounds bawling through the thick cedar hillside. We were all concerned the race may end on private property, which would surely signal the end.

The hounds dropped down the hill and were gone in a flash. Scott and Sheila tracked them on GPS, which was like watching a slot machine, hoping we would hit triple sevens.

The lion did not cooperate and angled towards the high country, entering into deep canyons and rocky hillsides. The dogs were hot on the trail the entire way.

Several times during the race, seven-month old Puma would take the lead. She's a brindle Plott and full of fire and grit.

I couldn't believe that Scott had a seven-month-old and a 10-month-old that were so involved in the hunt. Unless you knew otherwise you would have thought they were well-seasoned dogs.

I had bonded with Parti, the 10-month-old. Scott and Sheila think she has a personality like a rock but she and I had spent some time waiting together, and she knew I was always good for a pat on the head.

I wanted to learn as much as I could about hunting lions, and from what I could tell, Scott was the best. We had hunted with dogs when I was younger and his method was far superior to anything we had done. Treeing coons paled in comparison to treeing a full grown tom.

They were the friendliest and definitely had an exuberance of energy. My experiences with Plotts were not good and I couldn't believe how well these dogs performed.





(Julie Arizona Desert Dog)

## **The Landscape**

We took off trying to find a road that would get us closer to where the dogs were. We tried to get high enough to get a good signal on the dogs with the GPS, but ended up having to go back to the truck where we loaded everything up.

We continued our pursuit by truck, traveling on backcountry dirt roads. We even had to stop and wait impatiently for wild turkeys to cross the road before we got to where we could hear the dogs again. Sheila and I rode together, and found that we had a lot in common.

RELATED: [The Strangest Introduction to Turkey Hunting](#)

It seemed like we spent a lifetime trying to find the right way to get to the dogs. We decided our only choice was to walk in. The GPS indicated the dogs had treed the lion approximately two miles from our location, and it was all uphill.

Scott took off ahead of us to get to the dogs as quickly as possible. I took a good look at the landscape and thought to myself, *'There is no way I am going to make it to those dogs.'*

This was some of the roughest, most unforgiving country I had ever seen. The landscape offered steep hillsides, rocky outcroppings and oak brush. There was no way to tell exactly what we were going to have to cross, but I knew it was going to be brutal.

I had followed my dad on some crazy hunts, but those were nothing like what we were about to do.

I was nervous I wouldn't be able to keep up. Over the previous three years I had given birth to two children, spent a total of nine months on bed rest, and had a C-Section. I was not in the best shape of my life to say the least.

I knew there was a chance that we had treed the giant lion that left the tracks we saw, so I had to do this.

The first part was the hardest; we were going straight uphill. I knew it was all mind over matter. I could hear my husband's voice in my head saying "You are in for an education."

I couldn't disappoint everyone, I simply had to do this! I would go as far as my legs would let me go.

My thighs were burning and at times my muscles would completely give out. Several water and rest breaks helped, but not much.

There were times I could hardly catch my breath. I had to remember how to breathe: inhale three seconds, hold it for three seconds and let it out for three seconds. It seemed to help.

I followed in my dad's tracks, and sometimes I would sink in the snow down to my waist.

I didn't know if my knees were going to hold up; it was all I could do to get through the deep snow. We followed the path that Scott had taken, and from my view it looked like he took the hardest route possible.

### **The Moment**

I was so excited I couldn't stop talking. I'm sure I sounded like a little girl the whole way, but I was trying to cherish every agonizing moment. I knew that this hunt would be over too soon, and I was going to enjoy it to the end.

In reality, I was happy just to be outside. It had been a long time since I felt exertion, and it was a welcomed feeling.

Scott had a wonderful sense of humor, and kept telling us on the 2-way radio that the route got easier. I guess his idea of easy was much different from mine, because it just kept getting harder. Maybe this was his way of getting us to keep going.

At this point, I was thoroughly convinced that Scott was part mountain goat.

I thought we were moving at a pretty good pace but he was quite a bit ahead of us. I couldn't return home to tell my drill instructor husband that I had given up halfway there, I would have never lived it down.

Finally, we got the call from Scott that the lion was treed. He estimated it was around 140-150 pounds.

I was so happy to hear this and it was my motivation to keep going. I pushed my body harder than ever before. I knew that we had to get to the tree.

Scott radioed back that the lion was getting nervous and we needed to hurry before he jumps tree and goes into some rough canyon country, making it impossible for us to make it to him before nightfall. I pushed my body as hard as I could, taking it 100 yards at time then resting only for a moment when my muscles wouldn't go any farther.

My dad made sure that he stayed right with me the whole way. He wasn't going to let me quit, since this was his dream as much as it was mine. We were in this together.

We both knew that an opportunity like this didn't come often and it made this hunt even more special.

### **The Contact**

As we began to close in on the tree, I could hear the dogs and the intensity was starting to rise. The barks and howls were like the yells of cheerleaders keeping us going.

When I got within 150 yards from the tree I thought there was no way I was going to make it. The terrain had changed dramatically for the worst. We had to cross a large rockslide under a bluff and it was extremely steep.



I knew one wrong step and I would end up in the bottom of the canyon with a broken bone. This was not the time to make a mistake in footing.

I am not really known for being graceful, so this was extremely nerve racking. I gingerly crossed the face slipping several times before arriving at the base of the tree.



At first, I couldn't see the lion. He was treed in a large Douglas fir and the branches were too thick. I moved up the steep hillside farther, and there he was!

After the most extreme hunt of my life, there was my lion. I realized I was standing only a few yards away from one of nature's most efficient killers.

The only thing keeping me from something that could end my life within seconds was a pack of six dogs. They had more grit than an entire high school football team.

The lion was the most beautiful animal I had ever seen and he was getting nervous with all of the activity. The dogs were still excited and barking even though you could tell they were exhausted. They were still doing their job, climbing on a downed cottonwood tree, trying to get to the lion. Scott instructed that he needed to leash up all the dogs before I could shoot.





It seemed like forever before all of the dogs were on leashes. This was chaos at its finest: cameras were flashing; dogs were bawling; and everyone was rushing around to make things happen.

My adrenaline was pumping and I thought my heart was going to beat out of my chest. It was so loud you had to yell just to be heard.

We were at the bottom of a drainage area and the dogs were bawling and chopping and it was echoing off of the canyon walls. I felt as if I had followed Scott into battle and we were in a war zone. The dogs sounded like heavy artillery firing. It was hard to focus through all of the chaos.

### **The Finish**

I had to pull myself together and bring my focus back to the task at hand, finishing the hunt. I began tuning out the dogs and the activity around me. I knew that my sympathetic nervous system was taking over. I had to work through my tunnel vision and shortness of breath, and I knew that I was shaking.

I squared my breathing and focused on the lion. I had to steady my hand. I couldn't afford to mess up this shot.

I had brought my Remington youth model .270 Winchester short mag, just to make sure that the lion went down immediately. I threaded my barrel through the branches of the tree the lion was in. I didn't have a perfect shot, but this was my only option.

I knew that as long as I could see the front shoulder I would be fine. I had a moment where I didn't know if I could shoot. He was such a magnificent creature and I had so much respect for him. He had led the dogs, Scott, my father, Sheila and myself to this point, and I had traveled through the toughest terrain I've ever faced to get there.

I took the shot and saw that he was hit. It was a perfect shot.

### **The Harvest**

I raced down to find that my 140-pound lion had grown! He was much bigger than we thought. I was so excited I couldn't believe that I had finally lived my dream.

The sun was getting low in the sky and we decided it was best to gut him and leave him there for the night. It had taken us two and half hours to hike in, and we still had to hike out. We were all exhausted and there was no way we could get him out of the canyon before dark.

I left with a heavy heart, hoping that when we came back the next day he would still be there. We found a trail that led us to the road, making the walk out much easier. The dogs were tired, but they were still jumping and wagging their short tails. They had enjoyed the hunt as much as we had.

It was starting to get dark and colder. We had worked up quite a sweat getting to the lion. My boots and leg gaiters had leaked and I was wet from my toes to my knees.

My feet and hands were freezing. My feet burned with every step I took. I tried to warm my hands against my body they and saw that they had turned red from the cold. My gun began to feel like it weighed a ton I had to keep switching sides.

My knees ached and every time I fell through the snow I found it harder to get out. My dad was exhausted too; he had carried a 20-pound pack the entire way. He wanted to make sure we had enough food and water.

Even though I was cold and completely exhausted, I was still on cloud nine.

I had lived my dream and it was a hunt of a lifetime. I had pushed myself to the limit and learned that I can do anything I set my mind to. This hunt sets the bar for me, and I am not sure I can ever top it.

I had to leave for home that evening and there were many miles I had to travel before I could rest, but I was so full of adrenaline I wasn't even tired. I kept replaying the days event's over and over again. I wanted to record every detail of the day in my mind.

My dad and Scott returned the next day to retrieve my lion. They had obtained permission from the landowner to cross private property, making it much easier to get to him.

They drove the snow machine up the canyon to the spruce tree basin. At that point they were able to use a winch to get him up to the machine from the deep drainage area.

I was so thankful to get the call from my dad that the lion was intact. I was worried that coyotes or something else might have reached him overnight.

The lion was 175 pounds and measured 7 feet long from nose to tail. Colorado Parks and Wildlife estimated him to be approximately five years old.

Several weeks later we celebrated by inviting the entire family (aunts, uncles, and cousins) for a wild game dinner. Mountain lion, elk, and deer were all served, and everyone enjoyed the spoils and story of the lion hunt.

One year later I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia and was finally able to understand why this hunt was so difficult for me. My muscles no longer function normally, creating an intolerance to exercise and physical exertion. This may slow me down; but with the good Lord's blessing, it will never stop me from hunting.

**"My inner strength is greater than my physical existence. It is up to me to believe in my self enough to make the impossible possible and dreams into reality"**

Charisa Argys

I hope that this can be a lesson to all of us to look deeper before judging others. Let us all go through life with more acceptance and less hate.

***"We can never judge the lives of others, because each person knows only their own pain and renunciation.***

***It's one thing to feel that you are on the right path, but it's another to think that yours is the only path."***

***~Paulo Coelho***