

**Michael
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—
Tribune
Outdoor
Editor



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Be thankful, and help if you can

The next time any of us feels like whining or that we've been dealt a bum hand, call the families of the kids featured in today's main story on this page — the kids who have had their wish to go hunting granted by the United Special Sportsman Alliance.

While it is a joyful story in some respects, it should make us realize how easy some of us have.

When I spoke with the mother of one of the young hunters, I found that the past few years have been mighty trying. She didn't bring it up — I did. I asked how things are going.

She told me about long periods of intense treatment, remission, *lingering effects of the illness*, loss of her son's father and her parents within weeks, and then a car wreck with a drunken driver who carried no insurance.

She still smiled, though, when she handed me the photos of her happy son with the deer he shot.

Women are strong creatures: I saw it a month ago when someone close to me finally lost her battle with lung cancer. She gathered her family around her and apologized for leaving so early and for having smoked cigarettes. Then she died while she and her husband napped together.

We may reap inspiration from those who handle their prob-

items so well.

I may never meet another woman as enthusiastic as Brigid O'Donoghue, the CEO and founder of United Special Sportsman Alliance.

After dealing with what many of these young hunters are dealing with and coming through it, she decided to help one man who was dying of cancer. He wanted to go deer hunting.

She told me that on the way to meet the man, she worried about how she would deal with the situation. She wondered if she would know what to say or how to act. She really didn't like the idea.

But when she sat on the couch next to the man and talked with him, he fell asleep — heavy doses of chemotherapy and radiation will do that — and he slumped over with his head in her lap.

"That is when I knew that I needed to do this for other people," O'Donoghue said.

So now, 10 years later, more than 6,500 seriously and terminally ill youth and adults have had their outdoor wishes granted.

Some want to hunt, some want to fish and some want other kinds of outdoor experiences.

O'Donoghue gets what the outdoors can do for a person. She tells parents of sick kids to get them outside.

"I tell them to wheel them

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outdoors and let them sit in the sun and feel the wind in their hair," she said. "They need a break from the hospitals and the indoors."

There are lots of things that the outdoors will not cure, of course. But for a few minutes, a nice day can help you forget your troubles.

And, if you want to feel better, you can help Brigid O'Donoghue and her group help kids.

The United Special Sportsman Alliance needs places where these folks can hunt, the USSA needs taxidermy, it needs money for travel expenses ... it needs all kinds of things.

You may reach Brigid O'Donoghue at 800-508-8019 or check out her organization on line at www.childwish.com.

Reach Michael Babcock at 791-1487 or by email at triboutdoors@greatfallsribune.com.