

October 29, 2021

Women Hunt™ Testimonial: Laura Houser

Hi, my name is Laura Houser. I reside in Colorado. I've lived here since 1980. I learned about the Women Hunt™ Program from a friend. He forwarded the email blast to me and said I should apply. Let me tell you why. My husband was diagnosed with cancer about six years ago. As he was fighting his battle, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. We fought cancer together. Sadly, he lost his battle and passed in 2020. Thankfully, I'm in remission. That journey taught us both many things. One of the most important things was that our lives are short. We really must make the most of our time here on Earth. I learned that life experiences are important! We need to do and experience what life has to offer. As I'm an upland bird hunter, I had expressed to my friend that I wanted to expand my hunting experience. That, coupled with my love of the outdoors inspired me to apply to the Women Hunt™ Program.

Honestly, I wasn't very familiar with the Wild Sheep Foundation, but I got online and researched both programs. What an eye opener. I was so impressed with the Wild Sheep Foundation and their mission. In addition, the Women Hunt™ Program offered me an opportunity to connect with other like-minded women and also build on my hunting experience and knowledge. I applied. The application was long. Seven questions to answer. Got down to business and started to write. The answers came from the heart. I submitted my application and waited. I was notified by email on a Friday. When I received the email that I had been selected, I think I screamed and cried for 15 minutes. I couldn't believe it! Renée Thornton, the Chair of the Women Hunt™ Program began emailing right away and also set up a Zoom call for all twelve women. When the faces popped up on my laptop, I thought, "This is real! It's going to happen!".

We all began preparing for the trip. For me, it was easier I believe. I'm retired, my kids are out of the house, and I'm only responsible for myself. The other gals had several obstacles to clear in order to attend. But they were all committed to the program even from the beginning. We met in San Antonio for one night before travelling to the FTW Ranch. San Antonio was a great place to start our journey. We got to meet one another, share a meal, and learn each other's background.

The gals are all fantastic women! Each one is strong, determined, and dedicated. They each brought something to the table that was a benefit to the program. Several had hunting backgrounds or family ties to nature. Some work in “outdoor” fields. All the women are dedicated to expanding their hunting experiences, learning new skills and absorbing all the new material.

Next morning, we headed to Barksdale, Texas and the FTW Ranch. The gals were simply amazing. All of us were excited, anxious and nervous about the next four days. We arrived at the Ranch at lunch time. Had lunch, then right into the classroom for instruction on how to sight a rifle. That was followed by a tour of the ranch at sundown.

Next morning, a combination of classroom instruction and actual hands-on practice with our new rifles. I felt like we were all sponges. Soaking up the knowledge being shared with us by extremely experienced instructors. It was hard work, but all of it was by laughter and a positive environment. I felt such a warm and welcoming experience. At no time was I intimidated or made to feel like I wasn't capable of what our instructors asked of each one of us. Every woman there was open to learning and helping each other. We all encouraged each other through all the classroom work and field work. It was such a great experience of building knowledge and camaraderie. Our class work included rifle instruction, practice, and cleaning. We learned about hunting etiquette, ethics, and the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. We learned how to field dress an animal, and even how to prepare the game for a meal. We also got instruction on how to find and stalk animals. All of this was done in a positive, encouraging manner. Each day was met with smiles and laughter. But all was taught in an educational and thoughtful manner. I felt like I had landed in a piece of Heaven on Earth! Ultimately, we were paired up to hunt for a whitetail. We had four hunting opportunities. I was partnered with a great gal, Rebecca. We didn't harvest an animal, but we had a tremendous team building experience with our instructor, Doug. Our hunts started with star gazing, watching the sun rise and reflecting on the hunt and what the day would bring us. What an amazing way to start the day. We also hunted in the evening. Another amazing opportunity to enjoy nature and the galaxy around us. We observed planets

through the spotting scope and took in the Milky Way. In this crazy world we live in right now, it was so refreshing to learn all aspects of hunting, building relationships with like-minded women and just absorb such a positive atmosphere. We concluded our experience with a great meal prepared by Chef Josh Schwencke. What a great meal and evening together. I can't say enough about the FTW Ranch and the staff.

Armed with our new knowledge, rifles, and gear to start our hunting journeys we all headed to our respective homes. When we get home, we will each be paired with a mentor for one year. That person will not only continue to teach us but also give us the opportunity to put into practice what we have learned.

We are from all parts of the US and Canada. We have built a bond that won't be broken. We are all planning hunts, and opportunities to get involved with conservation and ways to encourage women to get involved in the great sport. For me, I feel like I have been put on this planet to be kind, helpful and caring where I can. I plan to talk about conservation at sporting events, and gatherings. I plan to help educate folks that hunting isn't just about the kill, but it encompasses several aspects. It includes conservation measures for the animal population, processing meat for family and friends, building relationships and respecting rules and laws surrounding the hunt.

It's been an exciting and refreshing opportunity. It has really made an impact on my life. I am so excited to begin a new chapter and build on the skills I hold currently. I feel blessed beyond imagination. Thanks to the Wild Sheep Foundation, Rocky Mountain Big Horn Sheep Society, FTW Ranch, Weatherby, Sitka, Yeti, Boyt, Kenetrek, Leica, Gastronomy Live Events, Chester Moore, Gray and Renée Thornton, and Linda Demmer.

The possibilities are limitless!