



# Hunt Of A Lifetime

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- [Home](#)
- [Wallpaper](#)
- [Banners](#)
- [Privacy](#)
- [F.A.Q.](#)

## Youth Information

- [Meet Our Hunters](#)
- [Youth Referral](#)
- [Applications](#)
- [Waiver Of Liability](#)
- [News & Articles](#)

## Calendar Of Events

- [View Events](#)
- [Post Events](#)
- [Sponsors](#)
- [90 Day Raffle](#)
- [Winners List](#)
- [African Raffle](#)
- [Winners List](#)

## Help | Contributors

- [How To Help](#)
- [Requested Dreams](#)
- [Questionnaire](#)

## Sponsorship

- [Outfitters](#)
- [Sponsors](#)
- [Donators](#)
- [Links](#)

## Staff Members

- [Board Members](#)
- [State Ambassadors](#)

## Contact Information

- [General Information](#)
- [Board Members](#)
- [State Ambassadors](#)
- [Webmaster](#)

## The Story of Matthew Pattison

Hunt of a Lifetime - Nonprofit group seeks to fulfill kids' dreams

By Darren Marcy - Four Corners Outdoors

Filling in a void left by another national wish-granting group, a Pennsylvania organization is sending seriously-ill children on dream hunts and fishing trips.

Hunt of a Lifetime is relatively new to the world of wish granting. But its impact is being felt across the country, and it seems as if hunters and anglers can't wait to step up and help.

Wanted: A moose hunt

In March 1998, Matthew Pattison wanted to hunt moose in Canada. The 18-year-old suffered from Hodgkin's disease, and his parents new he didn't have the luxury of waiting until they could afford such a hunt.

Matthew's stepmother, Tina Pattison, called the Make-A-Wish Foundation, but due to heavy anti-hunting pressure and a lot of press over previous hunting wishes the organization had funded, it chose to no longer pay for youngsters to go on hunts.

But Tina and Matthew's father, Chet, were determined to send their son on a moose hunt.

After dozens of phone calls and lots of personal favors, Matthew got to go on his moose hunt.

Home of big hearts

A Pennsylvania man put Tina in touch with a Wyoming hunt broker. The man had contacted an Alberta, Canada, outfitter who had agreed to guide the youth on a moose hunt for free. On top of that, the small town of Nordegg, Alberta, turned itself upside down to help.

Despite the town having only 68 residents, Matt had everything paid for: air fare, a helicopter ride in and out, stock and feed, the camp and food, licenses and fees, a satellite phone in case of a medical emergency and meat processing and shipping.

A nurse even took a week off from work to stay at the camp in case an accident occurred because Matt's blood had lost its clotting capabilities from the chemotherapy doses.



We're going up there this summer so I can thank them personally, Tina Pattison said. And Matt got his moose with a 56-inch spread in October 1998, one month after his birthday.

He died the following spring April 28, 1999 of heart and liver failure.

He was 19 years old.

Something to look forward to

Tina said the final year of Matt's life was hard. His body was losing the battle and the ravages of Hodgkin's was taking its toll. But the final year of his life the pain that racked his body wasn't as bad as it could have been. He had a moose hunt he was looking forward to.

He kept saying, I'll be all right because I'm going on that moose hunt, Tina said.

Matt had hunted with his father since he was little, and the Pattisons loved to hunt, fish and camp. The moose hunt was the last thing he wanted to do, and his parents had fought to give Matt his final wish.

But many kids with a serious or terminal illness don't have that option.

In fact, Matt almost didn't get his wish. The first effort netted a hunt set for September 1999, five months after he died. Now, the Pattisons are glad they kept pushing and are grateful they found Nordegg and others involved in the trip.

Planning for the future

At the funeral, many people gave money to the Pattisons and asked it go to a charity in Matt's name. Tina and Chet couldn't think of a better way than to help Matt's name live on in the form of an organization that helped young people like him.

Hunt of a Lifetime was born in August 1999 when an attorney, donating her time, drew up papers for the nonprofit organization. It's been a rollercoaster ride since then for the Pattisons. They've had their story told in national magazines, newspapers and on the Internet.

Money started coming in from hunters across the United States.

The fact the fledgling organization was using the Pattison's home computer drew a check from a man who told them not to get a cheap one.

Hunt of a Lifetime isn't yet a year old, and it's already sent one kid on a white-tailed deer hunt.

That's the story Tina calls A Christmas Present from God.

She said she got a call on Christmas eve saying a 14-year-old in Wisconsin had missed the last two seasons with a brain tumor and all he wanted for Christmas was to go deer hunting. Two days later Tina had a hunt arranged and Jan. 15 the youth killed an 8-pointer.

Hunts are in the works for bear and moose right now.

An overwhelming response

Funds, so far, haven't been a problem.

Once the story got out, donations started coming in. Two checks for \$1,000 have been

sent.

Mail-order giant Cabela's weighed in with a check, the Pennsylvania Game Commission sent \$2,500. Lots of people have sent \$5 and \$10.

One man sent \$300 and said his son died two days before his 18th birthday. The man told Tina his favorite memories are of the two of them hunting together.

The Pattisons have dozens of similar stories.

Outfitters started calling offering free trips. Fishing trips like the pro bass angler who said between him and his sponsors a kid could show up and have the fishing trip of a lifetime, all expenses paid. Hunting trips for elk, deer, turkey, duck, goose, caribou, moose and bear are all awaiting a needy kid.

One hunter called and said he had a fully-paid-for weeklong package featuring caribou, black bear and fishing near Montreal valued at \$8,000. He said he was going to stay home with his two daughters and the next kid that wanted to go caribou hunting would have it all paid for.

Another man called from Bristol, Fla., and told Tina his son was totally disabled and would never be able to go hunting with him. He offered to take a kid on a fully-guided alligator hunt with lodging provided every year as long as they wanted.

People from across the country are donating frequent flyer miles, and a travel agent volunteered to set up the accounts to help get free airline tickets.

At a recent outdoor show, Tina underestimated the number of fliers she needed and printed only 1,500. Early Saturday, she sent her son to get another 4,000 printed with a blank check. Her son returned with the flyers and check.

The man wouldn't take our money, Tina said.

While at the show, a member of the National Wild Turkey Federation brought a print from his own collection over and told Tina to raffle it off for funds. At last count she had sold \$350 worth of raffle tickets.

The response is just overwhelming, Tina said, before breaking down and sobbing. You don't realize how many wonderful people are out there.

Wanted: Kids with wishes

Tina said donations are welcome, but the big thing right now is getting the word out and letting people know the organization exists. Boys or girls, ages 12 to 21, with a life-threatening, critical or terminal illness are accepted.

Tina said Make-A-Wish and two other wish-granting organizations have said they will refer hunting requests to Hunt of a Lifetime.

She said she understands Make-A-Wish's hands were tied by the anti-hunting groups, which she holds responsible.

I'm more upset with animal-rights activists who can't think of a child's needs before their own beliefs. Not every child wants to go to Disney World.

Wish kids are encouraged to call for information.

We need to find the kids.

Into the future

Nobody knows for sure what is in store for Hunt of a Lifetime. Tina and Chet are prepared to ride the organization into national prominence, and that shouldn't prove hard.

People in four states, including a man from Bosque Farms here in New Mexico, already have volunteered to form chapters in those states.

Hunt of a Lifetime is registered as a nonprofit in Pennsylvania, and a lawyer is donating time to file paperwork with the Internal Revenue Service for national status.

In the meanwhile, Tina is a hot commodity on the outdoor speakers tour. She's constantly taking time off from her job as a bus driver to catch up on work for the nonprofit and to tell her story to sportsman's organizations.

When she's not telling her story, she's on the phone lining up outfitters, guides and others and filling her contacts list for future wishes she hopes to be granting soon.

Want to help?

The best thing to help is to keep spreading the word, Tina said. Get the organization out there and get the story told.

Help the kids who are in need of such a hunt to find the organization and help those who can provide the services know they are needed.

Information: (814) 899-5682; (800) 484-4948, pin: 0862; or write: Hunt of a Lifetime, 6297 Buffalo Road, Harborcreek, PA 16421. The toll free number costs Hunt of a Lifetime 15 cents per minute.

(Darren Marcy is the outdoor editor at The Daily Times in Farmington, N.M., where this story originally appeared. He can be reached at [OutdoorsDM@aol.com](mailto:OutdoorsDM@aol.com).)

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