



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Kyle Wyss, right, a 15-year-old from Melrose, Wis., and his dad, Ricky, show off the cow elk Kyle shot while hunting in New Mexico. Kyle, who has had surgery for a tumor on his brain stem and cerbellum, earned the hunt by winning an essay contest for physically-challenged hunters sponsored by the North American Squirrel Association.

# Lucky layover

# Canceled flight allows Kyle Wyss to bag elk in New Mexico



**JERRY DAVIS**

Freelance Outdoors writer

A late November snowstorm, coupled with a canceled airline flight turned out to be good news for 15-year-old Kyle Wyss, who was on a five-day, cow elk hunt in New Mexico.

"We were supposed to leave the Double H Ranch at 8:30 a.m. to catch a flight to Chicago," said Kyle's father, Ricky.

This wasn't the first time Kyle was able to take bad news and deal with it in a positive way. Kyle was diagnosed with medullablastoma on his brain stem and cerebellum in early 2005, a few months after he killed two bucks during Wisconsin's 2004 gun-deer season.

"Deer hunting continues to be one of my favorite hunting activities," said Kyle from his Melrose, Wis., home. "I've been bear hunting, too, and pheasant hunting."

"After surgery, radiation and chemotherapy, Kyle lost his motor and speech skills. Then

he was in therapy for months and had to learn to walk and speak again," said Cassie Wyss, Kyle's mom.

Cassie and Ricky continue to be cautiously optimistic that Kyle will continue to improve.

"Kyle's prognosis is good. Doctors say that many kids who have this type of brain tumor eventually lead normal lives, some to the point that in five years one can't tell they have had a brain tumor," Cassie said.

In addition to his progress, Kyle received more good news last March, thanks to Tony Christnovich, co-founder of the North American Squirrel Association and owner of Schafer's Boats and Bait on Brice Prairie.

Christnovich was looking for a physically-challenged person who wished to apply for an elk hunt. Christnovich contacted Garry Ronke, Ricky Wyss' brother-in-law, and the rest of the story is history.

Kyle wrote a 500-word essay

**This wasn't the first time Kyle was able to take bad news and deal with it in a positive way.**

**Kyle was diagnosed with medullablastoma on his brain stem and cerebellum in early 2005, a few months after he killed two bucks during Wisconsin's 2004 gun-deer season.**

expressing why he wanted to go on an elk hunt in New Mexico.

"It wasn't easy picking a winner, but Kyle's story really touched our hearts," said Eric Torstenson, whose father, Robert Torstenson, once owned Double H Ranch in New Mexico.

Before Robert Torstenson died

of a stomach tumor in 2003, he donated his 211-square-mile ranch to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Eric Torstenson serves on the Ranch Board.

"My father left some really big footprints and always wanted to get youth into the woods," Eric Torstenson said. "It didn't matter if they caught or killed anything, just so they began to appreciate the woods and nature."

Kyle attended the nasa banquet last March and learned he had won the all-expense-paid trip to hunt elk on the former Torstenson Ranch.

"These are primitive hunts, either a muzzleloader or bow, so nasa gave Kyle a muzzle-

loader at the banquet when they told him he had won the trip," said his father.

"I could take someone along, so I chose my dad," Kyle said.

After hunting for four days and seeing hundreds of elk, all out of range, a snowstorm moved in. Kyle, guide and ranch manager Bill Ferranti, and Ricky Wyss continued to hunt despite the fact they might miss their return flight to Chicago.

As it turned out, all flights were canceled. Fortunately, Kyle killed a cow elk at 7:45 a.m. and still got to the airport in time to catch one of the first flights after the storm cleared.

"Back at school, everyone wanted to know if I got an elk and how long the shot was. My dad said about 120 yards," said Kyle, a freshman at Melrose-Mindoro High School.

"He shot his new muzzleloader about 20 times before we made the trip and another 15 times after we got to New Mexico," his father said.

"The school has been very positive through all of Kyle's illness. I just can't say enough about how helpful they have been working with us so Kyle could be gone for a week this past November," his father said.

*Jerry Davis can be reached at (608) 924-1112 or at sivadjam@mhtc.net*