

Crossbow in tight, held up by my left arm (what's left of it). Right arm (what's left of it), carefully placed, my hook inside the trigger guard. I'd been practicing this shot for months.

Everything started out late that day. The bears weren't moving, and we were in a great spot. I'd seen 23 bears all week, but it was my next-to-last day, and I didn't want to go home empty-handed... well, as close as I can get to having anything in my hands, since I haven't had them since 2008.

#### LOOK MA, NO HANDS!

I was riding an ATV on the family farm on March 1, 2008, ran into a downed power line and was electrocuted. The head ER doctor at my local hospital had me immediately airlifted to the burn unit at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville.

When I woke up three days later, my arms were gone. My right arm was amputated six inches below the elbow. The left, seven inches below. They had to amputate to save my life. I was 29. I had a wife and two daughters, a 1-year-old and a newborn. I didn't think I'd be able to dress myself again, let alone think of hunting.

Even though I was bothered by what I wasn't going to be able to do, I knew I was still a dad. That gave me the mindset that I was going to be okay with things, and that I was going to try things. It sounds so small, but I told my doctor, no matter what, I had to hold my kids again. When I held them for the first time, a couple days later, I knew that it was the biggest accomplishment of my life.

After that, I knew I could do anything. Twelve days after I was flown into Vanderbilt, I went home. A month after my accident, my friends took me turkey hunting. They helped me get set, learn to hold a shotgun with no arms, and I saw my first successful hunt since my life was forever changed.

#### BEAR WITH ME

My whole life, a bear has always been on my hunting bucket list. Before my accident, I thought it would never be possible, not because I couldn't, but because I didn't think I'd have the opportunity. I met a man named Mark Knight at the National Wild Turkey Federation meeting in Nashville in 2012, and we got to be good buddies. Mark is one of the hosts of Dirt Road Outdoors TV and owner of Midwest Whitetail Adventures, and he called and asked if I wanted to go into the woods in Canada, what the locals call "the bush," and hunt bear. Heck yes, I wanted to go!

We got set up with Ole Shoemaker of Blueberry Hill Outfitters in the town of Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan (not to be confused with the body of water of the same name to the northeast), and for a week, we hunted bear. It's a game of bait-and-wait, with beaver meat and oats set to draw the bears in. We perched in tree stands about 10 feet of the ground. And then we waited.

I enjoy the outdoors and I enjoy the company of people I hunt with. It's a special bond that you have with them. In a fast-paced world, where social media and texting can get in the way, sometimes it's nice just to get out in the woods. I always have said you can learn a lot about a person in a deer stand, because you have all the time in the world to talk. One day, I hope to enjoy that kind of quality time with my son and my two daughters, if they grow up to enjoy hunting and the outdoors the way I do.

#### PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Someone who goes out there unprepared is only going to get out and injure an animal. For months before I went



# BIONIC

## BEAR HUNTER

BY JASON KOGER



Photo by Saele TM

After an ATV accident involving a downed powerline in 2008, Jason Koger lost parts of both his arms. In 2015, Jason was able to bear hunt in Saskatchewan with Mark Knight, host of Dirt Road Outdoors TV and take this fine bear. Jason's attitude toward towards life after the accident is noteworthy and truly remarkable.

Special thanks to these companies and their products: Arms made by Advanced Arm Dynamics, hooks by Fillauer, bionic hands by Touch Bionics.

on this hunt, an archery professional named Mark Beck helped me practice with a crossbow. I wanted to make sure it was going to happen. In everyday life, I use high-tech prosthetics, including a computer-driven device called an iLimb Quantum made by Touch Bionics out of Scotland. It responds to tiny muscle movements at the end of what's left of my arm. The iLimb is attached to a custom socket made by Advanced Arm Dynamics, based in Texas. When I see the things I've accomplished, I know it's taken several teams of experts to help give me back my arms and my life. In the woods, I use simple, body-powered hooks, made by Fillauer LLC, attached to the AAD-made socket. When I've got my right hook in place, I can feel pressure from the weight of the trigger.

Before this hunt, I'd never been around a bear before. Bears are very vocal, always very curious. I had two bears try to climb up in the stand. It was great to experience something like that, something I've never experienced before. We waited a lot that day, and I was starting to get nervous about it. We couldn't believe we hadn't seen a bear that day. Then out came a bear from our left, not very big, headed for the bait. We watched that bear for several minutes. Then something snapped, a twig or branch. The smaller bear looked and ran out of there, as if he knew he had a whooping coming if he waited around.

Before I even saw the new bear, that's when Mark said, "Here comes one. Be ready." I got up, got ready and the bear came in. I took my time to get a good shot, a good position, and to make sure Mark and the second cameraman, Ronnie Corbin, were recording. Everybody was ready, good to go. I said, "I'm fixing to take the shot." I took it, and I knew I put a good shot on it. I was confident.

The bear jumped and started running, and I could see the arrow on the ground behind it. It had gone all the way through. I heard the bear fall, not very far away. It ended up running only 30 or 40 yards. It was dead from a double-lung shot.

## THE THRILL OF THE HUNT

The other day I woke up and looked down just to see all the scars I've got, from much more than just the accident that took my arms. You hear people say, "I've been rough on my body." I think every scar I have is absolutely worth it. They have formed me into the person that I am



today.

I've met a lot of good people, become affiliated with a lot of good companies, and they've helped me accomplish a lot. What I bring is the right attitude and determination. All these battle scars I've got have made me strong. I love more and care more. There's so many things that you could say it's done for me. I love hunting and I hope I can bring something special to the hunting industry, to show people if it's something you love, it doesn't matter what's happened to you. I've lived it. I've loved every minute of it. I wouldn't change it for anything.

I think this was a huge accomplishment, to kill a bear with a bow for the first time. We searched for records of this being done before by a double amputee and found none, so I think that makes me the first. But there are a lot more things I'm going to accomplish. There are so many more people I want to go hunting with, and so many more hunts I want to see and do.

God made us all different. I'm proud of that. I feel blessed that he gave me this opportunity to live the way I am. I'm going to take it and do something with it, the same way I would if I still had my hands. 🐾

*Jason Koger is a native of Owensboro, KY, where he lives with his wife of 11 years, Jenny, and their three children, daughters Billie Grace, 10; Campbell, 8; and son, Axell, 5. In addition to hunting, Jason enjoys public speaking and raising awareness for amputees. For more information, including contact info and speaking engagements, visit [www.jasonkoger.com](http://www.jasonkoger.com). You can also visit the Jason Koger - Public Figure page on Facebook or follow on Twitter: @koger84 or Instagram: jkoger84.*