by Dennis Thornburg

It all began with a phone call from Eric Pawlak of Cabelas in the spring of 2011, telling me and my hunting partner of 30 years, that we had drawn elk tags in Wyoming. The previous year, Vernon Anderson (better known as V-Ray to family and friends) and I had booked an elk hunt through Cabelas Tags with Laramie Peak Outfitters. We didn’t get drawn that year so our hunt was postponed to 2011. A phone call to Outfitter Dax McCarty informed us that even though Laramie Peak was now a part of Wagonhound Outfitters, there was no problem; we would be hunting elk in Wyoming come October 15! V-Ray and I are both old farts. He retired after 30 years as a wildlife biologist with the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Department and resides in Murray, KY. I retired after a similar career with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Shawnee Hills of southern Illinois have been my home for 40 years.

On the day before our hunt was to begin, our guide Jaime Anderson met us at the motel in Laramie. After introductions, we followed Jaime north out of town. After a stop for a cheeseburger and fries at a tiny diner along the way and a brief stop to make sure our rifle scopes were dead on, we arrived at drop camp, nestled in an aspen grove at the base of the Laramie Mountains. Ted Bade, our cook and wrangler was there with the horses and good smells of dinner in preparation earlier thought when looking at him through binoculars or your rifle scope. Just the opposite was true with this bull. As Jaime and I approached, we were both surprised at the massiveness of this bull. As Jaime and I approached, we were both surprised at the massiveness of this bull. As Jaime and I approached, we were both surprised at the massiveness of this bull. As Jaime and I approached, we were both surprised at the massiveness of this bull. As Jaime and I approached, we were both surprised at the massiveness of this bull. As Jaime and I approached, we were both surprised at the massiveness of this bull.

As the sun was setting low in the western sky, Jaime said, “I think that’s the bull you want; he’s a 6x6 on the last day!” Jaime: “You shot just over his back.” Lowering the crosshairs slightly from my previous shot, I touched off a second round and the 180 grain Barnes VOR-TX bullet from my Ruger 30-06 struck home. The big bull crumbled without taking a step.

Sometimes, when walking toward a downed animal, you find that he is not quite as big as you earlier thought when looking at him through binoculars or your rifle scope. Just the opposite was true with this bull. As Jaime and I approached, we were both surprised at the massiveness of this bull. Each antler was nearly 10” around at the base, and interestingly, the antlers were offset. One antler was attached to the skull nearly 2 inches higher than the other, yet both had grown equally well. He was indeed a unique and magnificent animal. As the day drew to a close, with a beautiful sunset in the western sky, I whispered under my breath, “Thank you Lord for being so good,” and I said to Jaime, “It just doesn’t get any better than this!”

Postscript to this Story – This old monarch had no front teeth so he couldn’t be aged, but his back teeth were worn smooth, so he had to be quite old. After Whitetails and Waterfowl Taxidermy in Murphysboro, IL, performed their magic, the shoulder mount of this majestic animal now hangs on the front wall of the rustic, open space dining room at the lodge in Giant City State Park, in the heart of the Shawnee National Forest of southern Illinois. It is a fitting location, where thousands of people can admire the beauty of this wonderful bull. Oh, by the way, V-Ray got a nice 6x6 on the last day!