

## **Tiffany Lakosky – Peace, Love and Venison**

### **By Tammy Sapp**

Tiffany Lakosky has achieved in 10 years what some people dream about their entire lives. As co-host of “The Crush” with her husband Lee and appearances on “Whitetail Freaks,” Tiffany is wildly popular in the outdoor world. She is beautiful, personable and a skilled bowhunter with a legion of fans. Like Michael Waddell, she doesn’t appeal to just one demographic. Her fans are young and old, men and women as well as new hunters and seasoned veterans.

It’s not all candy and flowers, though. Like the big whitetails she pursues, Tiffany also is a target, and her detractors express doubt about her hunting skills and contend she uses her sexuality to attract a male audience. Some have called into question whether or not she’s an appropriate role model for the thousands of young ladies who seek her autograph at outdoor shows.

Because my opinion on this subject was sought in recent magazine and radio interviews, I decided it was time to quit talking about Tiffany and talk with her instead.

#### **Who’s that girl?**

Like many women, Tiffany did not grow up in a family that hunted. Her entry point into hunting was meeting Lee a decade ago when he worked in an archery shop in Minnesota. He invited Tiffany to shoot, and she said she took to 3-D archery shooting right off the bat. With some help from local pros, Tiffany improved her shooting form and soon was competing in tournaments.

She had been shooting her bow for a couple of years when Lee invited her to try hunting. The first time she hit the woods with a bow, Tiffany arrowed a nice buck. After that, there was no shaking the hunting bug.

As Tiffany honed her hunting skills, Lee began pursuing a longtime interest in outdoor writing and filming. He bought a good video camera and with some pointers from friend Michael Waddell, Lee and Tiffany began filming their hunts.

While neither knew it at the time, that first video camera would become a catalyst for change in both of their lives. It would transform Tiffany from being an airline attendant and Lee from being a chemical engineer to some of today’s hottest outdoor celebrities. Their first year of serious filming took them to Wisconsin, Iowa and Kansas, with hunts ending up on Realtree’s Monster Bucks DVD, thanks to a gig as local Realtree pro staffers, and later on Kisky’s Whitetail Extreme series.

Shortly after the pair married, Lee decided to quit his job so he could pursue his dream. The couple packed up and moved from Minnesota to the land they had bought in Iowa. It was a good call because not long after that they received their big breakthrough, an invitation from Scent-Lok to host a TV show.

Tiffany said neither she nor Lee ever expected their careers to include hunting across the country for TV shows that would become the narrative of their young married life. When not filming, Lee and Tiffany shake hands, sign autographs and conduct seminars during their 50 plus appearances a year. Add that to running a production company and managing 5,000 acres in Iowa and a thousand in Kansas, you can see Lee and Tiffany are living life in the fast lane, albeit mostly on dirt roads.

Even though they are constantly on the go, Tiffany said she feels lucky they can do it together. While a lot of reality show relationships hit the skids, (think Nick Lachey and Jessica Simpson and Jon & Kate), sharing a love of the outdoors is something Tiffany believes strengthens their relationship.

### **Her side of the story**

While most people recognize stereotypes as oversimplified judgments, they are sometimes relied on as dodgy shortcuts to understanding someone, which frustrates Tiffany.

On TV and at seminars, her life may look like a fairy tale. However, those close to Tiffany know she is beset by the same troubles others face – a mother who battled breast cancer. Her father's death. And the myriad of other challenges life throws at us.

Tiffany said the people she associates with like and respect her. But she doesn't understand why a stranger would decide she can't be a good hunter because she wears makeup, has long hair or does her nails. Nor does she get why someone would declare she's unfit to serve as a role model for young women.

“Though I didn't set out to be perceived as a role model, I'm a good one. I'm a happily married woman who spends time with her husband doing what we both love. I don't drink, I don't smoke and I had a good upbringing.”

Tiffany said she has proven that through hard work and dedication, you can be a successful hunter.

Tiffany dismissed the notion she is a talentless diva akin to Paris Hilton as ridiculous. She said she frequently practices with her bow and can out shoot the guys. She knows how to drive a tractor and field dress a deer, even though that is normally a task that she and Lee tackle together.

Tiffany said she's not trying to sell herself as an expert, even though she is proud of her hunting skills. What she is striving for is to send a message that hunting is a lot of fun, and she hopes other women will give it a try. Judging by the shift in who is lining up for her autograph these days, she may well be able to make a difference. Not only have the lines to meet Tiffany grown in recent years, their makeup has changed from mostly men to many women now, both young and mature.

To reach that audience, Tiffany is now working on a “Crush Girl” web site aimed at women and girls. She is also launching a line of jewelry, apparel and accessories (including bow slings) that play off of her love of deer hunting called “Peace, Love and Venison.”

### **Final thoughts**

I view criticism as a form of feedback designed to make everyone in the hunting industry the best possible representative of something we all love. But it also can serve as a “keep out” sign. With license sales for men on the downslide since the mid ‘80s and flat for women since the early ‘90s, the last thing the hunting community needs is to be exclusive. The higher visibility of women such as Tiffany may throw out the welcome mat to potential women hunters who wouldn’t dream of going without highlights or a pedicure. It’s possible they may feel more comfortable about doing something as unconventional as hunting if they see others in that role who look and act like they do.

Plus, the state wildlife agencies, which are desperately trying to stretch their budgets to manage our wildlife resources, don’t care if they are selling a hunting license to a woman who may only help field dress her turkey or deer. They do care about making sure all hunters follow the regulations and show respect for wildlife as well as for other hunters, landowners and the property they hunt.

So maybe our time is better spent exploring the best way to invite others into our community and teaching them to be safe and responsible hunters. And yes, to have fun. After all, couldn’t we all use a little more peace, love and venison?