

LADY SHOOTER

Life Styles



LADY SHOOTER *LifeStyles*

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PHOTO: CREDIT: CHLOE JIMINEZ

from the EDITOR

As the year draws to a close, I find myself reflecting on all the things we are grateful for at LadyShooter LifeStyles magazine. When I took the reins of this publication in 2023, I was stepping into uncharted territory. I had little experience in the world of magazine publishing, but I was driven by a singular vision: to create a vibrant resource for the incredible community of women we serve. I must be honest; my journey as the owner of this magazine has been filled with both joy and challenges. The behind-the-scenes work of running a magazine is immense, encompassing everything from managing social media accounts and sourcing compelling articles to editing content, handling accounting tasks, marketing our brand, and navigating the complex world of advertising.

One thing that stands out is the unwavering support from the women who make up the LadyShooter LifeStyles family, including both our dedicated team and our loyal subscribers. It is their enthusiasm and commitment that have fueled our success and fostered the growth of the magazine over this past year.

The holiday season is a time for gathering

with friends and family, and as I look back on the year, I cannot overlook the struggles we have faced as a community. It is essential to remember that we are all in this together. Even in our competitive landscape, we should prioritize supporting one another. I encountered a few perplexing situations this year that highlighted this need for collaboration. Personally, I value helping others, including those who are my competitors, as my belief is that everyone deserves the chance to thrive and succeed. It has baffled me to see instances of blatant rudeness, such as when some individuals block competing companies on social media simply because they are experiencing success. This behavior does not contribute to a culture of empowerment. Instead, we should strive to work together to elevate our industry as a whole.

Furthermore, it is crucial to empower the next generation of women in our field. Recently, I volunteered with a wonderful organization dedicated to fostering young talent. While I was there, I witnessed a professional in our industry interacting in a dismissive manner towards other women and being condescending to the young girls eager to learn. It's disheartening because it's

often these negative experiences that can deter young women from pursuing similar paths in the future. As the renowned Maya Angelou wisely stated, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." We must be mindful of how we treat one another and be grateful for the support we can offer.

Looking ahead, 2025 promises to be a transformative year for us. We have been listening to your feedback, and we are excited to announce that we will be introducing more resources designed to better serve you within this dynamic industry. You can expect to see some exciting rebranding changes, the launch of a podcast (and if you are interested in being a guest on the podcast, please do reach out to us), a revamped website, and enhancements to our subscription offerings.

As always, we are eager to share your stories and inspire you to continue living your best LadyShooter LifeStyle. Thank you for being a part of this journey! ■

Brandy

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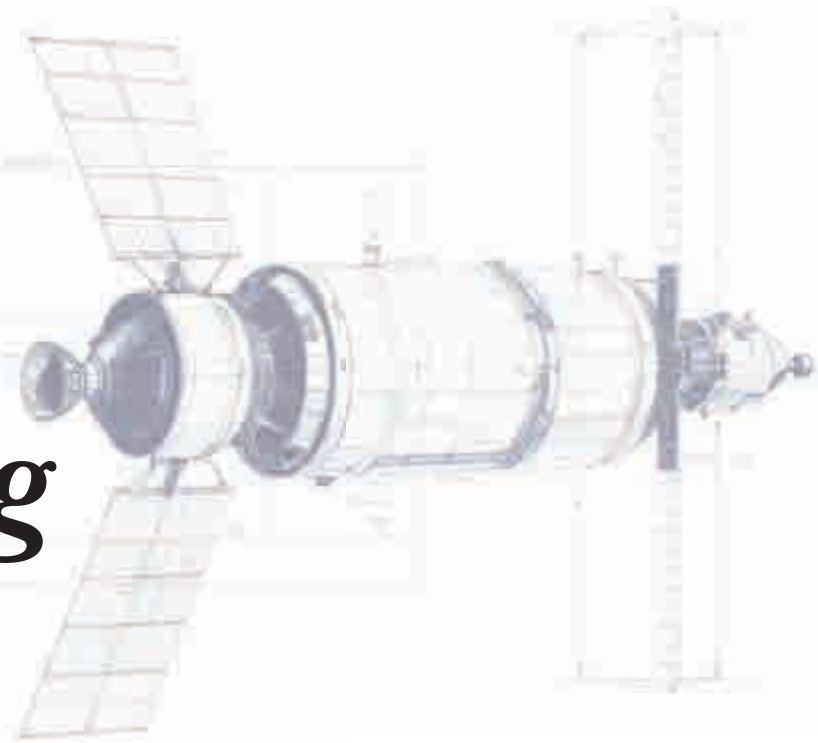
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Aerospace Engineering Student to Olympic Rings



WITH AUSTEN SMITH,

WRITTEN BY
NATALIA GONZALEZ



As I was watching the 2024 Paris Olympics Women's Skeet Final on my iPhone while driving, I remember thinking *this must be what guys feel like when they watch their sports on their phones while at other events that are keeping them from watching sports on their big screen TVs at home*. I have never been into watching sports, yet here I was, driving to drop my son off at his grandmother's and streaming the Women's Skeet Final to see how Austen Smith would do. Deep down, I knew she was destined for a medal, and I wanted to watch it happen live. As Austen worked her way through the final, my son asked why I was watching it. With shooting being the least-ever televised sport on the planet, he was surprised I felt the need to watch it then. Once I told him I knew Austen and was going to write an article about her, he was fully invested. The moment we realized Austen had secured the bronze medal, my eyes welled up a little. There was this magical moment when she walked away from the shooting station with her fist pumping in the air, and you could faintly hear her on the audio shouting, *"Yes! Yes! Come on!"* Her reaction was so authentic and powerful that during the medal ceremony, the ISSF Shooting Commentator, Rory McAllister, said, *"The reaction from Austen Smith when she knew she was the bronze medalist would honestly have thought it was a gold medal. What an achievement from this young American. When you think that the next Olympic games will be in her home country when we go to Los Angeles for 2028, you just have to say that perhaps Austen Smith will be going to the next Olympics looking for an upgrade, but for now, what an achievement."*

I first encountered Austen at the Dallas Gun Club, where we both are members. It was a freezing winter day in January 2024 in Dallas, Texas, and I had just left the Dallas Safari Club convention to come shoot at the gun club. No trip to Dallas is complete without a visit to the gun club, even if it is 16 degrees Fahrenheit outside. Driving to the clubhouse, I noticed one lonely black SUV parked at the first skeet field. I thought, *"I am not the only one crazy enough to come today!"* I finished my round of shooting and went into the clubhouse to sit by the roaring fire they had going. Austen and her father came in and sat at a table nearby. At this time, I had no idea who she was other than her Team USA vest gear and the fact that she was on a skeet field. That day, I was surprisingly too shy to introduce myself. However, what I observed that day is exactly why I felt that I had to share her story. Only a true lover of the sport and a winner will practice for hours in this weather.

A few months later, I finally found the courage to approach her. As she was leaving the clubhouse, I asked for an interview. Her polite enthusiasm and humble agreement left me feeling that I had been an idiot not to introduce myself sooner. Austen comes off as quiet, stoic, and slightly unapproachable. But the moment you are face to face and have a conversation, that all seems to melt away slowly, and you're left with a person who is clearly passionate about the things she loves and loves to talk about them with other people who love them too. I approached her with the idea of interviewing her before and after the Olympics to share some insight with our readers

"What an achievement from this young American. When you think that the next Olympic games will be in her home country when we go to Los Angeles for 2028, you just have to say that perhaps Austen Smith will be going to the next Olympics looking for an upgrade, but for now, what an achievement."

RORY McALLISTER, NBC COMMENTATOR
DAY 9 OF THE 2024 OLYMPIC GAMES

on an Olympian's pre and post-Olympic mindset. As a 23-year-old aspiring Aerospace Engineer, her Olympic career has gotten in the way of finishing her degree at the University of Texas in Arlington. I think her demeanor is so chill because she wins either way—if she loses at shooting, she can finish school and win at life.

Austen began her shooting career just shy of



turning 12. She was an avid video game player, and her father felt that this would really translate to shooting. I don't believe he had any idea what this would turn into. I often describe my passion for shooting as being "Love at first break", I am pretty sure this was the case for Austen. She quickly became obsessed with shooting trap with her father. Kindly referred to by many who know him as "The Rodfather", Rod Smith is pure main character energy. He had already guided his two sons into golf and car racing, where both had excelled; it was Austen's turn to find her "thing". She began shooting small local trap tournaments and progressed little by little. At one such game, the great Vincent Hancock, currently 4-time Olympic skeet champion, saw Austen shoot and insisted they begin to work together. "I was a big trap kid—I loved trap shooting. My dad and I always said we hated skeet and would never shoot it in our entire lives—it's trap all the way. I went to a little bunker tournament here in Dallas and met Brian Burrows and all these other guys. I thought I was set on bunker. Then I met Vinnie at Fort Worth Trap and Skeet, and he said nope, you're going to skeet, and I thought, well, I can't argue with you—you're kind of the best in the world, so I guess I'll do Skeet. I was coerced into it."

That fateful moment of living in the Dallas/Fort Worth area made all this so entirely possible, and it turned the course of Austin's life. Fast forward to 2020 when Austen qualified as the youngest ever American woman to make an Olympic team: "It was at Tucson Trap and Skeet, I remember it. I took my final couple of shots, and everyone was like, our Olympic team is Amber English and Austen Smith, and at the time, I was like, oh, just another selection

match—it didn't hit me until I got to the hotel room and my mom and I go on walks every night and I went on a walk with her that night. I was so dazed and confused, and I guess a coyote ran across the road, and I didn't even notice it—I didn't notice anything else because I was so shocked. I don't think it really set in that I was going to the Olympics until maybe a week later. It really hit me then, like, oh my God, I'm going to Tokyo. This is insane." When I asked Austen how she felt being delayed a whole year due to the pandemic, her answer surprised me because it was the opposite of what Mary Tucker, the American Olympic rifle shooter, had told me 4 years ago when I interviewed her. "I'm going to sound insane by saying this, but I think anybody else on the shooting team would probably back me up—it helped us. I was brand new to the



Austen and her dad, Rod

national team then—I only had one or two World Cup appearances at the time, so I knew I needed more experience. In the lead-up to Tokyo, we went to Lonato in Italy, and that was my first World Cup medal. Then I went to another Grand Prix after that and won a medal there. I don't think I would have done so well in Tokyo without those wins. Now I know I can do it. Before that, I had to force myself to believe that I could do it. It was nice to have several things leading up to Tokyo." Despite being in Tokyo completely alone without the support of her family in person, when Austen came home from Tokyo, she found out from her mother that The Rodfather had not slept the entire time she was gone. He was up all night pacing, worrying, and watching scores. Her mother has often called her father her "whoopee", as in her security blanket. He is her father and her number one cheerleader, supporter, friend, confidant, and, in many ways, a coach. "Vinnie knows me technically, but my dad knows me emotionally." Austen is confident that while her performance in Tokyo was good and, by some standards, notable for her first Olympic games, it would likely have been even better had her father been there. "I knew the moment I stepped on the plane from Tokyo back to the States that I wanted to do this again. I wanted to go to Paris and experience the Olympics."

The road from Tokyo to Paris was paved with even more mental adversity. "I want to say that many of our women got even stronger between Tokyo and Paris, which is crazy because we were already such a strong team. Dania Vizzi got extremely good, Kim Rhode was making a comeback, Caitlin Conner was doing extremely well, and Sam Simonton was making a really big step forward, so there was a lot of competition leading up to it. The moment I made the Paris team, it was a big relief. It was a toss-up on if I would make it. Any of those women could make the team and win a medal overseas."

Here are some questions from our interview before the Olympics in Paris:

What are you most looking forward to in Paris and experiencing a "real Olympics"?

The opening ceremony and actually having my family there. The last time, it was like, I'm here, but I didn't get to share it with anybody. I bring everyone with me this time, and we all get to experience it together. I think that's pretty special. I am also taking all my best friends on the team with me! Dania is a good friend of mine—we always joke and have fun. Vinnie, I've known him since I was 12, and Conner Prince is probably one of my best friends in shooting—we've grown up together on the junior team. I worked hard to get to this point, knowing my friends and family would



Dania & Austen

be there this time. I always shoot better when many positive people surround me, so I see no negativity around me when I go into this one. Just because of that, we are going to get good results.

You've mentioned potentially retiring after Paris to pursue your degree and move on with your life. Are you sure about that?

Everyone keeps on asking me that (she chuckled pretty hard here). Let me just say this right now—if I feel the urge to return after a year off, I will. But I am definitely going to take a year off to go get my degree. I am about 60% done. I want to get that completely squared away before I return to skeet. But I am definitely going to be shooting a lot of ZZ bird (Helice) between now and then. If I come out with a medal this time, I will probably feel a



Vinnie, Austen, Dania & Conner

strong urge to pursue LA Olympics 2028. It will be tough to hold off until I finish my degree, but I know I have to do that to feel accomplished personally.

What do you plan to do with your degree and what does that future look like for you?

I am doing Aerospace Engineering at the University of Texas at Arlington, so I would like to work for a major company like Lockheed, Raytheon, or any of these other major aerospace companies and start progressing roughly there. That's my major plan at the end of the day. I have even thought about possibly going to NASA. My big dream is to work in their jet propulsion laboratory in California.

Do you have any specific goals for this Olympics, or have you ever set goals for yourself or for specific medals?

I am a little different in that sense. It's not really a question of am I going to medal as it is I'm going to go do my best. I'm gonna to run my program. So, I am a huge advocate of mental training right now. I've worked with Lanny Basham recently. I actually credit him for helping me make the team. I didn't take it seriously until about a year ago, just because I was going with the flow and doing my natural thing. But with how strong all these other women shooters were getting, you kind of have no choice but to focus on the mental side of things. The more you just stick to a program, stick to what you know best, and don't try to create anything new, the bigger your chances are of actually doing well there. So that's my goal, to run my process, and if the process works like it's supposed to, I should be coming out with a medal. I was one target out from the finals in Tokyo, so I'm driven to get in the final this time. I've been to so many finals now and know how to do it—I'm ready for the final this time.

Do you like the pressure of the final? Does it elevate the experience for you?

Before the final, I would say no because you're always nervous and tense, like oh my gosh, I want to do really well. But the moment you get into the final and start shooting, those are probably some of the clearest targets I'll ever see. You're just shooting off of pure adrenaline at that moment. And everything just seems so much clearer, bigger, brighter. Especially on the World Cup stage that I've experienced, there's nothing like it—there's nothing like hitting those targets and seeing them explode. It's one of a kind—I want to experience that over there. I think having the crowd watching helps. I love seeing the crowd cheering, and I love hearing the crowd after I hit a perfect station.

Have you ever gone into a competition not mentally your best?

Yes, I will say that at nationals, which was part one of our selection match for this Olympic trial. I did not feel good going into that at all and it reflects on my score. That was the turning point, and I needed to focus on my mentality going into all these things. It was very score-fixated—if I didn't start with an excellent score, I had an awful feeling for the rest of the match. Now, I'm going to focus on the process that I've created, which should result in a 25 every time, and if not, then something really close.

Do you remember the first time you hit a 25 or perfect score in any shooting sports?

I do—I still have the shell casing, too. My dad and I keep our shell casings. I have the 25, 50, and 100. I don't know where the 75 is, but it's somewhere. I even have my first international hull. My first 25 was in ATA (American Trap Association), and it was one of my first-ever youth competitions—it was actually on the field that I train on here at Dallas Gun Club on field 6. It's like my lucky field.

Do you remember when you first thought you would like to pursue the Olympics for shooting sports?

I remember the exact day. I had just come home from shooting and told my mom, "So I'm really good at shooting." I wasn't actually at the time. I was just a little kid, but I thought I was good. "I want to go, and I want to shoot in the Olympics, and I want to be an aerospace engineer, and I want to do all these things, and this is going to be great," and my mom said, "Ok that's nice." Look at me now.



Austen in 2013

What is it like competing with all the other ladies of International Skeet?

That’s the one thing I’ve always liked about the team—we all have the attitude that I will win today, and you can win the next day, and so on. We are totally fine with it. If I didn’t win today, I know I did my best, and that girl is also extremely good. I’m not torn up about it, it was just her day, not mine. We’ve grown up with that mentality, it’s the only way we’ve been able to survive for so long and stay at the top of our game.

What are your thoughts on the shift in the growing number of female shooters?

When I started shooting, my high school team had one girl, me. And there were maybe some token girls on some of the other teams. I was recently at my old high school, and they now had quite a few girls on the team. I would like to think that I helped inspire that a little bit. But I think it’s down to the high schools themselves. They are being a lot more open and inclusive. They want whoever to shoot. It doesn’t matter what your background in shooting is—you could be a hunter or a video game addict like me. It’s a sport for everyone.

As we concluded our pre-Olympics interview, Austen was greeted by a local high school shooter named Sarah Lang. Sarah shoots on the Carrol Southlake High School shooting team and is also featured in this issue in the article “Pom Poms for Pew Pews”. Sarah is a little shy but has wanted to meet Austen for some time, so her timing was perfect that day. During this conversation between them and Wendy, Sarah’s mom, I saw a totally new side of Austen. She patiently and



honestly answered some of their questions and made herself available to listen to and encourage Sarah with her shooting. I think there was a significant connection between their neighboring high schools and the origins of school shooting teams. Austen mentioned she was looking forward to mentoring and teaching post-Olympics to encourage other young ladies like Sarah to pursue Olympic dreams. I can’t imagine the impact that having someone so accomplished giving you advice and encouragement would have on young Sarah, but I know it was a special moment for her.

Fast forward to August 10, 2024, Dallas Gun Club is hosting their big Fall Helice shoot, and guess who comes strolling in to shoot holding not one but two Olympic medals...I am pretty sure Austen had landed from Paris on August 9, and her first big task was to come shoot a Helice tournament to work through the jet lag. Everyone had such a fun time taking pictures with the returning champion and holding her medals. Austen graciously answered all the questions and posed with a big smile. Having spent time with her before the Olympics, I felt I knew her well enough to say there was a change in her confidently—a subtle but noticeable change in her entire demeanor. The intensity of gearing up for completion was gone. She had softened, and the relief of achieving her goals was palpable. Her smile grew, and her stoic face faded to a relaxing, resting smirk. She had done it.

We finally met back up a few weeks later for her post-Olympic interview. As she walked into the club, I saw the same relaxed and happy Austen I had seen at the Helice shoot. The gun club was hosting a small party to celebrate Austen and her Olympic accomplishments. She casually walked in wearing one of the Ralph Lauren outfits that every Team USA member had received at the Olympics. This was the one with the excellent race car-looking jacket, which I am so jealous of, but it is not for public sale. With her medals in tow, we sat at the same table for round 2. Here’s how it went:

So you came home with two medals. How do you feel?

It’s going to take about a year for it to sink in. I am still kind of reliving it every day. I’ll go to campus and think, “Yeah, it’s not that big of a deal”, and then someone will say, “Oh my gosh, you got two Olympic medals” and I’m like, “Dang, you’re right, yeah, I do.” I don’t think I will truly ever get over it.

Has a total stranger recognized you and congratulated you for your win?

It actually happened in Paris while I was there. I was out getting some stuff for friends, and some guy was like, “Hey Smith, congrats on your medals!” And here at home, a couple of people on campus have said something.

You don’t strike me as the kind of person who overly enjoys being the center of attention. How is this going for you being put on stage and paraded around?

You’re right. I’m pretty shy. But I’m not going to lie, it’s pretty nice to get recognized for your sport, especially since we don’t get much recognition. So I know I’m pretty shy and introverted, but I’m doing my best right now to put on a positive image for the sport and be a good role model. It is a little tricky sometimes, I won’t lie. Especially when I’m sitting there crunched over a laptop typing away, and someone recognizes me, I feel a little unprepared. But I am 100% grateful and appreciate it.

We left off with your decision to potentially retire after this; I have to ask, where do you stand on this?

I’m still on the fence about it. Not a for sure yes or no. I’m going to take the time off to get back into my degree and finish that. Maybe do some research and graduate school, too. I’m pretty education-focused right now. At the same time, I know myself, and the moment I get near a range again, I’m going to have an urge, so I’m not going to completely rule it out just yet. I have to at least give it up for a little bit, but I am content with it.

Talk to me about arriving in Paris and getting ready to compete.

We had a couple of weeks over there. Got there the first week and got to settle in and get the jet lag out of the way. We aren’t used to that in our typical matches. We usually arrive and compete right away. That was a nice change of pace. We got to practice a lot, which was the most I had ever practiced at a tournament. We also got to figure out the whole team dynamic. Vinnie, Conner, and I were fortunate to have our families there, so we didn’t have to stay in the village. We wanted to be as comfortable as possible, so we decided that being with our families was important while we were competing. We also came out with medals, so I think it worked out really well for us.

One could say that your biggest distraction in Tokyo was not having your family there. How was it having your whole family there this time?

It was actually kind of a relief. This time, having everybody there, you have your whole support system. Mom, Dad, and sister—everyone had their own little job to do, so that took the pressure off of me a lot. I had my dad watching me, and Vinnie was also watching me. If I started losing a couple of targets here and there, they would immediately correct me, which was nice. Honestly, just the emotional support. It was a rough match, so just having someone there to bounce your ideas off of and your nerves off of is all beneficial.

How did you feel going into your first competition and then after winning going into your second?

I felt good, actually. Both felt great. For the first one, it was like, man, I get to be at the Olympics again. This is awesome. So there was that excitement. Then, once that one was over, it was like, man, I got an Olympic medal, and now I got a chance for another one with my friend tomorrow?! That’s also awesome. And then we ended up with another medal. Both of us were over the moon excited about that. It was just nothing but excitement the entire time.

Was there any disappointment over getting a bronze medal and not a gold?

No, it was very much so—I just wanted a medal at the end of the day—I was just happy about it. There were so many other competitors there who had been to the Olympics x number of times and had not received one, so just that outlook alone takes care of all those doubts. The other two women were such excellent competitors, too, so you can’t really be too upset being beaten by one of them. Any of us can win any day, I think we’ve all proved that. It just wasn’t my day for gold, but it was my day for bronze and silver.

I’ve heard a lot of sports psychology people talk about what happens afterward. You’ve been training for this moment for so long, and then it’s over. How did you feel coming out of competing?

There is a little bit of downtime, I want to say, but at the same time, I have a good support system, and I’ve been able to make it through that way. Also, I’ve got school, so that also takes a lot of my energy out of thinking about it. Just having something on the other side really benefits you, studying, etc. It did help a lot. I think without that, I would have struggled with it a bit more.

What was your favorite part of the whole Olympic experience?



Once you win a medal, you go to the Walk of Champions. It is quite literally a stadium with a few thousand people, and all you do is walk down this catwalk and everybody cheers. That was probably the most incredible experience because, once again, you don’t get a lot of recognition as a shotgun shooter. You see all the swimmers and gymnasts getting it. So just having this moment where everybody sees you was something special to us. Conner and I especially had a ball with that.

Was there any negative experience throughout the whole time?

That’s the thing about the Olympics. If there were any negative experiences, all the positive ones cancel it out. You can have a bad day at the range, and you go home, and it’s like man, I’m still competing here, I’m still over here, this is awesome. You can’t have a genuinely negative experience over there unless you have a different outlook, which, for me, I’m just happy to be there. You can’t really have a bad day when you’re just excited to be there.

I think this is exactly the attitude that all competitive shooters need. It is certainly the one I try to have every time I compete. Spending time with this incredible young woman has been a joy and a learning experience. Her respect for those who came before her and her desire to encourage and even train those coming up behind her are admirable. To have accomplished your goals at such a young age, and not only that but goals that you proclaimed at the ripe age of 12, must feel like you own the world. It is my hope and my dream to see more young women continue to join the world of shooting sports so that we never have to see an Olympic game void of shooting sports. In a world where the rights of gun owners seem to be diminishing and eroding ever so slightly, it is nice to have these moments of inspiration. Having role models to look up to has paved the way for other women to have hope that they, too, can compete and win with the right attitude, the right support system, and especially the right mindset. ■

PHOTO CREDIT: JOSHUA SCHAVE



Personalize Competition Pistols

WITH IDPA & ASI COMPETITOR JACKIE RUSSO

When folks first learn of my background – retired police sergeant, SWAT officer, and detective – many infer I’m an expert in guns, familiarity with types of firearms, shooting, disassembly, and cleaning followed by reassembly. Furthermore, as a competition shooter, the assumption extrapolates beyond just guns to parts, accessories, triggers, sights, optics, and grips. As many know, lists of updated firearms are endless. It’s never done; there’s always something more to revise, change, or swap out.

When entering a competition pistol back in 2015, my introduction handgun was a Glock 17, in basic black. It had some modifications boosting

it to ESP – Enhanced Service Pistol – in IDPA. Could I specify what made it enhanced? Nope. Undeniably, it was dark and dull. As I enjoyed some success in competition, I whined . . . um, complained . . . , and inquired (?) about wanting something more fun to compete in besides the basic, austere Glock. As fortune would have it – my husband, retired police officer, department firearms instructor, and State Master Instructor and advanced armorer for many platforms, sourced several options to create a ‘fun’ gun for ASI (Action Shooting International) and IDPA (International Defensive Pistol Association) competition. Thus began my collection of unique and perhaps controversial ‘whimsical’ pistols, currently residing in the home safe, nestled in

pink knit gun socks.

It all started innocently enough with engraved magazine base plates. Unique base plates guarantee they are easily identified and returned promptly—with no confusion as to “Whose Glock mag is this?” after policing up a completed stage.

The first set engraved was for my Sig P320, with Hello Kitty’s sweet visage. The image shows her staring down a pistol: she means business. When we moved to Glock, we chose to add our shooting team’s “Corgi Nation Pistol Team” logo with our Corgi mascot image etched into red baseplates for those magazines.

Ready for something new and radical, I ventured to create the Hello Kitty- Sig P320 to



match the earlier mentioned mags. After some research, a company that offered hydro-dip for guns and other items was found. A review of their online catalog found the perfect Hello Kitty design and a flattering pink for the slide. Fortunately, as Providence would have it – the P320 firing control unit is removable, so the slide and grip module are shipped to the vendor. After a simple telephone consult, both Sig pieces were sent off to be re-emerged as a ‘pretty in pink’ Hello Kitty Sig.

Not to rest on its tiny manufacturer’s stock laurels, the competition circuit demanded several necessary improvements. Adding new Dawson sights and Gray Guns, internals created the ultimate, fully functional ‘Competition Kitty.’

While running a pink gun at matches was much fun, what was even more enjoyable was a big burley Safety or Range Officer going through the “make ready” commands and exclaiming, “Is that Hello Kitty? Aw—that is cute!” during the unholstering and loading process. Who wouldn’t love her?



When my maintenance team—e.g., my husband—suggested I return to my former duty pistol (Gen 4- G19), I was unenthused. After all, can we trade in an HK (Hello Kitty, for those who haven’t been paying attention) for a Glock? I was currently running the epitome of adorable!

When the opportunity for a customized Glock slide crossed my path, I found delight in converting my old duty Glock to something clever and unique. However, logistics steered me towards purchasing a new slide for this modification process. Although tempting to revisit HK again, using her image probably violated copyright somewhere, so it made sense to create a new design—this time with a Cardigan Welsh Corgi, our team mascot.

As luck would have it, the gal I was working with during the design phase also owned a corgi! So collaboration ensued, and a red running Corgi, with red paw prints sporting across the slide on all three sides, was agreed on.

While awaiting production of the Corgi Pistol slide, hubby sacrificed his own Larry Vickers’ limited edition RTF2 grip module, adding matching red pins, slide, and magazine releases to the project. When the slide arrived, a red slide-back plate was installed. Going beyond mere aesthetics, aftermarket competition additions of a Vogel Trigger, KKM barrel, and Proctor “Y” notch sights were fitted. Viola! The Competition Corgi Glock was complete and ready for the range.

Besides weekly ASI or IDPA matches – we often traveled out of state where more amused and surprised SOs and ROs chuckled at the Competition Corgi Glock. Although several farsighted ones pondered if it weren’t a sprinting cat. (Wrong! And now I’m questioning that PE you just gave me).

As fun as it is, the Glock was enduring thousands of rounds beyond just matches – training was a critical causation, and it just plum

wore out. Once again, hubby offered another alternate, and Glock 26 with a custom engraved



Corgi Nation logo for the slide-back plate arrived. Although it was ‘A Henry Ford Model-T’ black (Ford’s motto at the time, “You can have it in any color as long as it’s black,” comes to mind), I acquiesced and agreed to shoot a backup gun (BUG) in IDPA and compete with it in ASI.

Admittedly, I like shooting the G26. We make a great team. It fits me, and it is reliable. The accuracy is phenomenal! We do enjoy some success together at matches. But . . . how to make shooting it cool? Enter custom gear. This G26 is holstered in a pink donut -that includes a glazed and sprinkles-print motif with matching mag pouches; this successfully fosters my penchant for quirky fun.

As referenced in the introduction, assumptions about expertise are based on stereotypes regarding cops, competition shooters, and guns. This may come as a bemused surprise to the reader, but all the technical details about gun upgrades, modifications, pieces, and parts were sourced, supplied, and installed by my husband Joey.

The creative side is my responsibility, and competing with a dull gun doesn’t have to be ho-hum. Considering the vast possibilities of upgrading or embellishing, the choices are endless to make your firearm, magazines, and accessories truly and uniquely yours. ■



Becoming the

Master of My Own Mind

WITH USA HELICE
NATIONAL TEAM MEMBER
NATALIA GONZALEZ



As I sit in the restaurant of the shooting club in Cairo, Egypt, awaiting my lunch and turn on this first day of competition at the Helice World Championships, I am flooded with memories of this year and my journey on Dawn Grant's Mental Training program. The culmination of one year of training, competition, and mental game Monday Instagram posts. I am a little tired, perhaps a little jet lagged, and indeed hungry not only for food but to prove to myself that I am the master of my own mind.

In preparation for this World Championship, I embarked on what at times felt like an arduous journey: completing Dawn Grant's program. I use that term because it was hard to put it simply. Hard because of the dedication, a program designed like a college-level course. I left college over 15 years ago and never did any continuing education. Hence, the level of focus on the 1-2 hour video lessons plus the notes and homework was a lot to take on in my already full life and schedule. I will immediately put this out there; it was worth it.

Learning to master one's own mind could be considered the ultimate test of human capabilities. They say we use the smallest percent of our brain; there's so much more to discover and learn. So, to say that I have mastered the small portion I use feels like an accomplishment of Everest-level proportions. To say that I have fully achieved this would be a lie. I have learned, studied, practiced, and even succeeded in using what I learned on many occasions. However, this is not enough. The ultimate goal is 100% mastery, and I can tell you, based on my scores, I am far

closer than I was a year ago but not there yet. One fraction of one second of a distraction can so easily lead to a missed target. This is the best part of it. I believe that humans are made to learn, grow and evolve. Though my mind has done these things in the past year, there is no end in sight.

A big part of the program is the hypnosis audio recordings made by Dawn. Each week, the homework consisted of reflecting and practicing some techniques that helped achieve the overall goal of always being in the present moment. I feel the term hypnosis is a commonly misinterpreted word. Some people think of the carnival act person with some mesmerizing trinket that can count to three, and you are unconscious, then he snaps, and you're back, and you have no memory of what happened. That couldn't be further from the reality of this. The hypnosis audios are a guided meditation where Dawn leads you down a colorful and peaceful road so your mind can relax into a brainwave state that essentially allows information to come in and live rent-free without a fight. It is magical when you do it consistently.

Not only in my shooting but in every aspect of my life. As an esthetician, my job consists of one-on-one time with my clients, engaging in candid conversation, and then a 30-minute time to massage their neck, shoulders, and scalp. At the same time, a luxurious mask restores their skin barrier and moisture balance. During this "spa" time, we don't talk. The relaxing music is playing, and the music guides the rhythm of my hands. I used this time daily with every client to be present in the moment. To practice getting in the zone. During this time, I was so in tune and present with the needs of my clients that I have to tell you my tips went up by at least 10%. In regards to shooting, well, that's when this practice gets much harder. There is a deep burning desire inside me, and I think most, if not all, shooters to win. We spend thousands of dollars on our guns, ammo, practice targets, competitions, and travel. Of course, we do it for fun, camaraderie, and challenge, but we all want to win. For some of us, this desire to win can be detrimental to the task at hand. This was one of the most important lessons I learned from Dawn.

Every single thought that distracts you from being in the present moment will ultimately take you further from your goal. So many things happen when you are not in the right mindset. The main one for me is trying too hard. This easily leads to misses because of checking my barrel. After playing these shotgun games for 10

years, I still suffer from the urge to do well so badly that I will do the one thing you should never do. I can tell you this has improved significantly in the last year.

The first and most important thing that Dawn's program helped me with, which has been a permanent change, would be the tools she gives for getting in the zone. Breathing has been the key to my success. As a person who practices yoga regularly (although not as much lately), the practice of deep breathing is something I am familiar with; however, I had never applied it to the jitters and nerves of competition until now. My first few Helice tournaments were torture on my heart rate. I would get so nervous at the shooting stand my hands would shake, and I could barely get the shells into my gun. This was the first thing that I eliminated from my life using this program. Don't get me wrong, I still get a little flutter here and there, but here is a perfect example: I was in my first Helice shoot-off on my first day of competition here in Egypt, and I was cool as a cucumber. Yes, I missed my first target and was immediately out of the competition, but it wasn't because I was nervous.

Ultimately, the practice of being in the zone leads to success. When I talk to my friends with world titles, they all say the same thing. You must run your program, whatever it may be for you. Every step of your routine must run like a well-oiled machine. Then, it's just one target at a time. Nothing more and nothing less will do. It sounds so simple, and I know many people who have mastered this, hence the world titles.





Throughout this year, I saw my success grow, and I celebrated every milestone along the way. At first, it was my score; I would keep track of it,



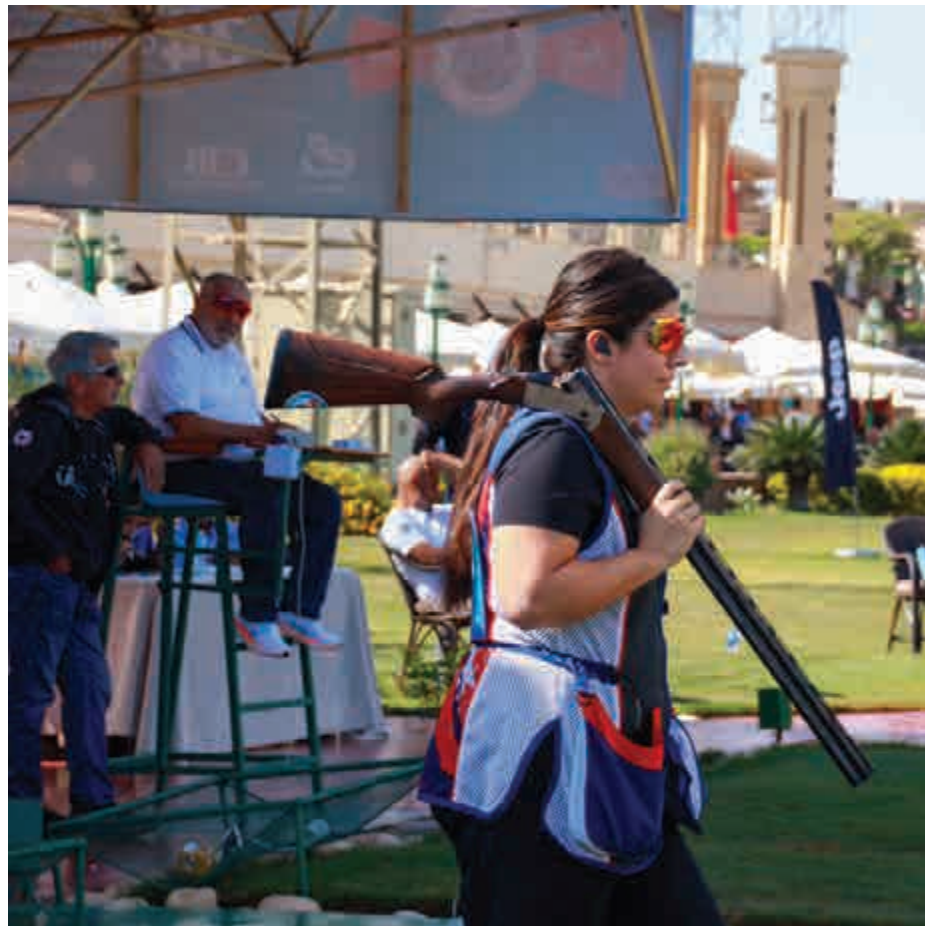
and every time I shot a higher score, I celebrated it. As I continued the program, I realized this wasn't what it was about. On a windy and challenging day at Austin Gun

Club, my next milestone was tying for third place with the 2023 ladies and juniors national champion Macie Paige. My final and favorite one

was when I missed my first three targets and then shot and hit every single target after that except for one, leaving me with a score of 26/30 on the final day of a tournament at Dallas Gun Club. Every step of the way, I celebrated these small wins. These receipts show that I had been doing the work, putting in the time, and improving my game. For many years before, in my sporting clays game and all the months before in my Helice game before I started Dawn's program, I had not seen much improvement. The stalemate of my game made me feel like I would never be very good at this, no matter how much I practiced or loved the game. I can't even put into words how happy I am that I took on this journey with Dawn Grant's program. Though it was hard to stay on track at times, life got in the way many times. I persisted and finished before this world championship.

I have a whole week of shooting ahead of me here in Egypt at the Helice World Championships. I am still learning to see myself as a winner and a true competitor in this sport, but I know this week will be one of the most incredible weeks of my shooting career. I wish my deadline for this article to be printed were after the completion of this week so I could tell you all about how it went. I can assure you that no matter the outcome, I will be happy and beyond grateful to have had the opportunity to be here and experience this place and this culture and shoot with some amazing competitors from around the world. I can also tell you that I will be going back and doing the program all over again. I know it helped me, and the more I practice what I have learned, the more I will achieve big goals and dreams.

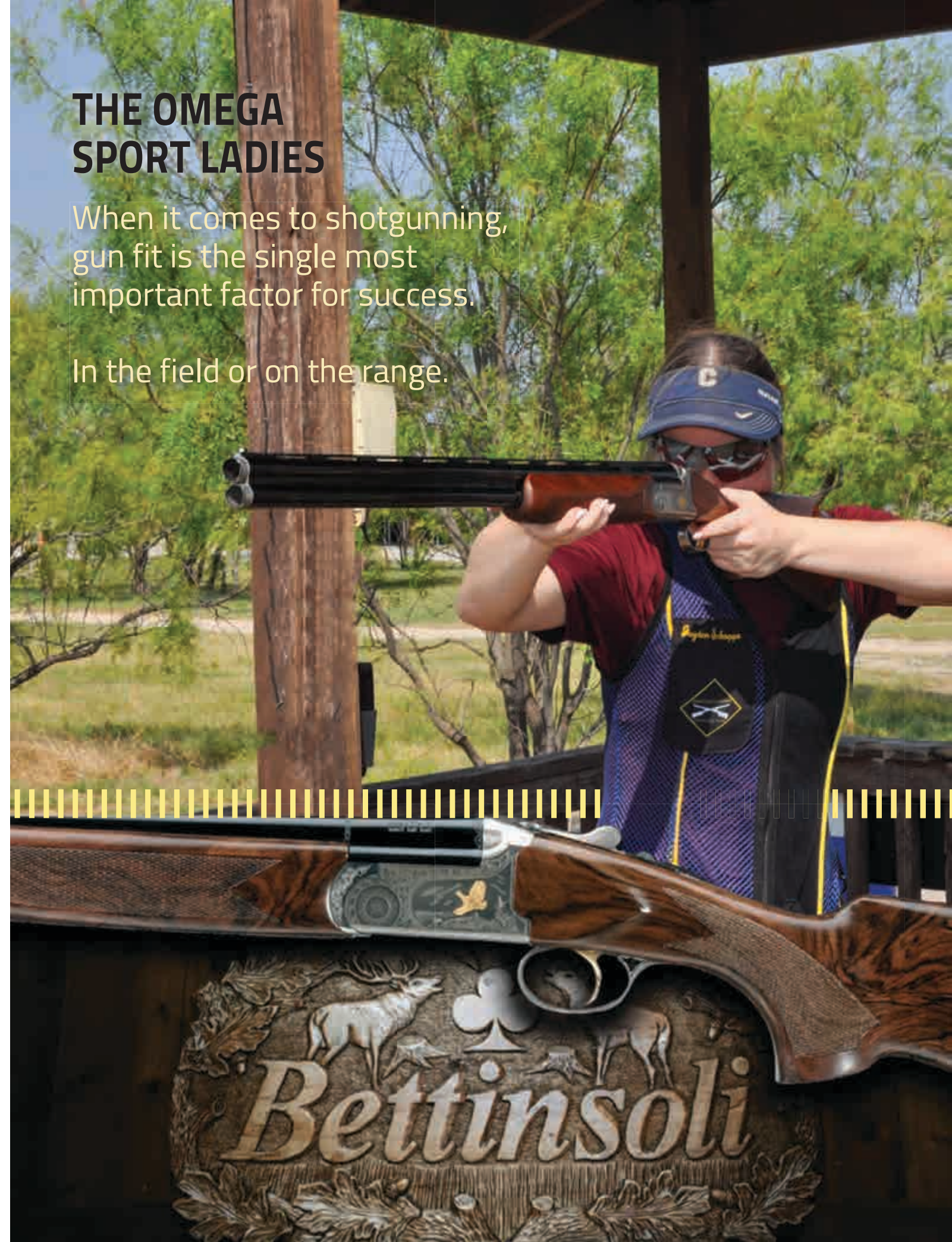
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THE OMEGA SPORT LADIES

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Confessions of a Lady Shooter

With Dawn Hzin
photos by Zachary Hzin

Dearest Lady Shooter,

This Author has several confessions:

- ❖ She is an avid reader of romance novels
- ❖ She can't resist a good period drama
- ❖ She is a late-in-life outdoorswoman, and
- ❖ She's terrible with a shotgun.

It all began earlier this year. Her beloved husband was on his usual rounds of winter shows, traveling, and making plans for the next year of adventures. He's a real writer, unlike your AuthorAuthor, who was conscripted. The house was clean, the dogs were napping, and she was working on her Netflix list and personal projects in peace. The phone rang, and it was the husband. *Dear Reader*, the husband *never* calls on these trips just to chat. He only calls when there is news or trouble.

"Do you want to go to New Zealand?" Ever suspicious, we ask, "Why?" He goes on to explain

that he has run into an old friend, Richard Burdon of Glen Dene, and has been invited to come hunt this year. He also adds this cherry on top: "*We would also get to do a traditional driven pheasant shoot.*"

How could we resist? International travel, getting to wear tweed, dogs, and shooting, too!

In a few short months, this Author and her husband had made it to the north island of New Zealand. Richard and a good friend of his were hosting us at Poronui. Historically a fishing lodge, the station has, in the last few years, started a driven pheasant shoot. While some might say it wasn't 100% traditional, for this American Author, it was a prime opportunity to wear the tweed that had been purchased with dreams of visiting the UK.

We arrived late in the evening. Once we settled into our private cabin, we were introduced to the gentlemen at our shooting party, the next day's shoot organizer, and the gamekeeper who manages the estate's birds with the requisite refreshments. We were then chauffeured to the site for our dinner, set in an extensive wine cellar nestled under what once was a stable. What might have been dodgy was anything but the chef revealing each course and the wine flowing freely.

I saw this Author drinking coffee and blinking over the breakfast menu in the morning. Also, this Author was coming to terms with the fact that she had not practiced with a shotgun at all during the spring. Telling herself that the birds would fly straight at her; how bad could it be?

After breakfast, the shooting party convened for a safety talk and review of how the drive would work when, out of nowhere, a smaller gun for your AuthorAuthor materialized – no doubt from some forgotten nook or cranny. Yours truly was then honored as the first to draw her peg.

The group then trundled over to the first of five drives for the day. The only Americans in the group, this Author and her husband, were to share a peg and a Gun. In this case, a Gun refers to the person loading the firearm, managing the shells, and advising the shooter. Traditionally, each shooter would have at least two break-open shotguns in which the Gun would reload and handoff, though all at this shoot only bore one Gun. In a somewhat blasphemous twist of fate, this Author's sourced shotgun was a semi-auto, meaning the reloading process took some additional practice, though only two shells would be loaded. Operating a driven shoot with seven pegs calls for a veritable army of dogs and people



between the beaters, the pickers, the shooters, and the Guns. Beaters ensure the pheasants are moving toward the shooters, and if all goes according to plan, the pickers will use packs of dogs to pick up the downed pheasants falling behind the shooters.

This Author volunteered to go first. This meant she found herself staring up at a small cliff face, slowly getting warmer and warmer in her tweed as the anticipation built. It turns out New Zealand in fall isn't that cold for a Wyomingite, and the layers of tweed with a sweater were a bit much. Plus, the coat inhibited her ability to bring the slightly-too-long-in-the-stock shotgun up in snappy fashion.

Finally, the birds started flying overhead, and now the author was waiting for the go-ahead from her Gun, David. With David's advice to paint the sky running through her head, she finally started taking some shots! With birds flying every which way, the guidance of the Gun helps pick targets, ensuring that you stay in your lane and deciding which birds may be easier to aim for. In the end, this Author struggled with timing and overthinking. She took a bird or two, but years of hunting wild birds in Kansas were arguing in her head with the reality of so many targets.

The horn sounded, ending the drive, and the husband excitedly asked, *"What did you think?"* This Author wasn't sure yet. A bit disappointed in her shooting prowess, she offered to let her husband shoot the next round. However, her

disappointment was quickly remedied when elevenses were produced – pheasant and mushroom pies accompanied by sloe gin or whiskey.

For the rest of the day, this Author enjoyed watching her husband finish out the drives using his shotgun brought along for this trip and



CONFESSIONS

playing photographer/videographer. Trying to capture the majestic views that New Zealand is known for and the anarchy of spaniels picking up birds left, right, and behind.

At the end of the day's drives, the shooters celebrate with the Guns, pickers, and beaters, sharing drinks and heavy hors d'oeuvres. Most are volunteers here for the fun and opportunity to participate in a traditional pastime. Additionally, the statistics of the shoot are shared, including how many birds were downed, how many shots were taken, and the shooting average revealed.

And lo and behold, the best drive of the day was the first! One could argue it's because all of the shooters were fresh, but since it's the drive that this Author/Author participated in, then obviously it was because she's not so bad a shot after all!

However, dear Reader, this Author has vowed to practice because there's always the tiniest chance that a trip to England might be next!



Alexo Athletica Conceal Carry Work It Dress Pant

WRITTEN BY: RANGE OWNER KATIE BALL

IMAGES COURTESY OF www.alexoathletica.com



Violent crime toward women is not a new topic. As violent crime rates rise across the nation, it has undoubtedly become a hot topic, especially in urban areas and for female runners. It's important to note that women in any living or working situation and of all geographical regions, age groups, and socioeconomic statuses can become victims of violent crime. The importance of situational awareness and self-defense training can't be understated. Amy Robbins, the CEO and founder of Alexo Athletica, is a long-time long-distance runner and mother, and she experienced a situation that led her to find Alexo. She was followed and jeered by a van with several men inside during a run by herself. She recounts praying that if she made it home safely, she would DO something to change the safety of women in this country and prevent the same thing from happening to other women. At the time, no one else did high-quality running gear for concealed carry, so she founded Alexo Athletica and started her own company to meet the market's needs.

Amy never set out to own an apparel company and built the company from the idea into what it is today- a company that produces Lululemon-quality activewear for the safety-conscious woman. Amy is often on TV (her background is Lifestyle TV), has run marathons, and has a great sense of fashion- she didn't want

to compromise and carry in gear that often trended toward tactical. Alexo now makes both men's and women's apparel and has partnered with substantial industry names such as Springfield Armory and DeSantis Holsters to bring you a carefully designed and produced line of clothing- from leggings to performance jackets and everything in between.

I am going to focus on their Work-It Pant for women. I first heard about Alexo from a friend and former shooting Olympian, who looked around in my gun shop and asked if I had ever tried Alexo leggings. I hadn't, and I immediately looked into the brand and made my first purchase (conceal carry running shorts! I fell in love with the flattering fit, high-quality materials, and perfect carry solution for an active Mom like myself). Last fall, Alexo released the Work-It Pant, and I was so excited- work and church-ready pants that easily concealed my firearm, taser, or even a pepper spray and knife. Nothing else on the market met this need.

The Work-It Pant arrived. I ordered an XL; I am 5'9" and 155 lb. I could have gone large or XL, but the waistband on carry gear is tight and thick (by design), and I prefer a slightly more relaxed look for work. Their size charts include measurements to help you find your best fit. The pants are beautiful, thick, soft nylon/Spandex blended fabric with a straight leg and medium

rise. I found them very slimming. The pants have four strategically placed carry pockets, allowing for right and left-hand draw in the appendix or lower back carry position. I always utilize a Kydex holster, and my slim Flashbang Betty 2.0 with the wing and UltiClip is a perfect fit with my Sig 365XL...even with the red dot sight.

The inner elastic waistband easily supports the weight of the loaded firearm. I can jump and move around, and it doesn't work down from the appendix's carry position. I've tested my draw on the range- and it's no different than drawing from the appendix position in any other pair of pants with an IWB holster. I have not found printing noticeable with a more relaxed top, especially a work-appropriate button-down, draped blouse, or thicker sweater. The inseam was perfect- 30.5"- even at my tall height. The pants can be machine-washed cold inside out, and they suggest laying flat to dry. After washing them, I didn't need to iron mine- they looked as good as new! I have also worn mine out fishing, and they got covered in thick river mud. They were washed and looked new after that, as well. My one complaint about the fabric is that it does attract dog hair mildly, so I use a lint roller before walking out the door. I like to pair these with a nonprinting top, either the boyfriend tee by Alexo, a blazer, or a looser fit button-up to hide any printing.

This pair of pants has become a go-to for me. This BRAND has become a go-to for me! Alexo gear is worth the investment and is such a convenient way to carry- from casual to dressy- you can't go wrong with a piece from Alexo!

Visit Alexo at alexoathletica.com Work-It, Straight Leg Pant, retails at \$139. Check out their concealed carry leggings and jackets for a more casual look! LadyShooter readers can save 10% on any purchase using code AlexoKatie10.

Katie and her husband, Jeremy Ball, own Sharp Shooting Indoor Range and Gun Shop in Spokane, WA (@sharpshootingspokane). Katie also runs their women's emphasis page @thatsharpshootinggirl on Instagram/FB. If you want more info on women's shooting and carry topics, follow her on social media!

Dark Alley Denim

@darkalleydenim

WRITTEN BY: RANGE OWNER KATIE BALL

PRODUCT AVAILABLE AT: www.darkalleydenim.com

I'm a Y2K girl. We love ourselves some jeans. And come on, ladies- which of us doesn't have that faithful pair of jeans that's your go-to? It matches everything in your closet and helps you feel your best. Is that pair that fits your body to perfection? Denim is to American fashion as the little black dress was to Chanel- the staple for every girl's closet.

Carrying a firearm requires a certain degree of proficiency, not only with the weapon but also with how to appropriately and safely conceal it throughout your daily life experiences and within your wardrobe. For many women (me included!), if carrying requires too much change to fashion and routine, it won't happen. Vain? Maybe. But I LOVE fashion and don't want to sacrifice that part of my identity in order to stay safe- nor do most of the women I know. A garment, like carry leggings, that integrates the considerations of carrying and concealing a weapon appropriately is a WIN for me, ESPECIALLY when it is beautiful, practical, and functional. I love the simplicity of knowing I don't have to utilize a special belt, worry about adding a belly band under, or be paranoid about carrying my body in a purse when I used to carry garments like this- because the designer already took all those things into consideration. I can simply clip in my favorite in the waistband holster and return to being the busy woman I am.

Dark Alley Denim was a product I first saw when it was presented at the Rugged Rare Booth at Shot Show 2024. You'll recognize Rugged Rare (@ruggedrare) as the company that

brings you Smith and Wesson Leather and Chameleon Conceal Carry Bags and has done a collaboration with Elegant and Armed (@elegantandarmed) on a Concealment Cami. They also worked with Joelle Orem (@tractorheels) to design these concealment denim pants. Joelle and I talked on the phone last summer. She is a Midwest farm mom who needed a convenient way to carry and look cute at the same time. When you live in a rural area, you need rugged clothing to stand up to farm life, and safety is a serious



concern when you live in isolated areas. Joelle didn’t find a product she liked that met these needs, so she designed her own to feel like her favorite designer pair. Female owned by a fellow Mom AND distributed by one of my favorite conceal carry companies?!? Submit your order now.

I selected dark-colored denim in a large size. I’m 5’9” tall and 155 pounds (waist size 30 or 10). I could wear a medium or a large in these and found they fit very true to size. The inseam grazed my ankles. My first impression was that they had a nice weight and stretch to them. Beautiful coloring. I don’t usually wear skinny-leg jeans, but after putting them on, they had a decidedly feminine and flattering fit that I loved. The stretch (They are made of 94% cotton, 4% polyester, and 2% elastane) made them super comfortable, and I had an excellent range of motion. I would consider these a midrise. The carry pockets allow for the gun to be carried in the lower back position (Kidney) for both left and right-handed individuals. They also have an extra elastic strap that buttons over the gun for added retention. You DO need a holster to carry these safely. I utilized a Flashbang Betty 2.0 (Utlclip attachment and concealment wing) inside the waistband holster. The pocket in the denim accommodated the holster and my Sig 365XL. This is not a carry position I usually conceal. Still, it’s thoughtfully positioned away from the spine and comfortably between the buttock and kidney, so it lays well and is accessible to draw.

THE PROS: I love easy and practical carry solutions. No belt is needed. Just grab your favorite Kydex holster and go. The pants are of beautiful quality and style and look timeless and flattering- and I am not a tiny lady. The carry pocket is large enough to accommodate a midsize handgun AND a Kydex holster- even with a wing. For lower back carry, the pocket is well-positioned and comfortable. The stretch makes the fit very forgiving, so it will flatter and fit many body types. The pants do still have belt loops and pockets both front and back, retaining the classic styling of traditional jeans. Lots of super casual options (like leggings) exist on the market, as do tactical pants (who wants to wear tac pants all the time?!)- but this is the ONLY pair of conceal carry denim I found- which is the perfect attire for so many carry occasions! Both colors are beautiful in person, and the generous stretch of the denim gave me freedom of movement, similar to my favorite designer stretch denim (think Nordstrom brands or BKE). I was super surprised at how

well the carry position helped mask printing- the lines of the gun just disappeared into the drape of any relaxed-fit shirt I tried with these. They come in 5 sizes: Small 2/4, Medium 6/8, Large 10/12, XL 14/16, and XXL 18/20, inseams range from 28-29.5”

THE CONS: Lower back carry is a more advanced carry position; the gun is more challenging to reach and draw and likely impossible to reach if you went to the ground in a crisis. You need a holster to go with these- pocket carry is NOT safe- with that in mind; I found the retention strap redundant. They are only available in a skinny-leg option. Garments like this must be washed like other clothing, taking them out of my carry rotation when they are washed and dried (I LINE DRY mine- so it takes a while for them to dry). Lastly, the price point (\$149) is a premium price point- however, it is in line with what other luxury denim retails at.

The skinny? (See what I did there, LOL) I REALLY enjoyed wearing these pants and will continue to rotate them throughout my everyday carry. I will also order a light-colored pair for a more casual look. The quality and ease of use make them worth the investment for me. If you are a jeans girl, this could provide a well-rounded solution, especially if you are comfortable carrying on your lower back.

I’m looking forward to more options—jean shorts and straight-leg designs would be amazing! For now, I’m investing in this brand and am excited for more from Dark Alley Denim! ■



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The Story Behind the Victoria Vest:

Redefining Women's Concealed Carry and Competitive Apparel



WITH MAKE READY
RANGE WEAR OWNER
NICOLE EARLY

My friend Victoria stopped by my house after work a couple of years ago and saw me consumed in the creative design process, working on a solution to a very challenging problem. Since my search for the perfect concealment garment for self-defense training and IDPA practical shooting competitions had yielded no acceptable results, I created a concealment vest designed specifically for women that would perform functionally for competitions and be attractive for everyday concealed carry. My ladies' vest would not look like a scouting vest. This goal launched me on an unexpected journey to transform women's range and concealed carry apparel.

With each iteration of the vest, Victoria stopped by after work to provide feedback, and on weekends, we tested my prototypes at our local club matches. Having over a decade of experience as a firearms instructor, range manager, and practical shooting sports competitor, Victoria wholeheartedly appreciated my frustration with the lack of choice in clothes for women designed to accommodate range gear.

Her current IDPA competition gear included an Adirondack-style utility vest that her mom found at a fashion boutique. Although she liked the look of this classical vest, it wasn't designed for concealment or competition and slowed her down. Flimsy, unstructured fabric bunched up when she motioned to draw from the holster. Inside facings and pocket linings were not tacked down and could potentially interfere with her equipment. It was too short, and Victoria had to stand awkwardly to keep her holster from peeping out the bottom during the equipment check. The front pockets had flaps that impeded access, and she needed to remove the waist drawstring. Her vest was super cute, but these shortcomings significantly impacted her time in practical shooting sports and self-defense situations, where tenths of a second count.

"Oh, I've never won a match," she told me while preparing for the annual International Defensive Pistol Association (IDPA) specialty ladies' match, The Southern Belle 2022 IDPA Championship in Mississippi. I knew it didn't have to be this way. I felt I had a unique combination of talents to solve this problem. By combining my knowledge of

garment construction and my firsthand experience in shooting sports, I set out to design apparel specifically for women with the desired performance features that would also look great both on and off the range. My inspiration for the style of the first Make Ready Range Wear ladies' concealment vest came from Victoria's original boutique vest. I offered Victoria my prototype vest to compete in the Southern Belle IDPA match.

She immediately noticed improvements from her original vest. The prototype vest's structure and tacked-down facings eliminated potential hang-ups. Easy-access pockets helped facilitate faster tactical reloads. She moved more efficiently and focused on her stage plan. The fantastic result was when she competed in my prototype vest: Victoria won 1st place in Stock Service Pistol Marksman and earned her first match bump to Sharpshooter!

This was the confirmation I was looking for. It wasn't about creating a fashionable vest. This was about my desire to help women reach their potential in a sport we love! Encouraged by successful testing, positive feedback from

competitive practical shooters, and Victoria's match bump, I decided to take this design to production.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES TO LAUNCH MAKE READY RANGE WEAR

Navigating the apparel industry was new territory for me. While I worked with a knowledgeable consultant to guide me, the early development phase of the vest was slow. The COVID-19 pandemic further delayed our progress, and virtual consultations made fittings difficult.

Later, when we sourced a new team, development ramped up quickly, which allowed us to work on multiple styles. I expanded my brand to include both range wear and concealed carry collections. Most of Make Ready Range Wear's signature styles are designed by me, developed in Austin, Texas, and manufactured in the Los Angeles Fashion District, the epicenter of American-made apparel.

CELEBRATING WOMEN THROUGH OUR DESIGNS

To celebrate women, our styles are named after real women who inspire others through their participation in shooting sports and the concealed carry lifestyle. In addition to naming our signature Victoria Concealment Vest after the very woman whose boutique IDPA vest inspired its creation, we've also introduced additional styles. The Mai Tactical Range Skirt is named



after Mai Phan, a multi-award-winning Top Lady Shooter of Old Eighteen Defense Run and Gun events. Mai is incredibly talented—she's a mother, international triathlete, architect, board member of a non-profit advocating for youths and first responders, boxing official, combat fighter, and former Ms. Texas beauty queen. She exemplifies the modern woman who balances multiple roles while excelling in her passions.

Another style, the Kelsey Moto Hoodie, is named after Kelsey Crouch, owner of She Stays Safe and Valor Defense Academy. We celebrate Kelsey's role as a mother, military spouse, entrepreneur, firearms instructor, speaker, multi-gun competitor, and a dedicated advocate for women's safety. Her commitment to educating and supporting women aligns with the mission of Make Ready Range Wear. In addition to being accomplished with firearms, these women are ladies with diverse interests and talents who embody the spirit of well-rounded women.

EXPANDING BEYOND THE RANGE: EVERYDAY CONCEALED CARRY APPAREL

Understanding that women need apparel that seamlessly fits into their everyday lives, I expanded my vision beyond range wear to include styles dedicated to concealed carry. My everyday carry designs can be used to build a capsule wardrobe. This includes styles that can be dressed up or down to fit effortlessly into work or social outings while helping to minimize printing so women can conceal carry on their person.

GETTING BEAT BY MY OWN GEAR

Two years after Victoria's success with my prototype at the ladies' match, women competing in IDPA with Make Ready Range Wear's ladies' concealment vest are experiencing similar success. At the 2024 Southern Belle IDPA Championship, Vickie Jennings won Carry Optics Division Champion, High Senior, and 1st Place Carry Optics Sharpshooter with a coveted match bump to Expert. This was particularly awesome because I, too, competed in Carry Optics at this match and got beat by my own gear!

Both of these ladies earned their match bumps, and their accomplishments are a testament to their skill and dedication. I'm proud that Make Ready Range Wear's design contributed to their success.



HOW I GOT HERE

My husband introduced me to firearms when we were first married. He wanted me educated, so he urged me to take the concealed carry weapon class and obtain my permit. I succeeded in obtaining my permit. However, I didn't have any interest in shooting until fifteen years later when he was recalled on a long military deployment, and it struck me that I alone was responsible for defending my kids and home.

By joining women's shooting clubs, including The Well Armed Woman and A Girl and A Gun, I gained the support and access to training classes that sparked my interest in shooting sports. As my participation in practical shooting sports increased, I became a certified IDPA Safety Officer and USPSA Range Officer and volunteered to work sanctioned matches. I also trained with world-class instructors and pursued certifications as a firearms instructor and coach.

I'm enthusiastic about shooting sports because the sport has transformed my life. What has drawn me to shooting sports is the positive mindset and discipline required to succeed, and the camaraderie of the competitors when we spend our weekend mornings shooting matches together. Putting into practice the mindset framework that many elite shooters use has helped me be more positive in every aspect of my life. I intend to pass on the joy of shooting sports to others, hoping they will gain confidence, success, and new friendships.



A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

My goal is to ease the challenges women face in finding competitive shooting apparel designed for their needs. Through my experience in practical shooting sports and self-defense training, I have built up my brand based on the understanding that when ladies step onto the range, it's about embodying confidence and precision. My vision is to create a range of practical apparel that allows women to achieve their peak performance.

I launched Make Ready Range Wear for women just like you. As the women who earned their first match bumps competing in the Victoria Concealment Vest experienced, Make Ready Range Wear's designs allow you to compete unhindered, so you'll never find a drawstring or covered pocket in our line. Whether you're a beginner or a seasoned vet, I want you to hit your next personal best, ensuring you feel unstoppable in competition and in your everyday life. ■

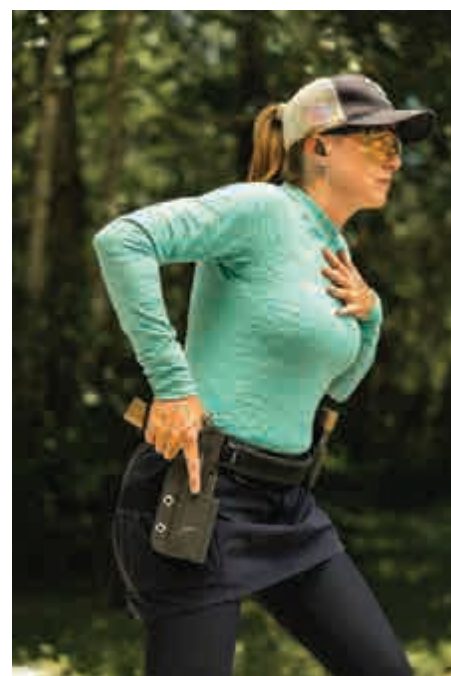
Shop at makereadyrangewear.com



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[makereadyrw](http://makereadyrw.com)



Inde Carry Concealed Carry Bag

BY MELONIE KENNEDY
PHOTOS PROVIDED BY INDE

www.indecarry.com

Are you an off-body carry girl searching for a bag that works with various outfits and isn't covered in MOLLE attachments and other tactical add-ons? If so, it's time to take a look at the INDE-CARRY bags.

Brand new this year, the INDE Bag and INDE QuickBag are sleek, streamlined bags that can carry a subcompact handgun and life's essentials. The Original INDE bag offers a double zipper that allows the user to set up a simple and quiet draw. The QuickBag™ version features Velcro panels that hold the carry section closed, allowing fast (albeit louder) access to the handgun.

After testing both models, I found myself at a loss for choosing a clear winner. Each access method has pros and cons, but both bags offer all the same benefits: they are lightweight, sturdy, and have easy-to-adjust straps to take the bag from crossbody to waist pack in an instant. Mesh pockets in the front cargo space hold ID, CCW, various other cards, a spare magazine, and a larger interior pocket that fits other incidentals such as feminine hygiene and a booboo kit. A

quick-clip key attachment and double zippers for easy access complete the front pocket. On the belly side of the bag, a zippered phone/passport pocket adds security during daily use and travel, whether you're carrying or not.

With INDE's discrete logo, you'll blend right in with the Lulu crowd, whether you're hitting the gym, running errands, or heading to work. A custom holster is available in a bag bundle, or you can sub in your own Velcro-backed holster, such as a Crossbreed Modular option. The INDE bags even fit my TASER Pulse+ device perfectly, which can be difficult with other packs and purses due to the thickness of the device.

At the time of this writing, INDE_CARRY is testing a version for larger handguns, so don't fret if you're not into subcompact models! Keep an eye on their website, especially if you're making a gift list and checking it twice; you might find an INDE bag is very nice! ■

MSRP: Bag: \$59

Holster: \$59

Bundles available starting at \$109





PHOTOS PROVIDED BY SARAH LANG

Dancing, cartwheels, and tumbling—I can’t remember a time when I wasn’t in a dance or gymnastics class. My mom says I started dance classes when I was 3, then switched to gymnastics at age 5, but I don’t remember anything besides tumbling and loving it. All of that was interrupted when my family relocated to Texas when I was in third grade. Once we settled into our new home, I started youth sideline cheer with Dragon Youth Cheer in Southlake, Texas. I knew nothing about football but loved the uniform and shiny pom poms! The following year, I also started competitive cheer. It was the perfect combination of tumbling mixed with dance.

I was introduced to shooting at a young age. My family has a hazelnut farm in Eugene, Oregon, so I’ve watched my dad and Grandpa Ted shoot for sport and necessity for years. I eventually became a “gun owner” with the purchase of a pink BB handgun when I was 10. I loved shooting spinning targets and cans set up on hay barrels, mainly when I shot better than my two older brothers. Shooting BB guns became one of the things I looked forward to when we would visit the farm each summer.

So, how did a competitive cheerleader start shooting? Like most in the community, my family attended the Homecoming Parade in Southlake Town Square every year. The parade comprises the Southlake Carroll Band, the Emerald Belles, cheerleaders, the Rodeo Team on horseback, and floats carrying various sports and clubs. As I

watched one particular float go by, I asked my mom what it was. I couldn’t figure it out by looking at the team or how it was decorated. She explained that it was the target team, “*The school*

has a team that shoots clay targets like that thing daddy does at the farm.” I quickly said, “*OH! I want to do that.*” My mom remembers smiling and saying she’d look into it. As promised, my mom



researched and discovered that the team started training kids in the 7th grade. A few years later, when I became old enough, she checked back in with me and asked if I still wanted to be part of the shooting team. My dad took me to the interest meeting, and as we walked in, I saw Lizzie Garcia, now part of the University of Texas at Austin Trap and Skeet team. I remember being inspired and relieved by another girl on the team. I joined the team that night.

You must understand that being an Elite Cheerleader is a significant time commitment. I would typically be in the cheer gym 3 to 4 times a week, traveling in and out of state for

competitions. This left little time to practice shooting, although I did attend almost all of the target team practices each week. However, as the year went on, I hadn’t competed in a single tournament. In the Spring, Coach Kyle Mohon pulled me aside to encourage me to attend one of the season’s final tournaments at Greystone Castle Sporting Club in Mingus, TX. I agreed, and my dad quickly registered me, probably before I changed my mind. Like most Saturdays, I had mandatory cheer practice, so after I shot the course, we immediately got in the car and drove to the cheer gym for over an hour. Later that day, I found out I won 2nd place and was

hooked! I continued Elite Cheer during my eighth-grade year and practiced shooting as much as possible with my dad. This left me little free time, but I was determined to learn and improve. I started to attend more shooting tournaments that year whenever I didn’t have a cheer practice or competition, and as expected, I began to improve. I participated in the San Antonio SCTP Texas State tournament that year, winning several individual and squad awards. Reflecting after the season, it became clear that my passion for shooting was stronger than cheer, so I decided to give up competitive cheer to focus on competitive shooting. Looking back, this was the best decision I have ever made.

The 2023-2024 season was the first opportunity I had to participate in both SCTP and TX YESS scholastic tournaments, and I competed in every one of them! It was a tremendous first year filled with accomplishments—varsity lettered in sporting clays, skeet, and trap; had 51 podium finishes of 3rd place or better, ten league HOA/HAA awards, won the Buckle Race for TX SCTP and TX YESS, and became the top lady athlete on my team and 5th overall. I traveled to the National Shooting Complex in San Antonio to compete in the TX SCTP State and TX YESS National tournaments. I was fortunate to win several individual awards and champion titles—something that third-grade me never could have imagined.

When I first started training with my high school team in seventh grade, it was very intimidating to get into the sport because there was so much to learn and no one to guide me. The leaders were much older than me, and the number of girls was limited. That all intimidated me and left me to figure out things independently with my parents in the same boat, which could have been a lot easier having someone reach out. It took me a while to grasp and commit to the sport, but my biggest regret is not diving in headfirst; having leadership could’ve made all the difference. That’s what created my motivation to be the leader that I needed.

Having so few girls in the sport, I want to encourage new shooters, but more specifically, I want to be a leader to the girl I used to be. With the large number of girls that joined the team this season, I decided to apply for a team leadership role, an important goal. I was declined a leadership role. Instead, only boys were selected. Initially, I stepped back from the team, feeling



unsettled and lost. This was new territory for me; I had competed in every available scholastic shoot during the prior season. But, with the break from my team, I received encouragement from various people and outside coaches and discovered NSCA (National Sporting Clays Association) events. I have just started competing in those, but they have become my favorite. I will continue competing in scholastic tournaments, but I know where my heart truly is. Not being chosen emphasized that not having the leadership title doesn't mean I'm any less of a leader. Without the official leadership title, my goal for the year is to continue growing in the NSCA world and help lead other girls, especially those new to the sport. This year taught me that you never know where life will take you, and you must accept every opportunity that comes your way!

With only ever competing in scholastic tournaments until the beginning of this season, shooting my first NSCA shoot was a big adjustment. NSCA allows people of all ages to shoot sporting clays, while scholastic is for middle and high schoolers. So, NSCA sets targets with more difficulty because of the wide range of participants. In October, I traveled to San Antonio to compete in my fifth NSCA event and first NSCA National Championships. It was one of the most fun tournaments I've ever been to. That tournament was full of targets I had never seen before, making it challenging and exciting. Each station was new, like a fun puzzle to solve.

Having the support of friends and family by my side also made this shoot so memorable. The unique atmosphere of Nationals has fueled my passion for exploring new presentations, courses, and experiences and sparked my love for shooting sporting clays.

As I plan for my junior year of high school, I hope to commit to a top university with a solid shotgun program. I would like to continue to excel academically and in shooting sports. Finding a school with a great coach and a supportive team that offers growth in the classroom and on the shooting range would be a dream come true. ■

Sarah Lang competes with the Southlake Carroll Target Team at Carroll High School in Southlake, Texas. She is a sophomore, graduating class of 2027. She is also a member of the National Charity League and the Southlake Carroll Junior Varsity Cheer team. Sarah trains at the Dallas Gun Club, Fort Worth Trap and Skeet, Northlake Shooting Sports, and Defender Outdoors Clay Sports Ranch.



2024 Accomplishments:
TEXAS SCTP:

2024 SCTP State HOA Champion (Runner-up)
2024 SCTP State Champion – Sporting Clays
2024 SCTP State Champion – Trap Doubles
2024 SCTP DFW Regional HAA Champion
2024 SCTP DFW Regional Champion – Skeet

TEXAS YESS:

2024 YESS National Ladies HAA Champion – 3rd Place
2024 YESS National Champion – Trap Doubles
2024 YESS State HAA Champion

2024 YESS State HOA Champion
2024 YESS State Champion – Skeet

NSCA tournament:

1st Place – Sporting Overall Winner, class
3rd Place Super Sporting Overall Winner, class

NSCA Nationals Championships:

1st Place – First-time Attendee Ladies, Main Course
2nd Place – Sub-Junior Lady, class
3rd Place – Lady

Find her on Instagram @sarahlangclayshooting.
For inquiries, contact Wendy Lang at
oc2dfw@gmail.com



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shootingsports.hillsdale.edu

JOHN A. HALTER SHOOTING SPORTS EDUCATION CENTER HILLSDALE COLLEGE

Enjoy year-round shooting at a premier destination!

Through the Halter Shooting Sports Education Center, Hillsdale College promotes the responsible and disciplined use of firearms in shooting sports for all ages by teaching fundamental safety and marksmanship; trains youth and collegiate athletes to compete at the highest levels; fosters intelligent patriotism, self-governance, and citizenship through teaching the U.S. Constitution; and supports American shooting sport success on the world stage in partnership with USA Shooting.

The Halter Center boasts a 23-station Sporting Clays Course, 5 Bunker Fields, 4 Skeet Fields, the outdoor Ailes Action Shooting Range, archery range, and casual dining. Construction began in Spring 2024 on an International indoor 25-meter archery range, which will also contain

a 10-meter Olympic air pistol/rifle range and an outdoor 50-meter rifle and pistol range.

Hillsdale College is a small, Christian, classical liberal arts college in southern Michigan that operates independently of government funding. Our students come from all 50 states and 14 foreign countries and are drawn to the challenge of a Hillsdale education; they grow in heart and mind by studying timeless truths in a supportive community dedicated to the highest things.

For 180 years, Hillsdale College has promoted “the diffusion of sound learning” as the best means of preserving “the blessings of civil and religious liberty and intellectual piety.”
Visit hillsdale.edu for more information.

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JOHN A. HALTER
SHOOTING SPORTS
EDUCATION CENTER

Luxury Cottage Rentals

A cozy home away from home, the cottages have been built with the generous gifts of friends and supporters of Hillsdale College to host guests at shooting competitions and those looking for on-site lodging while visiting the Halter Center.

Each cottage features four individual bedrooms with private bathrooms and entrances. So whether you're a couple needing one room or a large group needing to house many people, the cottages provide an excellent solution.

Quality Amenities and Convenient Location

- Fresh linens and towels
- High-speed wireless internet
- In-room Keurig machines and refrigerators
- Walking distance from our ranges and a 10-minute drive from the main campus
- Quiet and secluded

Reservation Information

- Check available dates at haltercottages.lodgify.com and submit a request to book.
- Our team will review all requests to ensure availability.
- Once reviewed and approved, you will receive an email with a payment quote.
- When payment is made, you will receive email instructions for arrival, entry, and departure.

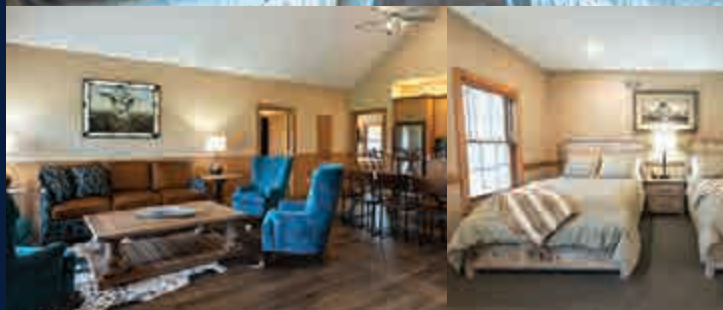
Email haltercottages@hillsdale.edu with any questions.

Additional Information

In 2019, Hillsdale College became the official home of the USA Shooting National Team. Through this partnership, the Halter Center serves as host for the Junior Nationals in rifle, both Junior and Senior Nationals in International Skeet and Trap, International Paralympic Grand Prix events, Olympic training camps, Junior World training camps, and Junior Olympic Development Camps. The National Team trains at the Halter Center for the Olympics and other national and international competitions.



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HILLSDALE COLLEGE



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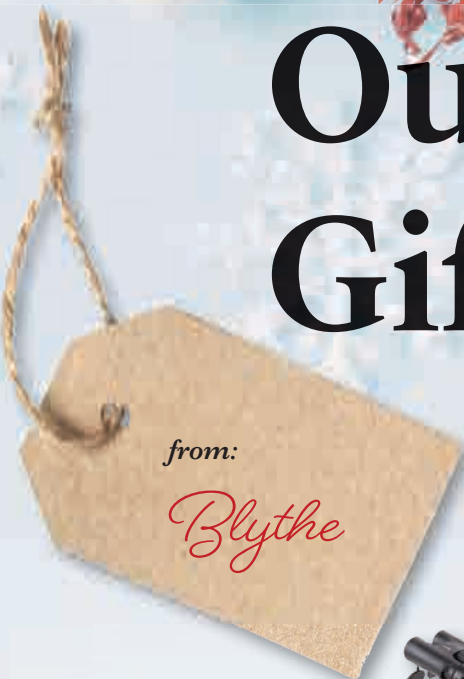
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BRILEY.COM ■ 1-800-331-5718



Our Top 5 (or so) Gift Ideas

OUR CONTRIBUTORS GENEROUSLY SHARE THEIR TOP PICKS



1. BINOCULAR PHONE MOUNT - For quick and clear snapshots in the field.

2. CHIPPEWAS - These snake proof/water resistant boots will last you a lifetime and are a must when walking through tall grass and muddy areas where unwanted visitors may lurk.

3. DUCKWORTH THERMALS - My go too for good hunting basics that will keep you warm during those colder mornings.



4. GUNNER KENNEL - Perfect for your four legged hunting companion. Gunner kennels are the best made on the market with both durability and the dog's wellbeing in mind.

5. YETI PANGA LINE - Any item from this Yeti line is ideal for a traveling hunter who wants to



protect their gear from the elements and invest in quality pieces.

6. RIDGE BELT - My favorite all around belt for hunting with customizable at home sizing and a durable material that will hold up through all your adventures.



1. SYREN L4S ELEVATE - because every lady needs a best friend.

2. NEGRINI COMPACT CASE - to keep your bestfriend safe while traveling.

3. TEXAS WOMEN'S OUTDOOR BASE CAMP MEMBERSHIP - to get discounts on adventures and free Zoom education.

4. HERUPLAND MEMBERSHIP - to learn all things upland hunting from an amazing community of women.

5. SITKA AMBIENT JACKET - lightweight, packable, quiet, and warm! The best part is the jacket does not get in the way of a shotgun.

6. LADYSHOOTER LIFESTYLES SUBSCRIPTION - because who doesn't need a guide to leaving your best LadyShooter LifeStyle!



1. **STAINLESS STEEL SKILLET** - a high-quality stainless steel skillet is a kitchen workhorse. Unlike nonstick pans, it can handle high heat, making it ideal for searing meats, achieving a good crust, and creating pan sauces. Durable and scratch-resistant, this skillet will last for years with proper care. \$30-\$60

2. **CHEF'S KNIFE** - an 8-inch chef's knife is essential for almost every kitchen task, from slicing and dicing to chopping and mincing. A well-balanced, quality chef's knife makes food prep faster and more enjoyable. \$40-\$70

3. **CUTTING BOARD** - a sturdy cutting board is essential for protecting both your knives and your countertops. Wood is particularly gentle on

knives, while plastic options are easy to sanitize. If you opt for plastic and plan to wash it in the dishwasher, be prepared to replace it every couple of years or when it starts to put off an odor, as high-temp dishwashing can break it down over time, \$15-\$30

4. **INSTANT-READ THERMOMETER** - for perfect meat, poultry, candy-making, or baking, an instant-read thermometer is a game changer. A digital model is fast and accurate, giving you peace of mind in every dish. \$10-\$25

5. **MICROPLANE ZESTER** - a microplane zester is a small but mighty tool, perfect for adding zest, garlic, ginger, or cheese to dishes. It lets you add a sprinkle of flavor, elevating even simple dishes to new heights. \$12-\$20

6. **SILICONE UTENSIL TOOL SET** - a good silicone kitchen tool set will last you a long time. Silicone is easy to clean, non porous, heat resistant, and will not scratch your pans. \$35-50

7. **ROTARY GRATER** - a rotary grater is a kitchen tool that can be used to grate & slice cheese and vegetables more efficiently and safely than a traditional grater. \$30-50



1. **UPLULA MAG LOADER** - loading mags is really hard for many women due to hand strength- this makes it so much easier and faster!

2. **SIG SAUER FOX TROT EDC FULL SIZE TACTICAL FLASHLIGHT** - this self defense tool is the most underrated option- not only does it light up your surroundings, the super bright light can temporarily blind an attacker providing valuable space and time to escape.



3. **HARD CORE HAIRSTICKS PENCIL TRAITOR** - it looks exactly like a pencil, but would work like an incredibly strong shiv. I carry it everywhere- because it doesn't look like a knife, and isn't metal, it goes completely undetected. hardcorehairsticks.com

4. **TENET CO MASCARA SHIV** - this is another completely concealed and unassuming weapon. For those of us that accidentally flashing a knife or

gun from our purse in public is completely inappropriate- this is a subtle self defense tool that is also very affordable. tenetco knives.com

5. Another new item I love is the **SABRE SAFETY GLOW IN THE DARK PEPPER SPRAY**. It attaches to your keychain, and glows brightly in the dark- no more trying to find it in your dark purse or car - it's easy to get your hand on in a crisis.

6. **EWOK CONCEALED CARRY PACK**- one reason I love the Outback XL? It's big enough for my CCW AND my wallet/keys and other EDC essentials. paladin33.com



1. CUSTOM SHOTGUN CASE
2. BOSS BISMUTH SHELLS
3. BERETTA A400 XTREME
4. SITKA HUDSON JACKET- keeps you warm, dry and camouflaged perfectly with plenty of storage for snacks.
5. SITKA WADERS- again warm and dry!
6. GARMIN PRO SPORT COLLAR



- Cue Julie Andrews, because “these are a few of my favorite things!”
1. ZENDIRA FRIDAY BAG IN CAFE CON LECHE
 2. ALEXO ATHLETICA MATTE 7/8 CARRY LEGGING
 3. S3 RANGE CARTS: RANGE CART 3.0
 4. MANTISX DRY FIRE TRAINING SYSTEM
 5. DANIEL DEFENSE DDM4 V7 AR-15
 6. ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP TO LOCAL RANGE OR WOMEN’S TRAINING ORGANIZATION
 7. GUN TOTE’N MAMAS BACKPACK SLING BAG

My preferred off body carry options are the bags in the Zendira Friday collection. Available in three sizes, the Friday crossbody bag is offered in a variety of luxe leather options, a resort-ready canvas line, and a nylon Active line. Each Friday includes a trigger guard custom made for your carry pistol, and holsters are available for the Full Size and Active models if you prefer that option. I’ve been thrilled with each purchase I’ve made from Zendira, and you can’t go wrong gifting one to yourself or someone else!

Another good option is the Gun Tote’n Mamas backpack sling bag. This is my go-to when I need room for more items, as it is more structured and easier to organize and compartmentalize my belongings. I’ve used my GTM sling bag as a day pack around the city, and have seen ladies use it as a diaper bag with older toddlers. Available in two colors for each size, I have personally found the distressed buffalo color to be the best all-purpose option.



from:
Natalia

from:
Sharon

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1. CUSTOM UPLAND BESPOKE VEST - why not be fashionable in the field!

2. GIFT CARD TO CLAY SHOOTERS SUPPLY - a clay shooter's haven for anything you could need.

3. CUSTOM MOLDED SOUNDGEAR EAR PLUGS - we need to save our hearing and having quality PPE is a must.

4. PRIVATE LESSON WITH LOCAL FEMALE INSTRUCTOR - learning from another woman provides a relaxing inclusive environment.

5. CRAIG BALLARD AFRICAN GAME INDUSTRIES GIFT CARD

6. DITALE SOFIA ADVENTURE PANT 2.0 - having a comfortable, durable outdoor pant, that also fits is so important for the everyday woman.

1. DRAKE WATERFOWL HAND WARMER MUFFER - (currently on sale for \$29.99) Last January I spent a miserable morning in a duck blind freezing. Not gonna happen again.

2. RECHARGEABLE ELECTRIC SOCKS - (controlled by an App) so you can control the temperature of your feet. Same miserable January duck hunt influenced this choice.

3. UPLULA UNIVERSAL MAGAZINE SPEEDLOADER - (9mm to 45) for the handgun enthusiast who doesn't want sore thumbs every time they go to the range. This will actually work with a .380 as well. Available in different colors.

4. SNAP CAPS - I want to release the firing pins of my O/U when I put it away. I have snap caps I can load into my gun between uses that satisfy this purpose

6. RIM OIL WIPES - make a great stocking stuffer, throw them in your range bag for on the go protection of your firearm.

7. GAME SHEARS - a great set of game shears makes processing your harvest a lot easier. ■

HOW MUCH IS THAT PUPPY IN THE WINDOW?



WITH KENNEL OWNER AND TRAINER
LAUREN SANDER

Adding a dog or puppy to your life is an exciting adventure. A long-term commitment full of hard work but so much joy! Matching people with dogs that suit them is one of my biggest passions. Nothing is sweeter than bringing home a puppy you planned for, studied, and saved for and raising that pup into a once-in-a-lifetime partner, friend, and family member. As we all know, there are several ways to go about adding a dog to your family:



PURCHASING A PUPPY



PURCHASING A STARTED OR FINISHED DOG



ADOPTING A RESCUE DOG/PUPPY

In the working/sporting dog world, the first two options are the most popular for many reasons, in my opinion. When purchasing a puppy, you are able to research the line of dogs—their health history, accomplishments, trainability, personalities, looks, and overall demeanor. You tend to know what you are getting when purchasing a dog or puppy from a known line of dogs. There are, of course, dogs who will not live up to what their genetics show they should be, but for the most part, if you are going to have a working dog, you are money ahead and will have much less heartbreak if you spend the time and money upfront on quality genetics that meets YOUR needs. Purchasing a started-to-finished dog, meaning one who has started training or is ready to hunt, has even bigger perks as you know what the dog is capable of. However, you miss out on raising a puppy, which I thoroughly enjoy! For this article, I will focus on purchasing a puppy and things I like to look at when pairing a dog to breed or looking for a puppy to buy.

You may have heard the saying, “Purebred does not equal well-bred.” I couldn’t agree more. Just because you find a dog with papers does not mean anything, as you can paper a horribly bred dog, horse, or calf. I like for people to decide what they want in a new dog: color, sex, temperament, looks, strengths, weaknesses, natural abilities/ desires, size, hunting style, etc. Make a list in PEN, and do not cave just because you find something that “will work.” This is a HUGE



commitment, and you should get precisely what you want.

Once a list is made, I focus on several aspects: health testing/ lineage health history, meeting breed standards in size, color, and build, parents/ grandparents’ temperament and trainability, accomplishments/ performance level throughout the pedigree, parents’ strengths and weaknesses, current use of the sire/dam, if they (the sire/ dam) were a competition dog- how long did they compete and why did they stop.? As a breeder- I always want to pair my females with males who complement their strengths and have different weaknesses. Never be afraid to ask a breeder, *“What is this dog’s weakest point, or what would you change about ____?”*

HEALTH/ BREED STANDARD

Has the breeder completed the recommended health testing? (OFAs for hip and elbow dysplasia, dilute color screenings, genetic cardiovascular or neurological diseases, eye clearances... the list may continue depending on what breed you are looking at purchasing.)

Do the parents have allergies? Does cancer run in their bloodline? What caused the death of the dog’s great-grandparents/grandparents/ parents? How do the parents handle stress, traveling, and environmental change?

Are they breeding to meet breed standards? (For example- labradors do not come in champagne, charcoal, or silver but breed standard colors of Chocolate, Black, and Yellow,

varying from cream to red in appearance. Breeders of these “off” colors are lying on registration papers with the AKC, cannot register with the UKC, and are NOT bettering our breed. This is an ethics issue happening with many breeds and designer crosses)

Registration associations should also be considered. Most, but not all, well-bred dogs are represented through the AKC and sometimes with their own breed registration association—for example, my Jack Russell Terrier is through the JRTCA and then eligible with the AKC. Caution away from illegitimate registries.

Ensure your breeder is breeding purebred, well-bred dogs to better the gene pool and breed. Our world has PLENTY of accidental breedings and breedings “just because” or of “designer breeds” such as the ever-popular doodles. While I know so many and love several doodles owned by friends, in my opinion, this is an ethical/moral issue as there is no registration association setting standards to uphold and VERY few breeders health test and breed to better the population- if you desire this type of dog- find a well-bred poodle and cut its hair to look like a doodle, super easy fix. Sorry- I said it!

TEMPERAMENT AND TRAINABILITY

Consider and speak to the breeder about the parents/grandparents of this puppy. Do they love to train? Are they calm and quiet in the house? Are they anxious and wound up in the field? Do the dogs make logical decisions? Do they think



about the task in front of them? How do they handle stress? Are they calm enough for a kid to be around? Do they have an “off” switch, or does it always work? Are the parents a team player? Do they look to their humans for success or just hunt and work for themselves?

Many of these things can be taught, but knowing the genetic predisposition of such traits is essential when deciding. We are starting to see many breeds and bloodlines that are so accomplished but bred SO “hot” that the average amateur owner has difficulty finding success with this type of dog. Buy what suits YOU, and find balance.

Strengths and weaknesses—Ask the breeder about the sire and dam’s strengths and weaknesses. If they cannot tell me why they paired two dogs, this is a warning sign.

What accomplishments does the bloodline or parents have? Have these dogs shown a natural ability to hunt or work? Have they achieved any titles in their required areas, or does the owner have proof that they are working in the field? Can you watch the dogs work? Does the breeder intend to keep hunting and/or competing with the dog after whelping?

As an owner, trainer, dog enthusiast, and hopeful breeder, pending that my female took this last heat cycle, I am so passionate about matching people to their dream dogs, bettering the breed you love, being responsible, and making hard decisions when it is for the betterment of the breed, and holding other dog-lovers accountable to bringing balanced, great dogs into the world. I urge you to start researching your next dog now.

What breed, color, sex, and traits do you want them to have and why? Stand behind your decision, and do not stop until you find the perfect dog for you. Sometimes, this takes time- I waited for almost a year for my dream chocolate female, Ember. I wanted a chocolate female out of one specific sire (who was the son of a great friend’s female I knew and loved) paired with an accomplished but balanced family female. Ember is the dog of my dreams, and I am SO thankful I waited until I found the perfect puppy for me. Raising, training, competing with, and pairing her with a male who compliments her weaknesses and enhances her strengths have been a true joy!

When looking for a breeder, please research, try to find others who know this breeder, talk with them, and see who you get along with. I caution anyone away from any type of pet store, period. AKC has a breeder directory, and there are MANY Facebook pages. I can always help you research or look for a breeder or bloodline. People often post on social media pages looking for recommendations- this is a wonderful tool! Usually, you will find an owner like myself that just

has a litter here and there. Other times, you will find breeders with several accomplished females who have a few litters a year- both are great; just research and find what YOU are looking for. Ember’s breeder was AMAZING at answering my questions and was never hesitant to give me an honest answer. My Jack Russell Terrier’s breeder was the same and was a wealth of knowledge. Find a breeder who will help you and your new dog succeed, allowing their breeding program to succeed.

I look forward to your feedback, questions, and comments. I am continuing the conversation about purchasing started/finished dogs and tips for raising puppies! Feel free to find me on social media and message me anytime with any questions; it is a joy to help. ■





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Chief Upland Vest Review

WITH BRANDY ELROD

As a former professional shotgun competitor, I came from the world of custom-tailored vests. When I started taking upland hunting seriously, I struggled to find a vest that fit and stayed on my shoulders while also evenly distributing the weight. I have owned five different brands of upland vests and this vest fits more like one of my custom-tailored competition vests.

Chief Upland sent me their Over and Under vest in blaze and olive in a size small/medium. The accessories, all in pink and olive, included an ammo box, a water bottle pouch, a grab bag ammo pouch, and an electronics pouch. I specifically asked for the orange vest with pink accessories due to some states' public land hunting laws.

When I opened the box and started pulling the vest & accessories out, you could feel the durability. Even a friend who is not an upland hunter commented on how well it was made. The exterior of the vest is built with the same 1000 Denier CORDURA® used in tactical military gear. The vest is waterproof, so you can push through any weather. Even the inside of the bird bag is lined with abrasion-resistant and waterproof rip-stop grid fabric. All zippers are also sturdy and waterproof. As someone who has hunted in extreme weather conditions, you can tell your gear will be protected from the elements. The interior back and hips utilize vertically vented ribbed padding to offer comfort and breathability. As you add weight, you have the extra padding to keep your back safe.

The vest has a card with information on attaching accessories to the MOLLE system. Part of this card is a QR code with a video showing step-

by-step instructions. Watch the video! You may put your accessories on wrong, like I did. Putting the accessories on correctly does make the hold on the MOLLE system much more robust.

If you are looking for storage, this vest allows that. Create as much storage as you want by attaching anything you can think of to the MOLLE system. Anything you attach to this vest will adequately distribute the weight to your hips. I will be adding more accessories. When I hunt, I am out for 8-10 hours and like to be prepared for everything. Pockets for snacks, gun tools, a first aid kit, and a few survival items in case of an emergency are always in my vest. The MOLLE system also allows you to put the accessories wherever you like. As a lefty, this is huge! I have found most vests are set up for the right-handed world! I want to not only be able to grab my ammo but also my water bottle and snacks from the left side. Now I can! The extra storage option and the ability to place the accessories evenly across the vest make for a more pleasant hunt.

Adjustability is given in the waist, chest, and shoulder straps. The webbed internal waist belt features two routing locations – high or low, depending on

height. The chest straps can be moved up or down the chest, and they're fully removable if you use one chest strap instead of two, depending on your preferred fit and function. If you have been blessed in the chest, no worries; you can add the longer straps to give the girls some room. Another feature of the straps is velcro fasteners so you can roll up the extra and not be in the way. The straps connecting the shoulders to the waist are adjustable for length, but these straps can be moved front-to-back along the hips. This allows ultimate fit customization based on your hunting style and body type. This was a massive game-changer for me. As someone with an upper-body impairment, I always have issues with my vest not fitting on the right shoulder. One time, when I was in Italy being measured for a new USA vest, the seamstress stated: "il tuo corpo è incasinato," and I just replied Si. For one, I do not think she thought I spoke a little Italian, and 2, she made me laugh. I am always on the struggle bus when it comes to upper body fit and vest. With the adjustable straps of the Chief Upland vest, that problem is solved.

The game bag is enormous and is front-loading! The game bag has an internal gusset along the bottom, so it lays flat when empty, expands as you add more birds, and contracts back to flat when the bag is emptied. The rear quarters of the game bag also utilize an innovative and durable stretch mesh system to allow even more expansion as you add birds or even your dog if you have to pack them out due to an



injury. The adjustability of the game bag and its wrapping around the front allows you to load your birds from the front of the bag versus fishing blindly trying to put your birds into the back of the bag. I know it never fails. I drop the birds at least twice, then give up and take my vest off to put the birds in the game bag area.

The vest features a built-in vertical hydration bladder pouch complete with three hanging clips for holding a bladder to accommodate nearly any style of water bladder. The bladder is kept close to your center of gravity for the best ergonomics. A hidden opening at the top of your back allows you to pass the bladder hose up through and down either shoulder. Finally, the chest utilizes a movable (and removable if not needed) water hose clip to secure the mouthpiece quickly. This is



very important for me. I have never had a vest with a water bladder holder and the ability to route the hose from the back without creating my own system and many carabiners.

If you are looking for a vest that fits like a glove or, in my opinion, is more like a comfortable backpack, this vest is for you. Buying a Chief Upland vest, you purchase from a family that owns a small business that believes in their

product and spent a lot of time and research to create a product that is not only functional but will last. If you see me out in the wild, don't mind me looking like a Unicorn fart in my multi-colored vest; know it fits me and my personality.

This vest is Lady approved!

Shop: chiefupland.com



Orvis PRO Upland Hunting Vest

WITH
BLYTHE
BROOKS

Being a 5'2 petite woman, skepticism around well-fitting hunting gear comes with the game. Specifically with upland bird hunting, this sport demands durable, practical, and comfortable gear that can withstand various terrains, long distances, and quick adjustments. Before laying hands on the Orvis PRO Upland vest, I was prepared to make aftermarket alterations to achieve a proper fit. To my surprise, the level of customizability allowed

for a tailored fit right out of the box without any additional modifications. The fit is secure but is optimal for seasonal weather, with room for layered clothing. Being on the shorter side, I found the length of the Orvis vest to be a nonissue thanks to the adjustable shoulder straps. The pocket placement sits comfortably at mid-thigh when the straps are fully tightened, making easy access to shells and gear without having to reach for anything.

Maneuverability is a highly desired element of any practical shooting vest. In the field, I need to move quickly yet seamlessly for a proper gun mount to make an accurate shot of the bird. The PRO Upland vest strikes an outstanding balance, being tactile without feeling bulky. Even while offering ample storage compartments and a myriad of adjustable straps, nothing obstructs your movement when mounting the gun or maneuvering through terrain. This small detail

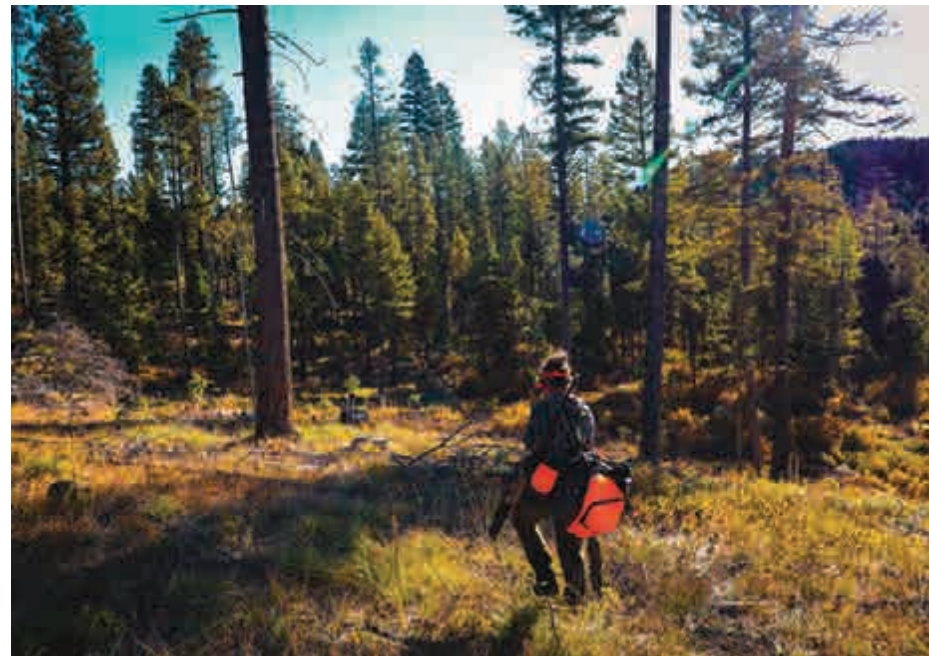
makes a world of difference and is suitable for right- and left-handed shooters.

This vest offers peak comfortability in the field. The full wrap-around straps provide excellent weight distribution, relieving shoulder strain by evenly distributing the load across your hips. This vest is durable and practical without weighing you down or putting unwanted tension on your body. After hours of wear, the Orvis vest feels as light as it did when I put it on, even with added gear and birds. I appreciated the breathable material with mesh back and side panels to prevent overheating on those hotter days. It is designed for all-day wear with 35 liters of storage, cushioned shoulder pads, and quick-adjust straps on the shoulders and sternum, making it perfect for those long trips—so pack in the snacks and go hunt!

The PRO Upland vest is very reasonably priced for the quality you receive. It allows for an easy cleanup after a day out in the field. You can take a water hose to it and not think twice. Both the vest and game bag have quick-release clips to simplify cleaning even more. Despite multiple washes and continuous days of wear, the durability shines through. The adaptive fit accommodates a wide range of body types with S/M and M/L sizes available and demonstrates thoughtful design through detail.

The Orvis PRO Upland vest is not only an upland hunter's best friend but a staple for any outdoors woman who values high-quality gear. There is no compromise, just ample possibilities that accommodate each hunter's individual wants and needs. It is truly everything you would desire when planning your next bird hunt and is at the top of my list for upland vests.

Shop at: orvis.com



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As we head into the hustle and bustle of the holidays each year, a large number of people bring up how stressful the season is. If you're in that contingent, you're not alone! According to one survey, over 85% of adult respondents referred to the holiday season (the period from the beginning of November until the New Year) as "the most stressful time of the year." Some stress in our lives is just part of life — but the holidays tend to add more to our mental load, task list, and calendars. If just thinking about the holiday season stresses you out, remember that there are ways to make it through, and quite a few of them translate to skill-building in shooting sports!

Let's take a look at a few of the coping mechanisms frequently suggested for tackling stress and how they carry over to success on the range and in the field.

GET OUTSIDE DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS:

With fewer hours of daylight during the winter holidays, it's easy for many folks to start feeling

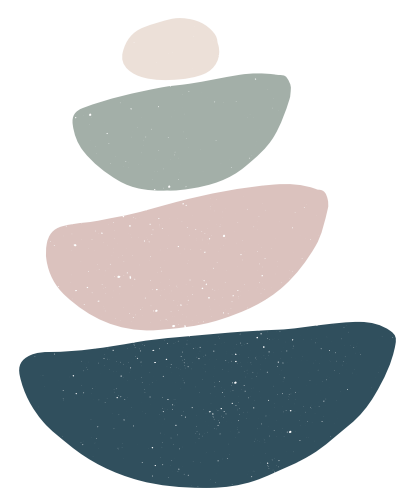
down. This is particularly evident for those who are faced with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD); seasonal depression waxes as daylight wanes. Suggestions to battle SAD include participating in outdoor activities during daylight hours — and what better way for us gun gals to opt outside than to hit the range, scout for deer, or enjoy a cup of cocoa on the back porch? You can even go Scandinavian: hit the mountains to try your hand at biathlon (cross-country skiing plus rifle shooting) and then get cozy in front of the fire in the ski lodge. So hygge!

SEEK CONNECTION:

If you feel lonely during the holidays, remember that someone you love probably feels the same way. Make the time to reach out to a friend to chat and give and receive support. This can be as simple as a quick text or email, but it could work wonders. Haven't seen your range best friend in a while? Invite her to grab her range bag and a box of ammo and grab a quick plinking session! No drills, no in-depth training; just get some rounds downrange and have a good time!

HONOR YOUR BOUNDARIES:

Are you feeling TOO connected to others after a multitude of holiday events? Schedule in downtime before and after them, and feel free to politely decline invitations that you know will run down your social battery. Planning for time off is healthy, and more folks realize that. (They may



WELLNESS

even appreciate you leading the way!) If you're normally out of the house every weekend for competitions and training clinics, perhaps it's time to clear your calendar and not hit the range. No one will judge you for curling up with a fluffy blanket and snagging new gear on the holiday sales while taking a break from matches.

FOCUS ON YOUR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH:

Find yourself indulging in treats a bit more during the holidays? Instead of wallowing in guilt, acknowledge that this may happen and add in a wee positive habit tied to each splurge. A short walk post-dessert, a glass of water between each glass of wine, or a few stretches during commercials on big game days can go a long way. When you do have time to squeeze in a round of traps, you'll still be hydrated and feeling fine.

REMEMBER TO BREATHE:

Breathwork is a fantastic way to reduce stress and increase mindfulness during stressful seasons. Precision shooters can attest that breath control goes a long way toward getting rounds on target. Some great options to research are box breathing and the 4-7-8 breathing method. Look them up online or contact your local yoga studio to find a breathwork teacher. Not only will you lower stress levels during the holidays and positively boost your heart health, but you'll also be able to experiment with how your breathing affects your



shooting. (Bonus points if you're a hunter: breathwork can help a great deal with managing the adrenaline rush that comes from the thrill of the hunt!)

SCHEDULE IN SELF-CARE:

Make a list of ways to give yourself a boost, such as a meditation session, a face massage, listening to a guided meditation on an app like InsightTimer, journaling or coloring. You can go out for services if your schedule and budget allow, but many can be done right at home. You can even schedule a "spa day" for yourself and the grungiest of your guns; get your favorite cleaning products out and clean the firearms, then relish that sense of accomplishment while you do a quick home manicure. It will be the perfect way to get you both refreshed for the New Year!

Just recognizing that the holidays can be more stressful than other times of the year immediately puts us on the path to finding ways to move

through the season in a healthy way. Whether you channel your inner winter huntress on the slopes or afield or just snuggle in for a quiet holiday, you're sure to better weather the season's busyness by experimenting with this list. Maybe you'll find something to help you make the most of 2025 as well! ■

Melonie Kennedy is an author, certified firearms instructor, and trauma-informed yoga & breathwork instructor. Find her online at taprac.app/meloniek





Empowering Women in Shooting Sports:

THE JOURNEY OF CLAYS FOR LADIES AND GREATER LADIES
WITH EDITOR **BRANDY ELROD**

Photos by: Kayla Lamberg and provided by: Greater Ladies

Shooting sports have traditionally been male-dominated, but a transformative movement has emerged, paving the way for women to engage, learn, and thrive in this exciting domain. Among the standout initiatives are Clays for Ladies and Greater Ladies, designed to foster community, skill development, and a love for shooting among women.

THE ORIGIN OF CLAYS FOR LADIES

Launched in March 2016, Clays for Ladies set out with a clear mission: to create a supportive and enjoyable space for women to come together for a day of shooting. This tournament was not just for seasoned shooters; it welcomed ladies from all walks of life, irrespective of their skill levels. The inaugural event saw 17 novice shooters and 66 main event competitors—an impressive turnout demonstrating the demand for such an inclusive gathering.

One of the unique features of the tournament is the Lewis class, which allows participants to compete on a more level playing field by being grouped according to their scores. This system encourages a broader range of participants, ensuring everyone can walk away with an award, regardless of their experience.

A DAY OF FUN AND LEARNING

What truly sets Clays for Ladies apart is its multifaceted approach to the shooting experience. The event now boasts three different shooting experiences, catering to all skill levels. For novices, the mini-course, led by experienced instructors, provides essential techniques and confidence-

building exercises. In response to participant feedback, a new 50-bird main event, alongside the established 100-bird course, has been added, enabling less frequent shooters to join their more seasoned friends in a supportive environment.

After shooting, attendees are encouraged to network and shop from local vendors, fostering connections and camaraderie among participants. Each year, the event evolves, continually embracing new ideas to enhance the experience for everyone involved.

THE BIRTH OF GREATER LADIES

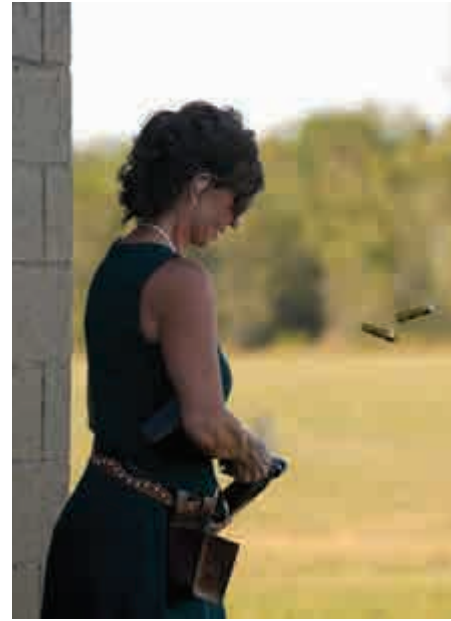
The Greater Ladies initiative began in 2020 when several club members sought to create a distinctive identity for their group while

participating in tournaments. This led to the birth of a logo that represented their shared passion for shooting sports. By September 2021, the group established the Greater Ladies Advisory Board (GLAB) to provide more structure and organization to their events. The creation of GLAB has resulted in increased participation and engagement, empowering ladies through structured mentorship and support.

A MISSION TO INSPIRE

At the heart of the Greater Ladies movement is a mission to inspire women to dive into the world of shooting sports, create new friendships, and develop their skills in a welcoming environment. Membership is open to any lady who belongs to





and a sumptuous steak dinner. This whimsical event adds flair and exemplifies the Greater Ladies group's inclusive and joyful spirit.

A SAFE SPACE FOR GROWTH

Clays for Ladies and Greater Ladies are unique because they are committed to creating a haven for women exploring shooting sports. The diversity within the group enriches the experience, allowing newer shooters to seek guidance from experienced peers. This support network encourages women to embrace their identities as shooters, helping them gain confidence and pride in their skills.

The continued mission of these initiatives is clear: to unite women from various backgrounds in an exhilarating sport, nurturing their growth and expanding the reach of women's shooting sports. ■



IT'S A HOLLY JOLLY HOLIDAY!

It's hard to believe the holidays are here! Between the holiday hustle and the usual December chaos, it's easy to feel stretched a little thin. Aside from that, the holidays are my favorite time of the year; it's the perfect excuse to spend a bit more time in the kitchen, trying out new recipes that are as cozy as they are unique. I'm bringing warmth and creativity to your holiday table this holiday season—and mine. My Roman-style butternut Squash Gnocchi with Nilgai Brown Butter Sage Sauce is exactly what you need.

This gnocchi is inspired by the classic Roman version, gnocchi alla romana, which differs from the potato gnocchi you might know. It's made with semolina flour and comes together much simpler—no need for rolling or shaping. With the added seasonal twist of butternut squash, a sage brown butter sauce, and a touch of bone marrow, this dish is packed with flavor and perfect for holiday gatherings.

WHAT MAKES ROMAN GNOCCHI SO EASY?

Unlike potato gnocchi, Roman-style gnocchi is custard-like, which means it holds together beautifully without much fuss. Traditionally, it's made with milk and semolina, but I swapped the milk for butternut squash puree and chicken stock to give it a festive, earthy sweetness. To make things even easier, I shaped the dough into a tube using cellophane and let it chill in the freezer. Once set, you have to slice it into rounds, bake, and serve!

GOING WILD WITH BONE MARROW

To top it all off, I went a little wild (literally!) by adding Nilgai bone marrow to the sage brown



Shore Off Like a Chefwith Holly Hearn

butter sauce. Bone marrow is incredibly rich and buttery, with a depth of flavor that elevates the sauce to something extraordinary. I used Nilgai marrow because that's what I had on hand, but any bone marrow will work. Combined with fragrant sage and nutty brown butter, this sauce is holiday magic.

THE FINISHING TOUCHES

Finally, a sprinkle of blanched kale, chopped



walnuts, and tart cranberries adds color, texture, and brightness to the dish. Blanching the kale keeps it vibrant and tender, while cranberries add a sweet-tart contrast, and the walnuts complement the nuttiness of the brown butter while adding beautiful texture. Together, they bring a pop of festive color and a touch of freshness to every bite.

ROMAN-STYLE BUTTERNUT SQUASH GNOCCHI

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup butternut squash puree
- 1 1/2 cups chicken stock
- 1 cup semolina flour
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 egg yolks
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare the Squash Base:

Combine butternut squash puree and chicken stock in a saucepan. Bring to a simmer over medium heat.

2. Make the Gnocchi Mixture:

Gradually whisk in the semolina flour, stirring constantly until thickened (about 5 minutes). Remove from heat, then mix in Parmesan, egg yolks, salt, and pepper.

3. Shape the Gnocchi:

Spoon the mixture onto cellophane and roll it into a tube about 3 inches in diameter. Twist the ends to seal and transfer to the freezer for 30 minutes until firm.

4. Slice and Bake:

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Unwrap the chilled gnocchi roll, slice into 3/4-inch rounds, and place on a greased baking sheet. Brush with melted butter and bake for 15–20 minutes until golden brown. While your gnocchi is baking, it's time to brown your butter.

NILGAI BROWN BUTTER SAGE SAUCE

INGREDIENTS:

- 3–4 pieces of bone marrow (Nilgai or any other bone marrow available)
- 1/2 cup butter
- 6–8 fresh sage leaves
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 shallot, minced
- 1 cup kale, blanched
- 1/4 cup dried cranberries
- 1/4 cup chopped walnuts

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare the Bone Marrow:

Roast bone marrow at 450°F for 15 minutes until soft and golden. Scoop out the marrow and set it aside.

2. Make the Brown Butter:

Melt butter in a skillet over medium heat, then add sage leaves. Stir until the butter turns golden brown and fragrant.

3. Combine and Serve:

Add bone marrow, blanched kale, walnuts, and cranberries to the browned butter. Season with salt and pepper, then pour over the baked gnocchi. Serve warm and enjoy!

This holiday season, let's all take some time to slow down, gather with loved ones, enjoy what truly matters, and create something memorable. This Roman-style butternut squash gnocchi is beautiful and filled with comforting flavors that are sure to impress. It makes an incredible side dish on your traditional Christmas table, adding a unique, festive touch that pairs well with holiday classics. So, take a little time in the kitchen, get creative, and bring some holiday warmth to your table. ■

Happy holidays and happy cooking!

To Keep up with my hunting, fishing, and cooking adventures and for more recipes, tips, tricks, and more, head to gamegirlgourmet.com and sign up for my monthly newsletter!





Elderberry Syrup

WITH HOMESTEADER TORI KING

My homemade elderberry syrup is one of my favorite things to keep on hand as we head into the fall and winter seasons. It is way cheaper than the tiny bottles you can purchase in the store, and I can control precisely what is in it.

Bonus: I have been known to give this to friends and family around Christmas, and it is always much appreciated!

In our home, we all take a tablespoon maintenance dose daily, and if someone is starting to feel under the weather, they take a second dose. This recipe has extra immune-boosting herbs compared to some recipes. On cold mornings, I like to add my daily dose to a mug of warm water or sometimes to my cup of tea. So good!!

Funny story—I once gave a quart jar to an elderly friend, and she was so excited. I assumed by her reaction that she was familiar with elderberry syrup. I asked her how she and her husband liked it a week later. She said it was so good that she couldn’t stop drinking it and that it was almost gone! When I told her what the

dosage was supposed to be, she laughed and said no wonder she felt jittery after drinking it. We both had a good laugh. On the plus side, it is made from natural ingredients, so it wasn’t harmful... she just consumed a lot of honey quickly.

Now, let’s talk about some of the benefits of each herb in this recipe.



ELDERBERRY

(Black, not red) is high in vitamin C and antioxidants. It is great for easing colds, flu, and fevers, often shortening their duration. It always feels so good on sore throats, and it is probably one of the most versatile herbs. There are so many other uses for the elder plant besides what I have mentioned above, and the great thing is that it can be found in most states.



BILBERRY

Also commonly referred to as European blueberries, bilberries are high in manganese, vitamin K, and vitamin C. Like Elderberries, They are high in antioxidants and considered antimicrobial and antimicrobial anti-inflammatory.



ROSEHIPS

Rosehips are another herb that is high in vitamin C. They are known to ease respiratory symptoms and boost the immune system. What are rosehips, you ask? They can be found on rose bushes in late summer-early fall after the roses have been

pollinated and the buds fall. This is usually after a light frost and should be harvested before a hard frost. The color is typically red but can also be orange, purple, or black. Pick firm and blemish-free hips. Trim off the stem and blossom end, remove the seeds, and rinse well.



HIBISCUS FLOWERS

Hibiscus flowers are high in...you guessed it, vitamin C! It is high in antioxidants and an anti-inflammatory. These flowers are found in many tropical areas around the world. They have many other health benefits as well.



GINGER ROOT

Ginger root, also known as ginger, is great for much more than just adding flavor! It is known for its anti-inflammatory properties, as well as helping aid in digestion and easing nausea. I personally omit this one from my own recipe, as I tend to have a mild sensitivity to it, but that is what is so great about this recipe: You can tailor it to suit your own likes and needs.



ECHINACEA ROOT

Echinacea root is great as a preventative for colds and flu. It is antimicrobial, antiviral, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, and antifungal. Echinacea can also aid fevers, lymphatic congestion, infections, and viruses. It is a perennial that can be grown almost anywhere.

One thing to note—it is more effective in small and frequent doses. I also only add this to every other batch of elderberry syrup as many herbalists believe that it can lose its effects if taken

long term. For example, take it for 3-4 weeks, then take a break for 2 weeks before resuming the recipe with echinacea.



CINNAMON

Cinnamon is anti-inflammatory and great for boosting the immune system, but did you know that not all cinnamon is created equally!? There are two main types of cinnamon: Ceylon and Cassia. Cinnamon is made from the inner bark of a Cinnamomum tree. Strips of the inner bark are dried until they roll and turn into cinnamon sticks. Cassia comes from the Cinnamomum cassia tree. It tends to be a dark brown-red color, the sticks are thicker, and it is rougher textured than a Ceylon cinnamon stick. Cassia cinnamon is considered lower quality and most commonly found in supermarkets. Ceylon, or “true cinnamon,” is less common and is tan-brown, with much tighter rolls. It is milder in flavor compared to its counterpart. It is more expensive because it is less common; some studies say that Ceylon is the healthier option. For this reason, I prefer to use Ceylon for our family, but if all you have available to you is Cassia, that will work fine too.



CLOVES

Cloves contain a compound called eugenol, which has been shown to act as a natural antioxidant. Antioxidants help reduce oxidative stress, which can contribute to the development of many chronic diseases. It is just another great herb to have in your arsenal of medicinal tools.



RAW HONEY

Lastly, raw honey (*if you give it to children under 12 months, use maple syrup due to the risk of botulism*).

Local raw honey is always best. I cannot always find it locally at certain times of the year, so I keep some from Azure Standard. Raw honey has antifungal and antimicrobial properties. Raw Honey contains many beneficial vitamins, such as Niacin and riboflavin. It also includes the mineral Zinc, which is also great for immune health! Honey is excellent for relieving coughs and helping to soothe sore throats; it makes this concoction into a thick and sweet syrup.

Hopefully, I haven’t bored you with all the facts. I love pulling out all my books and doing some good old-fashioned research. I want you to know not just how but why I do what I do, and that way, you will have the knowledge to make informed decisions for yourselves. Now, onto the recipe! (I always double, and it is super easy to scale up even more if you wish!)

SUPER IMMUNE BOOSTING ELDERBERRY SYRUP

- 1/4 cup dried elderberries
- 1/4 cup dried bilberries
- 1/4 cup dried rosehips
- 1/4 cup dried hibiscus flowers
- 2 Tbsp fresh ginger root OR (1 Tbsp dried ginger root)
- 1 Tbsp dried echinacea root (*omit every other time*)
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 5 whole cloves
- 1-2 cups raw honey (*substitute for maple syrup if giving to 12 months or younger*)
- 4 cups water (*spring or distilled is best*)

DIRECTIONS:

Pour water into a saucepan and bring to a boil. Combine herbs in a bowl and mix well. Once boiling, turn it down to a simmer (steaming, not boiling) and add all the herbs. Mix well and allow the mixture to simmer for 30-45 minutes (longer if you upped the recipe) until the liquid has reduced to half.

Strain herbs using a mesh strainer or cheesecloth. Using a wooden spoon, press out as much of the moisture as possible from the herbs. Allow the liquid to cool to room temperature. Measure honey (or maple syrup) and add it to your liquid. Mix well until all the honey has dissolved.

Bottle, label, and store in the refrigerator. We usually go through this too fast for it to go bad, but it should last 6-8 months in the fridge.

Take 1-2 Tbsp daily as a maintenance dose, more if you feel the sniffles coming on!

PROPAGATING ELDERBERRY PLANTS FROM CUTTINGS:

This is on my to-do list, as we have plenty growing around us in the mountains of Pennsylvania but none in my yard. My friend successfully propagated some for her yard, so I know this works!

Find a friend who has a bush or a wild one nearby and snip a few branches. Look for branches that are about as thick as a pencil and have at least 2-4 nodes on them (where new leaves or branches will grow come spring). Cut your starts about 6-8 inches in length.

It is best to do this in winter or early spring while the plant is dormant. Also, make sure you choose healthy branches free from mold or disease.

Cut the bottom at an angle and the top straight so that you know which is the top and bottom when you get home. They will not grow if the cuttings are planted upside down. Take a few more than you need in case of failure. You can always give the extras away if you have too many.

If it has been a few hours since you took your cuttings, make a fresh cut at the bottom and dip it into root hormone before planting. Bontone II rooting powder works well.

Many experts agree that a soilless medium is the best choice. Look for 70% coco coir 30% perlite. Keep it moist like a damp sponge, and check it every three days.

After 8 weeks, pull on the cuttings (GENTLY). If there is some resistance, you know it worked! Additionally, if you see buds or leaves, this is another sign that your cuttings took root.

Once the danger of frost has passed, harden off for a few days, and then plant once the soil is steadily at 50 degrees.

Keep the ground watered well for the first few weeks. ■



Avid Armor USV20 Chamber Vacuum Sealer Review

WITH TORI KING

I am always “on the hunt” for new kitchen gadgets to make my homesteading lifestyle easier and help streamline the process. So, when my cheap vacuum sealer broke last summer, I started researching what I should get next. I kept reading about various chamber vacuum sealers but hesitated to spend the money.

One of the brands I kept going back to was Avid Armor. I liked that they are a small, U.S.-based company and that, in all my research, I kept finding great reviews. When my USV20 was in the mail, I could not wait to try it!

Upon opening the box, I immediately knew it was a top-notch machine. It came well packaged, and nothing about it looked or felt cheap. The vacuum sealer is about the size of a toaster oven, and the stainless steel makes it look sharp! It also came with a sheet of paper with quick step-by-step instructions on one side and tips and tricks on the other side. It was helpful; I set it up in 3 minutes or less and completed the test run.

The next question was, what should I vacuum seal first?! I had two 30 lb boxes of frozen blueberries sitting in my freezer, and I decided to portion out a box and see what this little machine could do. Fourteen pouches sealed in under 45

mins. (That’s with my 5- and 8-year-old helping) Next, I decided to seal some peaches that I had previously frozen on trays this summer and shoved them in freezer bags. Then, I decided to try vacuum sealing a few half-gallon jars of my children’s favorite cereal. Side note: I have to jar all my dry goods because otherwise, I deal with pantry moths. Each jar is sealed with the jar attachment in under 3 seconds a jar! Impressive! Lastly, I vacuum-sealed some ground beef and loose chicken sausage. I can’t wait to try it out on some more produce and meat, and I even called my friend to see if she needed anything vacuum-sealed!

Overall, I am thrilled with my new kitchen gadget and would highly recommend it if you are in the market! It is definitely worth every penny. It is easy to use, easy to clean, and very compact. I can see myself using this machine regularly, and I can’t wait to try out the marinade function. The only downside I know is that sometimes we like to freeze whole chickens, and they will be too big to fit in the chamber compartment, but in the grand scheme of things, that is such a minor issue. If you are wishing to seal larger amounts of food, then the USV32 will be your best option. I am so

happy that I no longer have to deal with my old sealer. Meat juices are almost always sucked into the machine and would cause it not to seal or give a poor seal. The USV20 can also seal soups and other liquids, so I will definitely be using that feature shortly. All I can say is...bring on the hunting/butchering season—I’m ready!!! ■

The Avid Armor Ultra Series USV20 Chamber Vacuum Sealer features:

- Heavy-Duty Stainless Steel Construction
- Clear View Tempered Glass Lid provides full visibility of vacuum & seal process
- Pouch clamp to hold the pouch securely in place
- One Touch ‘Auto Vac & Seal’ Function
- Adjustable Vacuum Time Function (15-60 seconds) to achieve maximum vacuum on every pouch.
- Adjustable Seal Time Function (3-9 seconds) to ensure positive seal on all different pouch types.
- Accessory Port to vacuum seal external canisters and containers
- Marinate Function to quickly and easily marinate meats and other foods in any container inside the chamber
- MSRP: \$324 with free shipping

To purchase your Avid Armor Chamber Vacuum Sealer visit avidarmor.com





2A Advocacy: Suicide Awareness & Prevention

BY MELONIE KENNEDY

Over the past several years, firearms ownership among women has jumped. As we welcome other ladies to the shooting community, we all make an effort to encourage them to get training, join us at the range and in the field, and share information with them about firearm safety. One vital piece of the safety puzzle that we need to remember to share is safe storage options. Offering information about safe storage helps keep criminal individuals from accessing a woman's new firearms and can save lives within her family and community. Many of us may immediately think of small children gaining access to unsecured firearms, but properly securing our guns can also assist in suicide prevention among all ages.

According to the CDC, as of 2020, 54% of Americans were affected by suicide in some way. Suicide was the 12th leading cause of death in the USA and the second leading cause of death in ages 20-34. Sadly, 54% of firearm deaths were suicides, and 53% of all suicides were by firearm. This is of particular concern in the military community, as the 2019 suicide rate was 1.5 times higher for veterans than it was for non-veteran adults over the age of 18. With the 2020 surge in

gun ownership among women, the suicide rate among women veterans jumped as well. The rate of women veterans who died by firearm suicide was nearly three times higher than that of non-veteran women, prompting a wake-up call at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Holiday stress and loneliness can add to these concerns. A study referenced by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention showed that nearly 88% of adults referred to the holiday season —beginning in November and going to the New Year —as the most stressful time of the



year. Additionally, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 64% of people living with mental illness report that their conditions worsen during the holidays. On top of this, over 70% of communities in the United States did not have enough mental health providers to serve their populations in 2021 when judged by federal guidelines. This means that individuals may face additional stressors while dealing with limited access to professional assistance.

As we can all see from these statistics, promoting firearm safety and preventing firearm suicides need to be a top priority in the women's community within shooting sports. Anyone can play a role in suicide prevention, and together, we can learn the risks and warning signs of suicide and encourage those who struggle to seek help. As we do so, we can make a huge difference both in improving mental health and reducing suicide within our immediate circles and our communities at large.

SO HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Understand that there is no single cause for suicide, but suicide risk increases when several health factors and life stressors converge. One myth about people in crisis is, "If somebody wants to die, they'll find a way." The reality is that the acute risk for suicide is often time-limited, and most people do not switch to a different method if the current method for suicide is not available. This means that if we securely store firearms, we may help a person survive the immediate crisis and go a long way to saving their life.

In some cases, this may just mean that we have stored our unloaded guns in a locked safe or



NSSF
The Firearm Industry
Trade Association



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

with devices such as a trigger lock or cable lock as we enter their homes for gatherings. In other cases, this may mean that we create a plan to store someone else's firearms for them as part of a safety plan or help them find a legal means of storing their (or our own) guns concurrent with their seeking resources and assistance. It also means gathering our courage to have hard

conversations: reaching out to friends and family to see how they are doing and asking in no uncertain terms if they need help or choosing a trusted person to help us get help. Sometimes, just seeking connection with others can be the boost we, or others, need in order to move through a stage of crisis.

We can share statistics about suicide with others and select an organization to support their



efforts to spread awareness and prevent suicide, whether among the community in general or specifically youth, law enforcement, military, or women. For those active on social media, sharing posts from such organizations can go a long way in getting the word out about resources for people in crisis and for people affected by suicide who need support. Spending just a few minutes helping others get contact information for helpful organizations or locking up non-defensive firearms can create a positive ripple effect of love and encouragement that saves multiple lives! ■

For additional information and suicide prevention resources, please visit the following organizations:

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
988 (call or text);

AFSP.org and **988Lifeline.org**
Includes military/veteran-specific resources

The Overwatch Project
[OverwatchProject.org](#)

National Shooting Sports Foundation
[NSSF.org/Safety/Suicide-Prevention/](#)

Project ChildSafe
[ProjectChildSafe.org](#)

Walk the Talk America
[WalkTheTalkAmerica.org](#)

Hold My Guns
[HoldMyGuns.org](#)

US Department of Veterans Affairs
[MentalHealth.VA.Gov/Suicide_Prevention/](#)

American Foundation for Firearm Injury Reduction in Medicine
[AFFIRMResearch.org](#)

If you or someone you know are in crisis, please **call 988 for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**, or **text TALK to 741741** to text with a trained crisis counselor from the **Crisis Text Line** for free, 24/7.

Suicide Prevention Resources for Military and Veterans

Military & Veterans Crisis Line
988, Press 1
Text 988, 24/7

Vets 4 Warriors
855-838-8255


InTransition
1-800-424-7877

Office of Warrior Care Policy
[warriorcare.dodlive.mil/](#)

Military One Source
1-800-342-9647

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors [TAPS]
1-800-959-8277

[afsp.org](#)



American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

You are *not alone* and support is *always available.*

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
Find a chapter near you at [afsp.org/chapters](#)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Crisis Text Line
Text TALK to 741741 to text with a trained counselor for free



American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

IT’S TIME TO SHOW WHO WE REALLY ARE.

GUN OWNERS CARESM

Gun owners care about the safety, preventing unauthorized access to firearms, bettering communities, helping those in need and conserving wildlife and wild places for generations to come.

You won’t hear these positive stories about real gun owners and pro-gun advocates in the mainstream media. In fact, you’re more likely to see insulting messages that try to shun or even shame gun owners due to some heinous acts of criminals. It’s time for gun owners to tell their stories, to show how we’re making a difference, to show that we don’t fit under one identity and to keep others accountable for trying to villainize lawful gun owners.

We’re calling on all gun owners to join us.

WITH YOUR SUPPORT,
WE CAN DO THIS — TOGETHER.

GunOwnersCare.org

Book Review

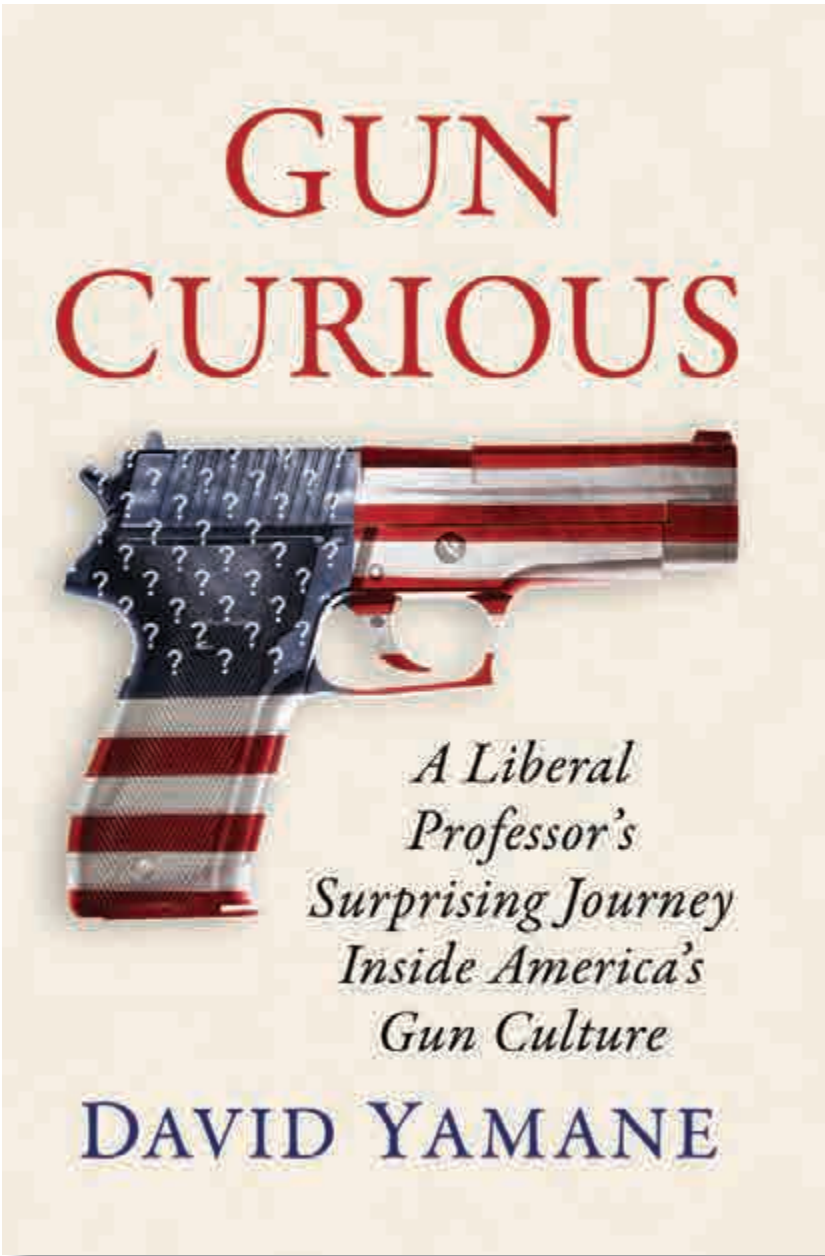
BY MELONIE KENNEDY

What happens when a sociologist and self-described lifelong liberal becomes a gun owner in his forties? He seeks to understand the new culture he’s now exposed to, looks for ways to connect with others, assesses how connection does (and does not) happen, and speaks up to share his findings. Over time, he becomes not only a trusted expert to other researchers but also to students at the university where he teaches and to all those in the gun community who may face similar feelings of being “the same, but different.”

In his most recent book, *Gun Curious*, Professor David Yamane offers readers a balanced, fair look at gun culture. With a true curiosity and willingness to have a conversation beyond personal and professional bias, Yamane doesn’t shirk from asking hard questions. He also doesn’t shy away from admitting to his biases or calmly pointing them out in others to get to the facts. His choice to point out that both sides of any fight can — and do — manipulate statistics and emotions means he opens himself up to attacks. It also shows the reader something significant must be asked of each of us: are we really willing to sit down and listen, or are we too busy trying to feel we’ve “won”?

Professor Yamane’s insights not only offer information to his fellow liberals but also provide a better understanding to more conservative folks if they are willing to step beyond political tropes and inflammatory media and look for common ground with fellow shooting enthusiasts.

Gun Curious would be an excellent gift for anyone who wants to learn more about firearms and the various perceptions about them, particularly for folks who constantly break the mold when it comes to beliefs about guns. With a glossary of gun terminology courtesy of the Cody Firearms Museum, it is a handy introduction for new shooters and those who haven’t yet made it to a range. It is also a resource that will make the middle-of-the-road person feel supported and understood when questioning why we can’t all find something to agree on, whatever our choice



on owning a gun (or not) might be.

I think *Gun Curious* is a must-read for anyone who wants to learn more about the history and politics of firearms use. I gleaned so much from it that I invested in a print copy after reading a digital edition for this review, and I bought several

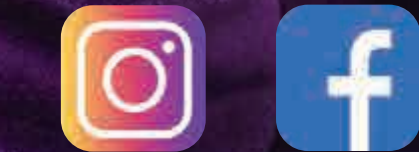
copies to gift to friends and family.

Gun Curious can be purchased through your favorite bookseller in ebook and print. To learn more, visit GunCurious.com or DavidYamane.com

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