

LADY SHOOTER

Life Styles



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feature

IO RACHEL CARRIE
AUTHOR, HUNTER, ADVOCATE

PHOTO CREDIT: MELONIE KENNEDY

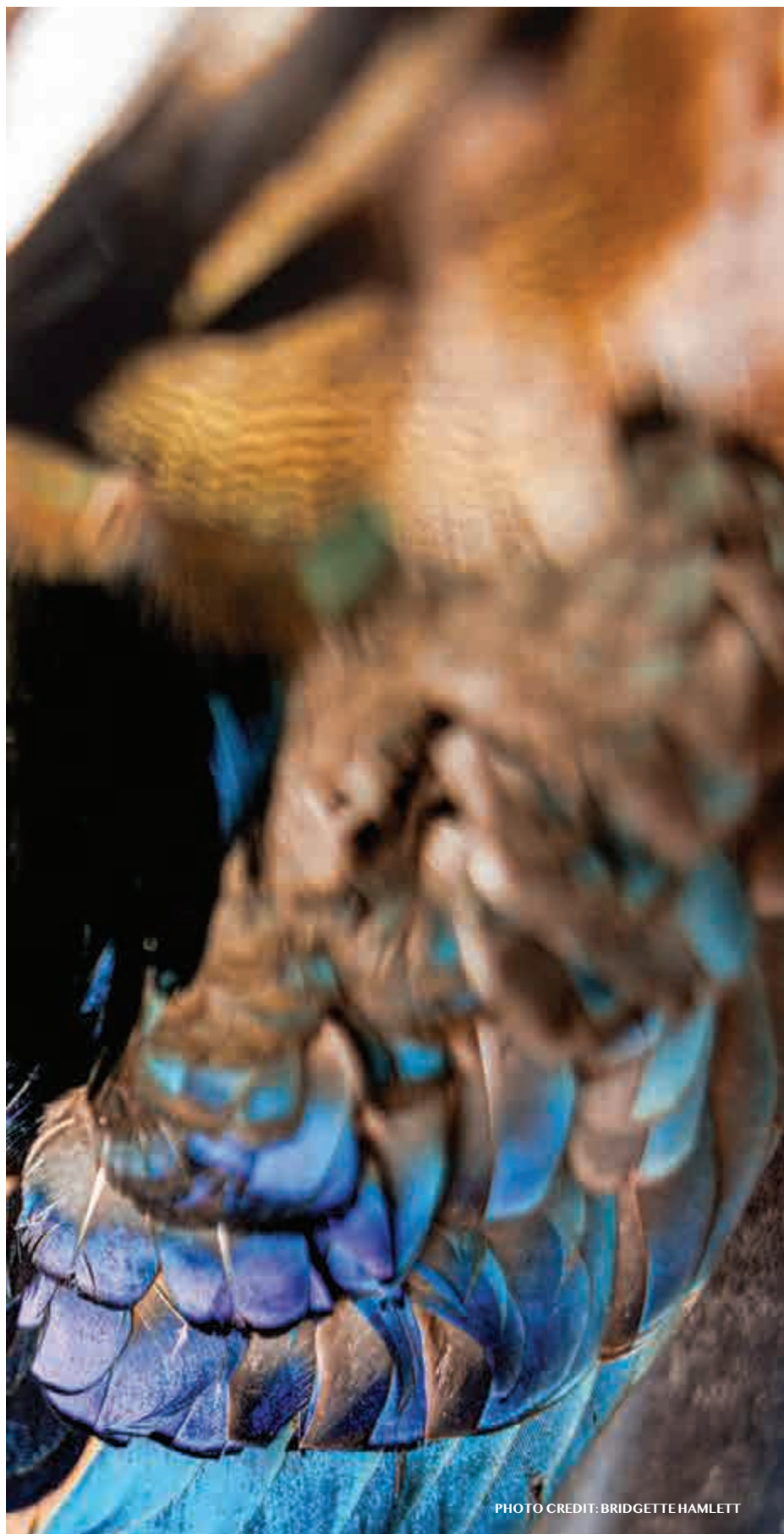


PHOTO CREDIT: BRIDGETTE HAMLETT

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New Year WITH BRANDY ELROD

As I write this, it is 5:00 am; I am sitting at the dining table of the cutest cabin you will ever stay at in Oklahoma while some pretty badass women are sound asleep in their respective rooms. I am here with a Texas Women's Outdoors coordinator, Sharon, and we are taking five ladies Pheasant hunting. We always stay at the Log Cabin Escapes in Caddo, Oklahoma, so call Nancy the next time you are in Southern Oklahoma. Better yet, call Todd from Caney Outfitters if you want to enjoy a wing-shooting adventure while you stay at Nancy's Cabin.

My desire to encourage more women to partake in this industry grew as my shooting

career grew. I have always been heavily involved in youth shooting sports, and at one time, I had the highest number of females on my high school shotgun and archery teams in Texas. When I decided to retire from the USA Para-Trap team, just like everything else in my life, I needed something to do. I have given ladies shotgun clinics here and there, but not to the extent that I am now. The most common need I have seen is very few female instructors in the shotgun world. My original shotgun instruction certifications started as a necessity for the youth team I was coaching and a requirement of the school insurance. What I did not realize was the mentor I would gain in my first NRA course I attended and the path that I would be set on to change the shooting world one clinic and camp at a time. As I tell everyone, I feel like I am saving the world one lady/child and firearm at a time. I host clinics and camps all year long where I empower women, reintroduce them to proper firearm handling, and prove to children with limb

differences that they can pursue a sport they may not have thought possible. I have also changed the way I instruct. I no longer focus on teaching the methods of registered clay target shooting; I focus on ensuring the ladies/children are using comfortable & safe firearms and, most importantly, having fun. That is part of why I retired from the USA Team; it was no longer fun, there was no support (financially, physically, and mentally), and there was no purpose for me to continue chasing an Olympic dream that would never happen. As I went into a woe-is-me phase, I realized that a silver lining came out of all of my travels, medals, and connections on the USA team. I gained a platform to be a spokesperson for women & para shooting sports and ran with it. Women are the fastest-growing demographic in the shooting industry: hunting, recreationally, and competitively. Still, they do not know where to start or receive poor information and thus try the sector and leave.

Part of my mission with the magazine and my clinics is to introduce, reintroduce, and retain

ladies (both adult & youth) in our industry. Basically, I am building a massive tribe of ladies to empower each other to get outdoors and learn how to use firearms properly for both fun, for a means to feed themselves, and protection. I am also traveling across the US, introducing para children to the world of the 2A industry, determining their adaptive firearms needs (with the help of the most amazing gunsmiths of Feland's Gunsmithing), how to balance their bodies to shoot, as well as taking them on adventures to give them opportunities they never thought possible. Inside the back cover is a picture of Rumi and me, a limb-different child I introduced to shotgun at a HerUpland Quail camp in Arizona. More of her story and the organization will come in the Summer issue, but she had never shot a shotgun before, not only did I teach her to balance her body to shoot, we went on a once in a lifetime adventure hunting desert quail in the snow. As I continue to grow in a new phase of expanding women's shooting sports and helping more children on their para-shooting journey, I have also grown my tribe of ladies with whom I love going on adventures. I encourage you to seek out women's firearms organizations in your state if you need a group of like-minded women to enjoy your lifestyle with.

I have always enjoyed being surrounded by leading ladies in my life. My grandmother, 4-H horse judging coach Cindy, bestfriend Mindy, shooting adventure buddy Gayla, and cousin Jawanna have always been influential in my life. As you move through life, seasons change, and so do you, but you always need to have the constant tribe of supportive women you are surrounded by. As you read through this issue, you will get to know many leading ladies, both the women in the magazine and the writers of the articles.

By the way, the picture is of me at one of the most fantastic events I have ever attended. Yet another tribe of extraordinary ladies (Greater Ladies of Greater Houston Gun Club) hosted a Skeet Soiree, where we shot American Skeet in ballgowns and enjoyed a fantastic dinner! More info on this group and their events is coming in the Summer issue.

I would love to hear from you if you have a question, a story, or knowledge to share.

As always keep living your best Lady Shooter Life Style!

Brandy





Feathers, Family, and Photography

A Lady Shooter's Journey

WITH PHOTOGRAPHER BRIDGETTE HAMLETT

I've been immersed in the world of hunting since I could barely walk. My earliest memories are filled with the excitement of following my dad through the woods, engulfed in darkness yet feeling nothing but exhilaration. Hunting is in my blood, a legacy passed down through generations. As a child, you could find me shadowing my dad or nestled in my paw paw's truck, savoring mandarin oranges and Vienna sausages – the simple joys of a hunter's life.

FROM CHILDHOOD DREAMS TO FAMILY BONDS

My journey through the seasons – from shooting clays in my paw paw's pastures to moving through deer to duck and turkey season – was more than just a pastime; it was a rite of passage. Meeting my husband, our shared love for duck hunting became the thread that wove our lives together. Our engagement was as unique as our love, unfolding on a memorable hunt in Venice, Louisiana, with Limitless WaterFowl guide services. That day, we not only bagged two bull sprig pintails, a dream for any hunter, but I also returned home with a different kind of 'band' – a symbol of our shared life ahead.

CELEBRATING LIFE'S MILESTONES WITH HUNTING

Our passion for waterfowl hunting seamlessly blended into every aspect of our lives. We celebrated our son Grant's arrival with a mallard-themed baby shower and nursery. Our gender reveal? A spectacular shot at a clay target releasing a cloud of blue powder, sharing our joy with the world. Every hunt brings us closer, and we make it a point to share our experiences with Grant, even if he's still too young to join us in the





CONCLUSION: LEGACY, LOVE, AND LIFE LESSONS

I hope my story is a tapestry of tradition, family, and the pursuit of passions for all correlates for all who read. It's about embracing the legacy of hunting, the joy of family bonds, and the thrill of capturing life's fleeting moments. Through the lens of my camera and the barrel of my gun, I've discovered more than just hobbies; I've found a way to express my love for nature, family, and the art of living fully.

Bridgette is an accomplished photographer, mom, and hunter. She also owns a media company and you will see her photography spread throughout the magazine.

*To learn more visit:
www.hamletthypemedia.com*



early morning ventures. For now, he hangs out with his favorite person, maw, for the morning hunts, and he accompanies us on evening boat rides, a precursor to the adventures that await him.

FINDING MY CALLING IN PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY

My foray into photography began with a Canon Mark II, initially purchased to capture my newborn son's early days. However, this tool soon became a gateway to a newfound passion, intertwining with my love for hunting. Photographing my husband's CrossFit competitions was just the start; soon, I was capturing the essence of our hunts through my lens. This journey in photography and videography is a testament to my belief in divine guidance – a path laid out by the good Lord, allowing me to share my family's love for waterfowl hunting with the world.



Vara Safety REACH 2S

WITH MOM AND LICENSED INSTRUCTOR TAMMY STEIN

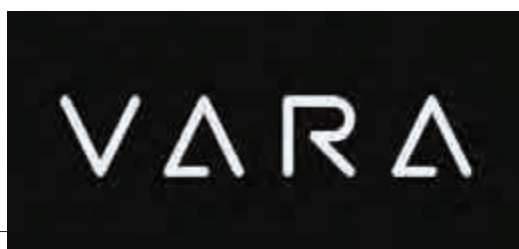
I was thrilled to receive the Vara Safety Reach 2 Pistol quick-access safe. I have been considering this product for a while for several reasons. Firstly, as a mom, I wanted to keep my kids safe from any harm while also ensuring that the gun is secure from their curiosity. I really liked the fact that it works only with my thumbprint. I even tried it out with my youngest daughter, and it worked wonderfully! She couldn't release it from the Reach 2 safe.

My oldest daughter lives independently, and I wanted to find something she could use. This is why I decided to give it an honest look and try it out. I liked that it had a 30-day hassle-free return policy if it didn't meet my safety concerns. I wanted to install it and try it out for myself as soon as I received it. Installing it was easy, as it came with hardware and easy-to-follow instructions. However, I did have a learning curve with setting up the thumbprint. I was a little nervous as I'd often been told I did not have good fingerprints. I learned you must quickly let it read your thumbprint three times. Meaning on, off, then on, off again to get the technology set up. I was holding my thumb for too long originally when setting it up. I contacted their customer service department, and they were friendly and helpful. We discovered what I was doing wrong. It was such an easy setup after that.

What sold me ultimately was the quick access to release the pistol with my master grip and the placement of my thumbprint, which was perfect every time! It is a rapid release but secure from my girls. Once you replace your firearm in the Reach 2 safe, it locks in with a red light as the indicator and a beep. It is entirely secure at that point. The battery life is good for about six months. The three lights only come on when accessing the Reach 2 safe. The holster design moves up and down until it's locked in place. It works with many different manufacturers' models of pistols.



In conclusion, I am happy with the Reach 2 safe! As a mom, owner, and senior trainer of my company, 1840 INC, teaching many people with concerns about how to keep it ready for quick access but stored, locked, and secure, this is a viable option that I will recommend.




1840 Inc
A Legacy of Freedom

Rachel Carrie

with Natalia Gonzalez, Photos provided by Rachel



I remember when I realized that Rachel Carrie followed me on Instagram. @rachelcarriehunting currently has 70.2k followers and only follows 3,213 accounts. I had become one of those accounts, and I was completely unaware. I had posted a story about my son wanting to borrow my watch for his Italian mob boss Halloween costume and Rachel sent a laughing emoji. I initially thought it was a fake account impersonating her; I even double-checked that it was her actual account. I have been following Rachel Carrie since I started shooting. It came about because I wanted to follow female shooters on Instagram, and I probably searched something like “shotgun shooting women,” and Rachel was the first and only one that popped up as a result. Nowadays, the shock of seeing a woman out in the field shooting or hunting isn’t there, and you will get many results with a search like that. Rachel has had a lot to do with that demographic rise.

Rachel Carrie is a big deal in shooting, but you would never guess by talking to her. This incredible, wild-haired woman, whose friend refers to her as BD, will disarm any preconceived notions you may hold about her in one

conversation. Rachel doesn’t even recall exactly when it started, but for the longest time, she didn’t even know why her friend called her BD. Finally, she asked and learned that BD stood for Beth Dutton, which meant nothing to Rachel at the time. This has been corrected as Rachel has since watched the show *Yellowstone*. Rachel now realizes that she not only slightly resembles the much-loved character in physique and fashion but also in her rebellious spirit and a strong sense of responsibility to raise awareness and change minds surrounding the negative assumptions that the world of hunting carries in the UK and around the world.

A self-proclaimed “glamorous tomboy,” Rachel grew up in the countryside of Northern England. With a brother and sister in the family, her mother always said, “I got a boy, a girl, and something in the middle.” Like most young girls who are allowed to shoot a gun, it was her father, Dave Carrie, a renowned wing shooter in England, who first put a gun in Rachel’s tiny 10-year-old hands. As Rachel recounts, “He said, ‘Here’s a gun. Aim it and pull the trigger.’ He didn’t explain much about recoil or how to put it on my shoulder. I ended up in a backward somersault into a wall.” Much to our mutual dismay, this experience went as expected; she hated it, which turned her off from shooting for a long time. When Rachel was about 25 years old, her father came home with an air gun pistol. He told Rachel that if she could hit all the

cans with this air gun, she could keep it. “So, I hit all of the cans and thought I was Lara Croft, and I was amazing, you know, Annie Oakley, the next big thing.” This sparked her renewed interest in shooting as she practiced at home, and she decided to give it a go again. There was an “Intro to Clays” event at her local club, and she finally had the kind of experience every woman should have for the first time: proper instruction and proper gun fitting with like-minded peers and she fell in love at the first break. Hesitant to tell her father beforehand not to get his hopes up, she left the experience thrilled and anxious to share the news with her father. “I





haven't put a shotgun down since that day." Her father couldn't have gotten her to the gun store fast enough; he was over the moon. "He would have bought me any gun in there. He's picking up these expensive guns, but I picked the cheapest, oldest gun off the shelf and, for some reason, just really liked the feel of it. It came up nice, felt good, was chunky, had been around the block a little bit; it had an adjustable comb..." For me, this is where her character started to shine. She had the option to get any gun she wanted, and she chose something based solely on how it felt. Rachel shot this Browning until it fell apart while shooting a peg of FITASC and had to use her hair tie to hold it together to finish the round.

Since becoming an avid shooter, Rachel has met the love of her life, Mark Winsor, written a wild game cookbook, starred in a documentary series about hunting, and, of course, become the female face of one of the most respected brands of shotguns in the world: Krieghoff. Rachel's anything-but-mediocre rise in the shooting community is, of course, based on the merit of what she brings to the table in every way imaginable. However, social media played a significant role in her journey as well. Rachel began posting about her life and hobbies, as we all do. It just so happens that, at the time, there were no other beautiful and elegant women posting about shooting and hunting. I don't know about you, but I would much rather see pictures of a woman hunting and shooting than a man. Social media boosted her image worldwide until one fateful day when it reached me ironically. Social media is now something that could be hindering her reach and following due to shadow banning.

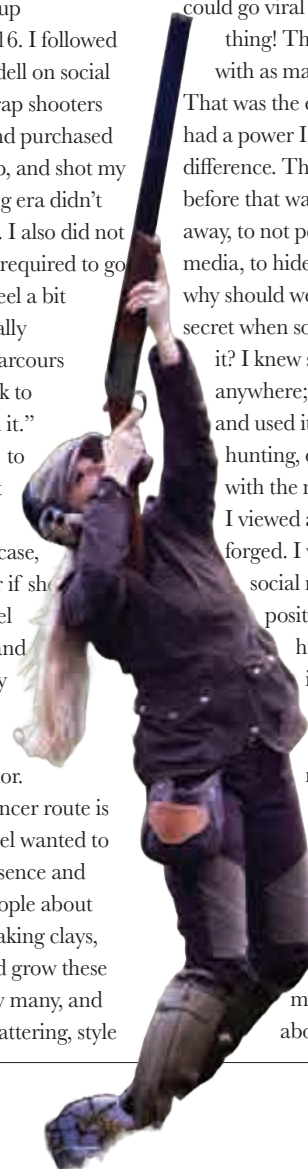
Rachel's love of Krieghoff started in 2010

when she started shooting. This particular year, the Krieghoff gun of the year featured Arabian horses, essentially the most beautiful shotgun Rachel had ever seen, and she fell in love. From this moment on, Rachel coveted a Krieghoff. "I shot my trusty old Browning, always wearing a Krieghoff base layer with the brand emblazoned on the arm (manifesting.) I tried several other

brands over the years, but my heart was always set on owning a Krieghoff one day. It was difficult to escape as Mark is a Krieghoff Pro Shooter and has been with the company for 20 years, so there was never a Krieghoff far away. My day came when I took up international trap shooting in 2016. I followed Kayle Browning and Corey Cogdell on social media; they are both successful trap shooters with Krieghoff guns. I sourced and purchased my first Krieghoff, a K80 Pro Rib, and shot my first 25 straight. The trap shooting era didn't last long; I found it a lonely sport. I also did not have the desire or the dedication required to go to the Olympics, thus making it feel a bit pointless to be shooting. I eventually customized my K80 and fitted Parcours barrels, and I've now moved back to shooting sporting disciplines with it."

In 2019, she was approached to help Krieghoff develop their first ladies' gun, The Victoria. They showed her drafts, mockups, the case, and the name and then asked her if she wanted to be the face of it. Rachel has a big social media following and naturally has been approached by many companies, ranging from clothing and accessories to guns, asking Rachel to be an ambassador. However, the ambassador/influencer route is something other than what Rachel wanted to focus on. She tried to use her presence and following for good, to educate people about hunting, food, and the joy of breaking clays, and to advocate for, promote, and grow these areas. While her style is copied by many, and she admits freely that it's pretty flattering, style

influencer or product ambassador isn't a title she's too fond of. "I love to write; I write with passion and honesty; it is my unique writing style and relentless advocating for hunting that I am most known for. People always mention it when they meet me, and I'm very proud of that. I pioneered how we responded to the anti-hunting community in the UK, brought the wild food ethics argument to the table, and catalyzed a change in the hunting narrative. I couldn't just sit back and let the relentless personal attacks against me go unanswered; that's not how I had been raised, so I stood up for myself and, with it, I suppose, stood up for the whole community. It was a Facebook post, "A Letter to an Anti," which I wrote in response to the negative comments I was receiving. They were coming in thick and fast once I'd started sharing my hunting adventures on social media, so I thought I'd address them all in one fell swoop and penned a rather lengthy open letter, so lengthy I didn't think anyone would read it but ten years ago it went as viral as one could go viral before going viral was even a thing! The post was shared over 5k times with as many comments and over 10k likes. That was the eureka moment when I knew I had a power I could use for good and make a difference. The majority attitude in the UK before that was to ignore anti, and they'd go away, to not post about hunting on social media, to hide it. The complete opposite is, why should we act like hunting was a dirty little secret when so much good has to be said about it? I knew social media wasn't going anywhere; we either stood up and fought and used it for the positive portrayal of hunting, or our detractors would flood it with the negative. From that moment, how I viewed and used social media was forever forged. I would go on to see all of my social media profiles as a pin board for positive promotion of shooting and hunting. Eventually, the UK industry started coming around my way of thinking and publishing my work in hunting magazines. Of course, at that time, being a female in the hunting field was pretty rare, and I know that's what attributed to me standing out, but if that's what drew people in who then went on to read my work, I am not getting upset about that."



Rachel's social media following could have been turned into a lucrative enterprise with the many companies wanting a slice of her audience, "When other gun brands and companies wanted me to partner, they were amazed that I asked them why, I just didn't feel I could give brands what they wanted that perfectly created and curated content and the pressure on me to provide it. I didn't want to turn my profiles into a shop front when I go hunting or shooting. I want to be immersed in everything I love about it, not trying to find a perfect pose, angle, or shot of a product I'm using to satisfy my content quota! I wanted to stay true to my purpose. Working with a brand should be much more than an empty exchange for exposure; Kreighoff is a family. I was honored to be invited into that family. I had already invested in my first Kreighoff and shot it well in the field many years before they asked me to partner with them. I was already storytelling, and my Kreighoff was my co-star in those stories, so it felt a natural progression to make it official."

However, this was a match made in shotgun heaven. "It was a breath of fresh air when I got the call from Kreighoff; I didn't have to ask why as the call started with, 'We have been following your journey for some time and feel the way you portray and promote shooting and advocate for hunting, conservation, and wild cooking so eloquently and passionately align with the messages and ethos of our brand.' They sensed that I played a big role in encouraging the female demographic here and in Europe, an area they wanted to represent better. It was a fascinating opportunity for me and the culmination of quite a lot of hard work and time served in the field



and behind the keyboard! To have a brand I respected and loved as much as Kreighoff recognized that. The Victoria is a lovely gun, but I won't deny I first had reservations when Kreighoff called to say they had the foundations of a ladies shotgun and could I field test it for them, 'Oh no, I thought, (and said out loud to them) please no pink, no floral engravings or gimmicks.' The fact is that shooting is still predominantly a male-dominated sport, and even though the ladies' demographic was on the rise, those in the industry responding to this rise were predominately men. None of them were getting down to the nitty-gritty of what women wanted and needed in clothing and equipment. The few "ladies" guns I had seen previously marketed had just engraved flowers on the stock, giving them a feminine name and marketed them with pink or purple accessories, thinking this would suffice as a lady's gun. The 'shrink it and pink it' approach. Kreighoff had taken a different approach; most

off-the-shelf shotguns are dimensionally made to fit the male anatomy. Even with my first shotgun, I'd had a Jones adjuster fitted to kick out the toe, thus making it fit my shoulder better. Among the other stark differences in anatomy, ladies have certain attributes on their chests that men don't. This alone is one factor that can change how a regular shotgun sits in the shoulder; Kreighoff has changed the pitch and cast to account for the finer nuances of a lady's fit. They have adjusted the length of the pull and the palm swell to fit a lady's hand better; it's the first and only shotgun on the market that is the closest fit to a female anatomy that you can get out of the box. And, with an adjustable comb and personal engraving options, you can make this gun your own. It was nice to finally have a company acknowledge that women want to be able to shoot well; we want guns that fit us."

Even though The Victoria is a ladies' gun, Rachel's fiancé, Mark Winsor, apparently is borrowing the gun to shoot clays and grouse. Rachel still has her 12-gauge Kreighoff and her 20-gauge Victoria, which she mainly uses for bird hunting. Rachel's love of hunting has led her on adventures all over the world, which she proudly posts on social media. The photos are amazing, but her captions really set her apart from other hunters. A true lover of making a statement, her writing style embraces the primal feelings of the hunt, captures the reader, and provokes thought and consideration for what it truly means to complete the circle of life through hunting and conservation.

In 2016, a production company approached Rachel, and pitched the idea of a reality documentary series that thrust Rachel into the spotlight with the general public beyond the shooting community. This cemented her place in hunting history as a true advocate for hunting and the shooting world. In the UK, you must be



careful with the subject of hunting, not unlike the United States. It is not well received, and public perception surrounding hunting leaves people like Rachel in the minority. In the past, when Rachel had seen hunting featured on television, she felt it wasn't being portrayed in the best light. She wanted to avoid feeling backed into a corner dealing with creative editing practices. However, her mind was put at ease when she entered the London offices of the production company for a meeting. She was greeted by many hunting trophies lining the walls, which sparked only a slight paranoia. "Me being suspicious, I thought, have they planted those there?" The man who owns the production company does hunt, so she thought this was a good sign. The idea they pitched to Rachel was that she take a celebrity PETA model out hunting. Jodie Marsh, a TV presenter, reality TV star, and vocal animal rights activist famous for modeling naked for PETA, was to be Rachel's counterpart. For an entire week, they would spend all day together: hunting, talking, eating, and immersing Jodie in the hunting world. "They gave me lots of editorial control, so I went for it."

Throughout their week together on "Jodie Goes Hunting," Jodie and Rachel spent time pigeon shooting, and Rachel was able to explain why they shoot pigeons for crop protection at a local farm. They spent time at Rachel's parents' house, where Rachel cooked a recently harvested deer. They even went

to a local rifle range to let Jodie shoot rifles, "which she was very good at."

"Still, to this day, it is probably one of the things I am most proud of because it took quite a lot of courage to agree to do it in the first place. As I said, it was quite a scary prospect, but it turned out well. At the start of the documentary, she is hating on me. There are times when she says things like, 'I hate this woman, she's a murderer, there's something wrong with her,' and yeah, we just spent time together; I was my true self and worked hard to give Jodie the facts about hunting, it's importance to wildlife conservation and give her a true picture



Jodie's eyes, too. The week culminated with Rachel taking Jodie to stalk a deer and Rachel shooting the deer in front of Jodie. They hugged and cried, and Jodie now realized that Rachel wasn't just someone to be understood but befriended, respected, and admired. Rachel and Jodie remain friends and stay in contact regularly. This impactful and well-documented week gave Rachel the confidence she needed to realize that her advocating for hunting didn't need to stay confined within the walls of her social media. She could change even more minds if she can impact someone so devotedly anti-hunting.

of who hunters are behind the media's lies and misrepresentation. As the week progressed, we became excellent friends." It takes an exceptional character with a sense of maturity to deal with someone who feels so strongly on the opposite side of an issue, and through patience, kindness, and facts, allow them to truly see, understand, and respect your side. Admirable, to say the least.

After a week with Rachel, Jodie began to understand hunters and hunting; she soon realized hunters don't simply want to kill everything. Rachel's love of animals, her dogs, and even a fox she had been taking care of helped soften her image in

Even though Rachel's shotgun hunting life started later, her love of hunting and harvesting the land began when she was young. When she was very little, Rachel and her father used to hunt rabbits with a falcon, and then her mother would cook them. I didn't even know this was a thing. This time with her father became the foundation for a life she never dreamed would be her own. Being the daughter of an avid, perhaps even a famous shooter in his own right, I naturally assumed that Rachel waltzed into the shooting community and was accepted with open arms as I was, but the fantasy of a perfect integration is not how it started. Thankfully, Rachel stayed true to her glamorous nature and brought strong femininity and beauty to the sport, and, in my opinion, changed the landscape of what it looked like for women in the shooting community. No



longer does a woman have to feel like she must tone down her feminine nature to keep up with the men or to fit in. One person who I'm sure appreciated the "Beth Dutton" of it all is her fiancé, Mark Winner.

Her father had thrown her into the deep end of competitive shooting once he realized she was hooked. After only six months of shooting, Rachel's father entered them into a world championship. I believe most people would be intimidated by attempting big professional-level targets, but not Rachel. She didn't care what she was shooting as long as there were targets flying so she could try to break them. This would be the first of three major moments that would lead her to the man she now calls fiancé. "I first saw Mark and thought he was cute, but shr was shy, and I never spoke to him. Then fate had it we were squadded together at the Essex Masters. We were all waiting, and the referee said, 'Oh, we're just waiting for Mark Winner.' Obviously, I didn't know who Mark Winner was at this point, but he was squadded with us. I'll never forget that I looked down this long grassy lane, and this guy was like 10-15 minutes late at this point. He's just strolling like strutting down, cool as anything, Mr. Suave, singing, and he just gets to the peg. And I'm thinking, God, who is this idiot? I mean, how rude." Good thing first impressions aren't the only impressions that matter. A few months later, they found themselves at a shoot together in Wales. Rachel had messed up her

schedule and thought she had time to drive back home from Wales and drive back to shoot the following morning. It turns out she did not. With no extra clothes, makeup, or hair products, she was faced with a potentially stressful experience. Luckily, Mark informed her there were plenty of rooms at his hotel and invited Rachel out to dine with him and a friend. Second impression: "We went out for dinner that evening, he and his friend. He made me laugh a lot and charmed me, and the rest, as they say, is history." Mark isn't as big of a hunter as Rachel, and their running joke is that most girls take up closet space, but she takes up wall space with her hunting trophies. They each travel a lot for their respective sports within shooting, sometimes together and sometimes separately. "If it's somewhere hot with good food, I'll happily go with him, but if it's one of these dingy shooting grounds in the middle of



I got on the other end of the phone. Her goal has shifted to "focus a little more on me and less on kind of trying to save the world. I felt at one point, with the media work I was doing, it's kind of hard to relay how much it takes out of you. When you do the TV stuff or even the newspaper articles, you feel like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders because you're not just speaking about yourself or representing yourself. You're representing the shooting community as a whole, so there's quite a lot of pressure and quite a lot of weight."

I believe that the stereotype about fame and the price thereof comes into play here.

Life is different in the spotlight, and due to social media, the fingers of fame can touch you so delicately and suddenly that unless you are chasing fame, it probably throws you off balance a little bit. "I'd had quite a hectic few years of doing projects around that theme, and it culminated in me writing my cookbook. I thought, what better way to explain hunting than the ultimate thing that we do it for: the food side of it. I thought if people can relate to anything, you know, people might not be able to relate to going out there and killing things or shooting, but I thought that they might be able to relate to the food part." Game & Gatherings, The Cook Book by Rachel Carrie is available for sale through her Instagram page. The photos are fantastic, and the food just winks at you from the page, daring you to cook it so well you might think you can write a cookbook, too.

The anticipated release of the cookbook led to many news articles, and Rachel even went on

nowhere, then he can go himself; I'll support him from afar. With a waste management company specializing in industrial waste recycling, four sites, and hundreds of employees, Rachel's 22 years of service with the family business keeps her busy juggling her love. I say her love because, to me, it seems that is what she imparts to the world through her life's work. It is clear by Rachel's tone, which I can only describe as jolly, that love fills her completely. From her family and upbringing to her own child and partner, she gives her all to the people and things she loves. Rachel's 17-year-old son, Brandon, has also joined the family business. A "great shot," as described by Rachel, with a preference for rugby rather than shooting, Rachel hopes he takes up an increased interest in shooting so they can spend more time together.

When I asked Rachel what came next on the journey of her life, I was surprised by the answer



"This Morning," the UK's biggest national morning television show, to discuss her lifestyle. They had Rachel on a few times, actually. "70-85% of the feedback is really good, and it's positive. It's exactly the type of feedback that you don't even dream of; vegans and vegetarians are singing your praises. And then you've got people who are on the fence who get it and go shopping for wild game. Then, you've got 15-20% of the absolutely hateful, trolling, abusive, disgusting kind of stuff." It seems that fame comes with a formal invitation for people to judge you and assume they know you simply because you can be seen on their phone screens daily. But I don't think that fame has anything on just being a woman - constantly underestimated while sometimes praised for the very same things that inspire criticism from others. It was actually a conversation Rachel had with a mutual friend of ours and a prominent figure in the worldwide shooting community, Catherine Kruse, that inspired Rachel to continue down the path of a hunting advocate. "Rachel, this is your God-given place. This feels like this is your gift, your blessing; this is the thing that you're supposed to be doing." We agreed that there is power in Catherine's words, and if you ever get the chance to meet her or speak with her, you will know what I mean.

Rachel experienced a time when she struggled to enjoy shooting if I can word it that way. The pressure of being Mark Winner's fiancée felt intense. She often worried her scores might be perceived as being related to Mark in some way, perhaps reflecting poorly on his ability to teach. Most people assume Mark is Rachel's coach, which he is not, so this thought process is a legitimate concern if you look at it from one perspective. However, Rachel is now learning to see it from another point of view, the way I try to see it in my own training; this is about having fun. "Do it because you love it so much." Forget about what anyone else thinks, and play your game to the best of your ability. Just this past year of getting back in the competition saddle, Rachel has already reclaimed her regional ladies' sporting and 5 Stand titles she first won when she first started out. "I'm never going to find the time to practice and train enough to compete at the highest level. I have a business to run, wild game to chase, and many more hunting adventures to be



had, but I think it's important for everyone to remember that no matter your level, everyone can get out there, shoot and compete, and have fun; it's you against you. You get to meet amazing people from all over the world and shoot in some incredible destinations, and who doesn't love shooting in the sunshine? Too often, I hear women say they're "not good enough" to shoot a 100-target registered at the weekend and I always tell them - not good enough for who or what? You'll never learn and get to enjoy different targets if you don't step out of your comfort zone! Everyone and I mean everyone (I've seen Mark's scores from when he started out), starts at the bottom of the scoreboard. Everyone's been there at some point in their journey, but the fun, the exhilaration of breaking clays, and the social value of getting out there and just shooting isn't worth missing out on for fear of missing a few clay pigeons! I'd love to see more ladies out on the course - as my dad has always said, "If as many women as men shot, men wouldn't make it on the podium."

With so many life-changing moments, the evolution of the wild, blonde-haired little girl to the Rachel Carrie that became the face of the Krieghoff Victoria, created a sold-out cookbook, became a television star and social media queen of English sporting life, a natural break and slowing down of sorts appears to be on the horizon. In her "chill" era, Rachel is spending more time shooting for fun. Her love of animals is also a big part of her life and continues to be. "I've had a chihuahua since I was five years old. Everyone always wonders why I don't have a "proper" peg

dog, but I don't have time to maintain training properly. I like to watch the well-trained work dogs on estates. I don't want my unruly, partially trained, spoiled novelty pet dog ruining it for those dedicated dog handlers." Between practice, hunting, and clay competitions, she is getting back to her roots of where it all started. She is enjoying it all over again, and averaging 100 competition targets every weekend has become the new standard. "With business, life, and all of my other projects and commitments, I'd never find the time to truly focus on competitive shooting to a level where I could be considered a contender at a world championship." With her mental game finding its new normal, this ever-evolving thing called life is happening and propelling her forward into

her next stage of life, perhaps even a world title. Hopefully, this will give her and Mark time to go from being betrothed to being married. A Rachel Carrie wedding is exactly what the internet needs. Along with more pictures of these dogs, Ferdinand II, her latest chihuahua, and her Frenchie named Bunny, can be seen here with her camo in her pigeon hide, ready to retrieve.



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A Girl & A Gun Women's Shooting League is a women's only organization founded by women shooters to cater to female pistol, rifle, and shotgun enthusiasts. It aims to help beginners reach their desired skill level while providing experienced shooters more opportunities. Some members are focused on enhancing their self-defense and competitive shooting abilities. In contrast, others are interested in learning about selecting suitable guns and gear for long-term participation in the community.

The league also offers three days of top-notch training and camaraderie for female law enforcement officers as a part of the Back the Women in Blue event. This annual event, held at the state-of-the-art Round Rock Public Safety Training Center, is part of the league's mission to give back to the community. Officers can earn TCOLE training hours, improve their weapon and DT skills, network and mentor with other women, and receive recognition for their role as role models, protectors, and defenders of their communities. This event is an exclusive training opportunity for female law enforcement officers. It is presented by GLOCK as part of the A Girl & A Gun "Back the Women in Blue" Program. The training includes live-fire and simulation exercises with pistols and rifles and instruction in defensive tactics, ground fighting, handcuffing techniques, and other relevant skills for officers' daily lives. Attendees will also have the chance to learn rappelling techniques from the 5-story tower and tour the Round Rock Police Department and training facility, led by Chief Banks. TCOLE, the

Texas Commission on Law Enforcement, is the regulatory agency for all peace officers in Texas, including police officers, sheriffs, constables, and more. All peace officers in Texas must complete

mandatory training hours approved by TCOLE. Officers from Texas will receive TCOLE hours for attending Back the Women in Blue, while officers from other states will receive



documentation to submit to their respective agencies for training hour credit.

I had the pleasure of gaining insight from two ladies in attendance.

JANA

Jana has been a Law Enforcement Officer for 9.5 years, starting as a patrol officer and later becoming a Sergeant, overseeing the Code Enforcement Division. She is one of the first officers in Texas to hold this position, which gave them more authority and compliance. After this, she returned to patrol to take on new challenges. The woman who nominated her also attended the BTWB training, and they had first met 13 years ago while working at a daycare center in Bridge City, Texas.

Jana went into the BTWB training with an open mind and purposely did not do much research to add to the adventure. She knew the training would involve firearms and defensive tactics and was eager to improve her skills in these areas. As a law enforcement officer, she learned that there is always room for improvement, and the training proved to be an eye-opener.

The firearm training was far more than just shooting at a stationary target. The instructors showed them how even the slightest variation in their grip, trigger finger placement, or thumb position can impact the accuracy of their shots. She realized the importance of continuous training and how she needs to improve her shooting skills, mindset, fighting ability, and other tactical skills.

At the training, she was nervous about meeting all the ladies because she did not have much “girl time” at work or home. However, she was pleasantly surprised by how welcoming and impressive the other female officers were. They came from different backgrounds and had varying experience levels, from competition shooters to SWAT team members to officers with only one year on the job. Jana believes these women will be lifelong friends, and finding others with similar interests and mindsets was terrific. It has motivated her to connect with the other three female officers in her department and spend more time together, sharing tips and supporting each other.

One of the topics covered at the BTWB



training was leadership skills, including “Queen Bee Syndrome,” which refers to women in the workplace who intimidate and exclude their female colleagues. Jana wants to be the opposite of that and foster a supportive environment for all officers in her department and neighboring agencies.

The best part of the BTWB training was the instructors themselves. The courses were all hands-on, and the instructors were highly qualified, experienced, and passionate about teaching. Some were men, and some were women, but they all demonstrated their skills and

were eager to share their knowledge with the participants. Being a female in law enforcement has its benefits and challenges. Jane believes that women bring a different perspective and approach to problem-solving, which can be helpful when dealing with victims.

JOHNETTE

Johnette has been in law enforcement for six years. Although she started her career late in life, she always wanted to do it but only got the chance later. Her career began at Florida State Prison, an all-male prison, and subsequently transferred to



the Nassau County Sheriff's Office Jail and Detention Center. She is a Detention Sergeant, acting as Watch Commander on her shift. She has been recently selected for Lieutenant, and once the promotion takes place, she will officially be the Watch Commander.

She went to BTWB hoping to learn something new and have fun. However, the program exceeded her expectations. She learned about the history of women in law enforcement, how to rappell from a six-story building, how to manipulate her grip on her firearm, fix her stance, adjust her posture, and maximize her shooting efficiency. She also learned how to shoot while running, clear a building and shoot when necessary, and defensive tactics utilizing Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. Each instructor was skilled and very wise and readily shared their wisdom.

Johnette said the camaraderie was fantastic! There was no judgment, only help and cheering on each other. It was great to be around other females who understand what being a female in law enforcement is like. To be able to share similar issues was necessary and refreshing. It truly helped to know that she was not alone. It was a much-needed, four-day "wooo-sah" moment.

Johnette said it was hard to choose a favorite part of BTWB as everything was different, and she learned something from each aspect of the program. However, if she had to pick, she would say her favorite was all the knowledge she gained quickly. She loved rappelling head-first down a six-story building.

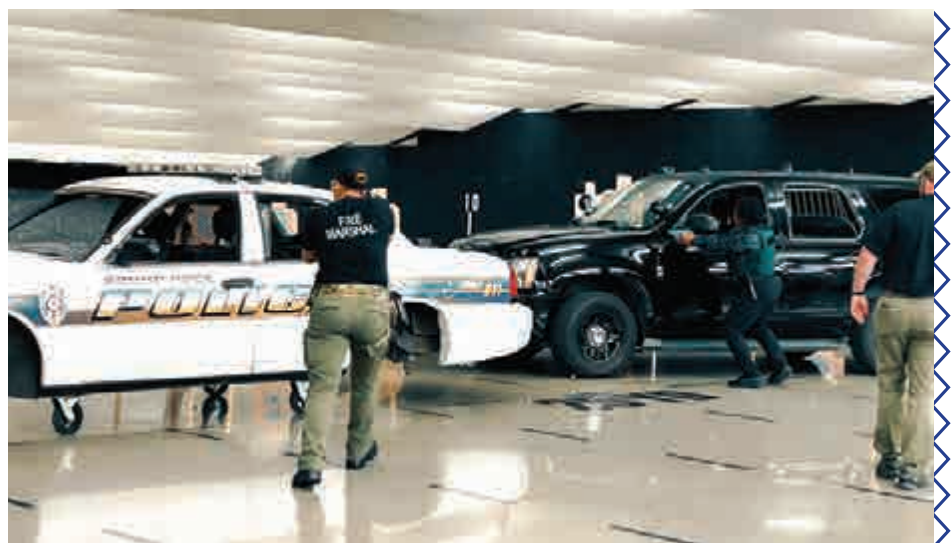
As a female, Johnette has a heightened sensitivity, which helps her talk to troubled people. She feels it is easier to de-escalate a situation with just her voice. Johnette has hardly ever had to use force to calm a situation. She finds

that inmates tend to listen to her more than they would a male officer. Being a female in law enforcement also gives you an undeniable sense of accomplishment.

Johnette also said females have to work harder to prove themselves worthy of being able to do the job. Law enforcement is a male-dominated field, and male officers tend to treat females as if they are inferior/weak. Many male officers have trouble taking orders from females, which makes it difficult to move up the ladder. There is still that "old-school" mentality that a woman should be at home barefoot and pregnant, in the kitchen or the bedroom. Because of this mentality, some (not all) men refuse to teach women the job duties.

Many wonder why she is in law enforcement, given her educational background, which includes four associate degrees, a bachelor's, a master's, and a Ph.D. She could be earning a much higher salary in another career field. However, she cannot see getting better rewards from doing anything else. She desires to make a difference and some of the people who get arrested and are brought to her need help. This is an occupation where making a difference in someone's life, someone who has nowhere else to turn, takes place. Johnette also owns a restaurant in Kenya, East Africa, where 100% of the proceeds go to feeding the children and elderly who have nothing. She can take a lot of the wisdom she acquired from BTWB and apply it to help others.

To learn more about Back the Women in Blue or if you have someone in mind to nominate for the program, please go to www.agirlandagun.org





Back the Women in Blue is made possible through A Girl & A Gun and the following sponsors.



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The Future

WITH SHELBY SIVADON

grandmother and her little dog, Opal, and her journey can be followed on her Facebook page, Janalyn's Journey where you can see her story is one of strength and inspiration to many.

BADF DISABLED HUNTERS SERVICES

BADF Disabled Hunter Services, a program established in 1993 by Buckmasters American Deer Foundation, recognizes the need for hunting opportunities for individuals with disabilities. In the United States, an estimated 1.7 million people with severe physical disabilities participate in hunting and shooting sports. These individuals often face life-changing events taken for granted by able-bodied sportsmen. For them, activities such as learning to shoot again, being in the wilderness, or observing wildlife can profoundly impact their lives. Understanding the significance of outdoor recreation for those with disabilities, BADF Disabled Hunter Services has developed various programs and resources to assist challenged citizens in the U.S. and Canada with their outdoor adventures. We can utilize combined resources to locate and organize hunting opportunities on private or exclusive lands with commercial outfitters. Our year-round program also promotes peer support among participants, fostering hope, confidence, self-esteem, and independence. It allows them to once again engage in a meaningful part of their lives. There are no membership fees or clubs to join, and our participants range from ages 8 to 80, with a variety of permanent physical disabilities including spinal cord injuries, amputations, complications from cancer, neuromuscular diseases, blindness, and strokes. Our disabled hunts, available for individuals with severe physical disabilities throughout the U.S., offer opportunities to hunt various species such as white-tailed deer, elk, turkey, exotics, antelope, wild boar, various types of fowl, and potentially others. Some hunts are conducted on private lands at no cost to the hunter, while others are arranged with experienced outfitters who specialize in guiding disabled clients at discounted prices.

In 2007, Janalyn was diagnosed with ependymoma at the young age of 2. After her tumor was removed from her cerebellum and she was sent back to the ICU, she was placed on her back which caused her to inhale and develop a stroke. She spent several months in the hospital battling various infections, such as pneumonia and brain fungus, which resulted in multiple brain surgeries, including shunt placements and removals. Unfortunately, Janalyn was left with several disabilities, including impaired vision, stability, speech, and mental function. Before her surgeries, Janalyn enjoyed outdoor activities like camping, hunting, and fishing with her father, but it seemed like she would never be able to do these things again. However, with the help of adaptive gear

and a blind built by her father on their land, Janalyn could hunt again and even took down a beautiful 10-point buck at a hunt organized by Buckmasters. Despite her limitations, Janalyn's love for hunting and fishing only grew stronger and she continued to defy expectations. However, at the age of 16, she was once again diagnosed with brain cancer and underwent radiation and chemotherapy. But true to her resilient spirit, she overcame cancer and was given the opportunity by Southern Outdoors Unlimited in Mississippi to go on a hunt of a lifetime, where she successfully killed a large 6-point buck. Although she may be unable to physically express it, Janalyn's joy and excitement could be heard in her giggles. She is determined more than ever to continue hunting and fishing, much to the pride and admiration of her family. Despite her disabilities, she uses guns with scope phone adapters to improve her aim, with her favorite being the 300 Savage rifle. Janalyn also enjoys other activities like bowling, Wii bowling, swimming, fishing, and anything related to SpongeBob. She shares a special bond with her



Additionally, many BADF chapters support disabled hunters in their communities by arranging hunts or sending individuals on special hunts in other parts of the country. Interested hunters must go through an application process, and all events prioritize safety. The Life Hunts program, established in 1998, grants hunting wishes to critically ill and extremely disabled children, as well as some adults. This program was created after mainstream foundations stopped granting hunting wishes or requests involving firearms or archery equipment. Life Hunts provide individuals with uncertain futures a glimmer of hope and something to look forward to during medical and physical trials. These hunts are also available to severely disabled children with diseases known to shorten their lifespan.

SOUTHERN OUTDOORS UNLIMITED

Southern Outdoors Unlimited, aims to introduce individuals with disabilities to the great outdoors through hunting, fishing, faith, and fellowship. Our non-profit organization relies on the generosity of sponsors, landowners, and volunteers to host events and build a sense of community for those with disabilities and their families. One of the biggest events is the annual SOU Super Hunt, a three-day Deer Hunt for

disabled youth in Mississippi. This event is free and open to any child between the ages of 6 and 17. The weekend is filled with exciting activities and hunting adventures across central Mississippi. Being a Super Hunt participant is an incredible experience from the moment you arrive until the banquet on Sunday. The landowners and guides treat the children and their families like VIPs, who go above and beyond to make them feel like family. The weekend is full of great food, fellowship, and fun, making it an unforgettable experience. Of course, the hunting is also top-notch, but the Super Hunt's real value lies in the friendships that are formed. Guides play a crucial role in the event, as each participant is assigned a guide for their hunts and throughout the weekend. As hunters, it is their responsibility to educate the next generation. For guides, this is a chance to impart knowledge and share insights about the outdoors

that will stay with the participants for a lifetime. The Super Hunt has been a successful event for 12 years, and it would not be possible without the dedication of the volunteers. These volunteers come from diverse backgrounds and give their time and energy to ensure the participants and their families have a memorable and enjoyable hunting experience.



To find out more about BADF or Southern Outdoors Unlimited please visit their respective websites.



SHOOTER VISION

WITH INSTRUCTOR CRAIG D. PORTER; PART II PHOTOS BY THADDIUS BEDFORD

The concept of Quiet Eye for shotgun shooters has been around since 2001, but it is still misunderstood or unknown to many competitors and coaches. Quiet Eye is an essential piece of the shooting process; it is a great aid, helping to enter The Zone or Flow and get more hits.

Dr. Joan Vickers defines the Quiet Eye as “The final fixation on a location within 3m of visual angle for a minimum of 100ms”. Vickers’s definition doesn’t mean much to most of us. Practically, Quiet Eye is a settling of the eye that occurs just before calling pull and is the act of obtaining hard focus on the target before pulling the trigger. Researchers have studied Quiet Eye in sports for decades and have always reached one conclusion: **Top athletes in sports always obtain Quiet Eye earlier and hold it longer than lesser-skilled competitors.**

The foundation of the NSCA method is Eyes, Movement, Trust. Without the proper use of the eyes, movement, trust, and a hit will not be achieved. Shooters and shooting coaches have known for a long time that visual connection with the target is critical. In his 1955 book “Game Shooting”, Churchill stated:

“Promise yourself to shoot that pheasant in the eye or the left leg or beak. Look at that and nothing else as you fire”.

In other words, have a sharp focus (establish Quiet Eye) on the target.

Knowing the eyes are important and proving it has taken a few decades and many advancements in science. Dr. Vickers started to study how the eye works in sports in the 1990s. Dr. Christopher Jannelle presented on the Quiet Eye for rifle shooting at the 2001 USAS bi-annual Coach Conference. Chris Batha mentioned some work by Les Greevy on a topic called Quiet Eye in his article “A Matter of Balance” in the September 2002 “Sporting Clays”. Les Greevy authored the article “Trapshooting the Olympic Way” in the March 2006 “Trap and Field” and provided a pre-shot routine to help shotgun shooters obtain Quiet Eye (QE).

The importance of Quiet Eye in shotgun shooting was conjecture based on field observation until 2010 when Causer, et al. did research on Quiet Eye and published the paper “Quiet Eye and Gun Motion In Elite Shotgun Shooting”. In short, the study concluded:

- Elite shooters move slower but more in sync with the target.
- Elite shooters obtain Quiet Eye (QE) sooner and hold it longer.
- In both sub-elite and elite shooters, QE onset was earlier, and duration was always longer on breaks.

Regardless of shooting ability, getting the visual lock on the target and keeping it **always resulted in more breaks** than when target acquisition was late.

Causer, et al., were not content to discover the importance of Quiet Eye, so they did another study entitled “Quiet Eye Training in a Visuomotor Control Task”. While the title may be misleading, the purpose of the study was to determine if shotgun shooters could be trained to improve QE and get more hits. The study took 20 International Skeet shooters and broke them into two matched groups with an average score of 60. One group practiced normally and got to watch video recordings of their performance. The other group was given a pre-shot routine to use and, in addition to watching videos of their performance, trained in Acquisition QE (AQE). After eight weeks of practice, the first group still had a 60 average score. *The group with QE training saw an average score in the 70s, a 20% improvement!* The study concluded that QE training resulted in better scores and better movement to the target at all levels of shooter ability.

The bottom line is that training QE makes better, more efficient shooters.

Vickers’ works address QE in a variety of situations. For example, in basketball, she discusses QE during play when the ball is moving and QE for free throw shooting and when passing or receiving the ball. She addresses QE during the shooting process in golf, maintaining QE even after the ball is struck. Vickers believes that using QE in situations where the target is unmoving results in better access to The Zone or Flow. Greevy’s pre-shot routine is about stillness and helping the shooter move into The Zone.

Remember, the eyes have two types of vision, Primary (Focal) and Secondary (Peripheral). Secondary vision is broad and sees movement quickly. The Focal part of the eye is very small (about 3%), and the rest of the eye makes up





Secondary vision. The eyes use Secondary vision to sense movement and direct the Primary vision to focus on the target. If the eyes move around, it takes longer to detect the target because the brain needs to sort movement to get on target.

If the eye can be made still (QE), it is more likely that target motion will be detected rather than having the mind distracted by other movements. Given the added benefit of more likely being able to move in The Zone, it makes sense to train for QE as part of the pre-shot routine. Vickers and Causer also call visual lock on the target QE. This can be confusing, so we define the pre-shot QE as the Stabilizing QE (SQE) and the moving QE as the Acquisition QE (AQE).

ACQUISITION QE (AQE)

Acquisition QE is a concept familiar to shotgun shooters. This is the hard focus on the target that generates hits. The earlier and longer a shooter can obtain the “target lock”, generating “hard focus” at the breakpoint, the better they will shoot.

STABILIZING QE (SQE)

The foundation of the SQE is a gaze rather than focusing on a specific point. The gaze must be centered where Secondary (peripheral) vision can readily pick up the target so the Primary vision can be quickly moved to a target. Vickers tells us that the eye cannot see objects moving at

high speed, so the gaze must also be located where the target is slow enough to acquire. The gaze must be stable, so the brain is not distracted by seeing non-targets objects due to eye movement. A Stable Quiet Eye calms the brain and helps enter “The Zone”.

Research has shown it can take one to three seconds to establish SQE. But Vickers notes it is not a counting game, the time to enter SQE is different from one person to another. For a game like International Skeet, the shooter should develop their SQE skills and learn to establish QE quickly because the delay after calling for the target may impact their ability to maintain SQE.

In some definitions, gaze is defined as focusing

on a specific point. For SQE purposes, the eye is not focused on a particular point but rather on a panoramic view, much like taking in scenery. While there is no focus on a specific point during the gaze, the focal center must still be set to optimize the target pickup point. The gaze must also be directed past the target line centered on a particular point so the eyes can come back to the target. **Focusing from far to near is several times faster than focusing near to far.**

Craig has an extensive resume as a NRA (Pistol/ Shotgun instructor/National Development team staff, training counselor, chief RSO), NSCA Level III certifying instructor, and USAS advanced instructor.



Rollin' with my Homie

Part II

Written & Photos by: Natalia Gonzalez

RICHMOND DALE, OHIO

We happened to arrive on Isaac's birthday. Jen and I had prearranged that Lawson and I would surprise the kids at the birthday lunch, which was taking place at the best local Mexican restaurant in Chillicothe. Chillicothe was the original capital of Ohio and the nearest town to Richmond Dale, complete with a Walmart, a Kroger, a new Raisin Canes, and a very stinky paper mill. Lawson and I waited in the car with a clear view of the front door to see when they arrived. This party was with the boys' father and his family, who welcomed us with open arms and were in on the surprise. The looks on both kids' faces when we casually walked into the restaurant behind them were priceless. At least one jaw dropped. The boys picked up where they had left off two summers before. Jen wasn't at this lunch, so I was secretly envious of the boys' reunion as I was still waiting to have mine with Jen. With 1,175 miles between us most days, I couldn't wait to travel the last fourteen miles from Chillicothe to Richmond Dale.

Once we were finally at Jen's house, we grabbed our stuff and knew exactly where to go and unpack, as we were already familiar with the sleeping arrangements. From then on, there was 100% pure fun to have for our stay; we were in Ohio heaven. I won't lie; the rest of the week was almost a blur. We were so incredibly relaxed and going with the flow that if it were not for pictures of the trip, I wouldn't have been able to paste the order of events together.

We started by spending an entire day in Columbus, exploring their fancy shopping area with indoor and outdoor shopping, which included designer stores. Derrick was still out of town, and we would pick him up from the airport that evening so the real fun could begin... Derrick is like a fourth kid. First, we had a delicious meal at The Cheesecake Factory, and everyone behaved.

Next was a trip to the Louis Vuitton Store. Yes, I know this is rather bougie. However, it was a cultural experience for the boys. A tremendously knowledgeable and friendly man helped us fall in love with the world of luxury goods, high fashion, and high jewelry, as it is called in this world. A true lover of fine watches, this devoted employee, Devon, regaled the boys with tales of the intricate and carefully designed new watches, including the art and history behind every detail. Mesmerized, the boys also bonded over Devon's previous college basketball career and the current basketball players he considers good personal clients. The visit ended with Lawson

trying to negotiate free bags, the rich and heavy paper bags they put your purchases in. Devon politely excused himself while he went to go "see what I can do." He returned shortly with three small iconic orange Louis Vuitton purchase bags, each filled with samples of various luxurious perfumes. He graciously gave us his card (in case I ever wanted to order something through him) and parted ways. Later that night, I would sample each one of the perfumes and fell in love with one. I am not a perfume person, so finding one that I love, not kind of like, but genuinely love, well, it's never happened before. Afternoon Swim will forever be my signature scent, and if they ever stop making it, I don't know what I will do. I ordered it from Devon immediately upon returning home. You may wonder why I included this part of the story, and I am happy to elaborate. I appreciate a true example of why luxury goods, the magic they bring to the survival of capitalism, and a type of status that some may find unfair make America great. Work hard, be rewarded, and buy nice, expensive things if you want. For others, it might be going on a safari in Africa every year or traveling the world exploring the most beautiful beaches; the point is, we can dream and achieve these things. The American Dream. It looks different for everybody, but I loved seeing these boys experience one aspect of that life.

The next activity on the agenda was a good,



old-fashioned trip to the movies to see none other than the box office-breaking Barbie movie. The boys were excited; they even got pink shirts to enter the Barbie spirit. After the movie, an in-depth discussion of everyone's thoughts and opinions on the film and its reputation, characters, and themes were had. It is fascinating what average thirteen-ish-year-old boys with conservative, gun-loving mothers thought of the movie. It was fun.

Once Derrick arrived, the vacation got into full swing. We swam in the cool, refreshing creek while Ohio was experiencing a "heat wave" by their standards. As for me, I was enjoying the below-90-degree heat and lack of humidity and was growing annoyed with the locals complaining about how hot it was. As the week went on, the temperature and humidity slowly rose. By the end of the trip, I told Jen at our last breakfast that it was okay now; it was officially hot and humid and worthy of complaining. She laughed.

Throughout the rest of the week, we talked and spent time with Jen's family, who now know and remember us from the last trip. Lawson even had the ultimate Hot Wheels experience with Jen's uncle. An avid collector himself since the 80s, Lawson and the boys spent an entire evening digging through large storage bins neatly stacked with thousands of vintage Hot Wheels. We played board games and card games, ate, laughed, and continued to bond and build the unique friendship we had invested in. We even

got matching Bibles during a girls' shopping trip to a local boutique. We wanted to take a stained-glass-making class, but I would be gone by the time the next class took place. We plan to book my trip dates around taking multiple stained-glass-making courses this coming summer, 2024.

No matter the changes in our lives, like Jen's ever-expanding local empire of Salt Creek Kayak Adventures to her latest venture, Salt Creek Cabins, we have found the time to spend together as friends and with our families.



one final game night and reluctantly packed our things. During this bittersweet packing session, I carelessly threw my iPad on the bed and watched it slide off slowly, making a loud thud when it reached its final resting place on Jen's floor. Jen and I dropped the boys off the following day and returned to the house.

Meanwhile, Lawson and Derrick went to get the kayaks ready. Salt Creek Kayak Adventures had a group of kayakers coming in, and it was time to get back to work. I began the slow process of repacking the master-level Tetris game necessary to bring everything back in the car, including all my antique store purchases from our successful trip to Chillicothe and at least four of their local antique shops. Antiquing is one of my favorite small-town activities, a sentiment shared by our entire party.

Business was good that day as more and more people began to show up; it was a hot day, perfect for a dip in the refreshingly calm waters of Salt Creek. Lawson had so much fun working and helping Derrick that he didn't want to leave. I let him stay and work past the lunch rush, and Jen decided it was a good time to let them handle it, as it is just a two-person job. I had been talking to Jen about how much I wanted to fall in love with pistol shooting, so we decided to pull out all her pistols I might like and take them down to her shooting range. Being a professional instructor, she gave me the safety instructions and began demonstrating the proper stance and grip. Once she knew I was comfortable, we loaded up the



This is why I do it. This is why I will never stop. I found myself in the shooting community. I found my people. My like-minded, incredible, intelligent, funny, talented, and alive group of people. These are the people I want my son to be influenced by. These are the types of friends I want him to have. Life is a series of choices, and who you choose to spend your life with, even for one week a year, matters.

On our final day, which we arrived a little earlier than expected. Isaac and Wesley were scheduled to spend time with their father on a camping trip to Hocking Hills. This is now on our list of places to go during our Summer 2024 trip. We had



life, might vaguely interest me: the stadium of the Indianapolis Colts, Lucas Oil Stadium. Lucas Oil is the top sponsor of many multi-gun competitions, and that's cool. Also, Lawson loves football, so I could appreciate the stadium as we drove past. Other than this moment, the drive to St. Louis was as uneventful as a day in the life of a particular president. Just kidding. Kind of. Not really.

The only activity on the agenda for this town was the City Museum. A maze of rebar with a scattered assortment of interesting exhibits filled this Children's Museum in downtown St. Louis. Even with multiple stories of activities, including a rooftop playground that rivals

first gun and shot it. I liked it; I didn't love it. Learning to love pistol shooting involves, most importantly, the proper instructor and testing different options until you find the one that feels "just right." And honestly, I feel like Goldilocks regarding pistols: I haven't seen the one that is "just right" yet.

A little while later, Lawson arrived, and it was time for his lesson with Jen. We both got to shoot so many fun guns from her collection. When Derrick asked me how I liked it, I was still shrugging, letting him know I hadn't fallen in love yet. He took this as a personal challenge, so he went home to pack up another little suitcase full of different pistols and ammo so I could learn to feel the difference between the other types. Just like when I started shooting shotguns, I had to know about the different calibers and types of ammo within that caliber and how each gun has its personality, recoil, and feel based on its size, shape, and ammo. It never ceases to amaze me as I learn about the infinite world of guns and ammo. Like baseball statistics, I am always fascinated with people, primarily men, who can get into deep, philosophical discussions about their favorite gun, ammo, or caliber. There is so much to learn.

RICHMOND DALE, OHIO — ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 451 MILES

As we made our way through what I am sure is still considered the Midwest of America, we passed a landmark that, for the first time in my



anything you've seen before, the lack of central AC in the building, and the exact need for knee pads to truly enjoy the twisted creation of a true artist, we came, we saw, we left.

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI — WHITE HALL, ILLINOIS. 75 MILES

The hometown of one of the National Sporting Clays Association's most notable range owners and partner in the clothing line Blood Money Clothing. Gary Fitzjarrell's FLC Outfitters was our home for the next few days. Nested in the middle of the expanse of southern Illinois cornfields,

we settled into a temporary life of complete and utter silence. I have never been in the middle of a cornfield, but now I can see why one would never want to leave, especially after living in the city/suburbia my entire life. We spent three days alone on the range 98% of the day. We were set up with a golf cart and a shooting card, and they even set up the Helice ring for me. All we needed was our trusty flats of RC Cartridges from Clay Shooters Supply, and we were set. We spent our glorious time there enjoying the crisp summer air, all the shooting our hearts desired, and some one-on-one time. Due to the rural nature of our establishment, it was a great time to resume Lawson's driving lessons. Every night after we were tired of watching so much Cobra Kai, Lawson would drive around the country roads that connected the rural houses and properties of the already rural town of White Hall, Illinois. The trip's highlight was me letting him drive to the gas station to pick up our pizza one night.

WHITE HALL, ILLINOIS — BRANSON, MISSOURI 328 MILES

The final chapter of our epic summer road trip led us to Branson, Missouri, home of the iconic Bass Pro Shops. The original Bass Pro Shops is in Springfield, Missouri, and houses the National Rifle Association's Museum. With a full schedule that included a trip to the museum and a visit to the Bass Pro Shops Shooting Academy, the anticipation of finishing our journey with the grand finale was riveting. Unfortunately, as we



arrived at our hotel late the first night, my sweet boy uttered the most dreaded words a mother could hear: "Mom, I don't feel so well." I reluctantly touched his forehead with the back of my hand, and the heat radiating from him would have set off an alarm on a thermal scope. We unloaded the luggage, and he went straight into the restroom for a "bower," a bath filled up from the shower head, so you get the best of both worlds. I left for the nearby pharmacy to get every remedy known to man, hoping he could kick this quickly and we could still go ahead with our plans. His repeated coughing, tossing, and turning all night confirmed the worst; I would have to cut the trip short.

I met the manager at the shooting academy for my official tour. Landry Weston, the man responsible for keeping the Shooting Academy in tip-top shape, could not be any nicer. He casually pointed to a man on the steps below us as he gave me the tour and explained why everything outside appeared to be torn up and in the middle of a wide-scale remodel. This man was Johnny Morris, the mastermind behind Bass Pro Shops and the area's outdoor facilities and hotels conglomerate. With a vast imagination and a great support staff, his latest venture included the addition of a stadium below the shooting academy to host large concerts and his newly formed bull riding team. Our tour concluded with a friendly competition on one of their 5-Stand courses with incredible views of the wooded terrain below, which is also the future site of their new and much improved sporting clay course. I had so much fun that I forgot to take

pictures and had Lawson on my mind. (please enjoy the professional stock photos that they sent over) When I mentioned to Landry that I am a certified instructor, the light bulb moment of all light bulb moments occurred. I am excited to announce that we will work together to have me come out to the Shooting Academy as a guest instructor. Be on the lookout for announcements about such events. If you have yet to make it to this part of the country, it is an absolute bucket list item of unspoken natural beauty. With a sick child waiting for me back at the hotel, I left my excitement about this fantastic opportunity behind. I focused on what lay ahead: an eleven-hour drive back to Houston with a feverish and exhausted child.

BRANSON, MISSOURI – HOUSTON, TEXAS 598 MILES

We departed the hotel around 11 am with a car full of things and our minds full of memories. Luckily, the drive from Branson has many options that take about the same time. There are scenic, straight highways and more scenic but slightly slower routes. I chose the scenic but fast route. Though he was sick, he was still talkative. With the iPad broken and no entertainment besides music and our thoughts, we embarked on the final leg of our trip. Our summary conversation on this day will forever be engrained in my mind. We talked about everything, and I mean everything. Everything from entertaining to awkward teenage moments was discussed; nothing was off limits. We opened up to each



other even more than we already do, which means a lot.

I still need to do the math on exactly how much this trip cost me in dollars spent plus dollars not earned, but the price is irrelevant. Again, I don't know when I decided to plan a month-long road trip with my son, but it was a stroke of genius. Twenty-seven days on the road and 3,929 miles created a new level in our mother/son relationship. Our bond has transformed into something I struggle to even put into words. The level of trust and friendship developed within us seems to know no bounds. His desire to learn, grow, shoot, and achieve great things has impacted every aspect of his life. His work ethic, dedication to school, and commitment to his sport, football, have amazed me and everyone in our family. We may never be able to do another trip like this now that he plays football, and the school sports will take up so much time in the summers moving forward. I wonder if there will ever be a time when, even if we have the time, he will choose to spend so much time with me over time with his friends. But I know this trip was eye-opening, soul-searching, and barrier-breaking for both of us. Please take advantage of every opportunity to show your children who you are so they can also show you who they are. Be yourself, full of beautiful flaws and imperfect patience. It is so much better to be accurate than to uphold an impossible to live up to the image. This might feel slightly off-topic, but if you have children, you know exactly what I mean in these last few sentences.



A photograph of a woman with long brown hair and a brown cap, smiling and looking upwards. She is holding a large, curved antler with her right hand, which has a ring on the ring finger. She is wearing a plaid jacket. The background is a bright, overcast sky. The image is framed by a dark blue horizontal band across the top and a pink horizontal band below it, both containing text.

KATIE VAN SLYKE

WITH BRANDY ELROD, PHOTOS PROVIDED BY KATIE VAN SLYKE

Poppy and Petunia's mom, or at least that is what everyone knows her as on social media. Katie has a tremendous following on multiple social media platforms, where she gives us a glimpse into her everyday life on her family's farm in Tennessee. Katie spent her childhood at "Running Springs" Quarter Horse & Cattle Company, where her parents originally owned and bred barrel horses, thus giving the name to the family farm with natural springs running through a sprawling 300 acres. I had the pleasure of sitting down with Katie and learning more about the outdoor part of her life.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

When she was a little girl, Katie started hunting with her dad as a toddler. They would hunt in box blinds, and she would sleep on the ground, waking up when he shot a deer. At the age of 10, Katie started hunting during juvenile weekend. One day, while attending the private Christian school where she spent her parochial years, her teacher asked who went hunting. Katie was the only girl who stood and told everyone that weekend she harvested a buck and two does. This was a lightbulb moment for Katie; this was the first time she told others she was a hunter and loved sharing her stories about her hunt. Katie was always fortunate as she always harvested a deer every time she went to the blind; by age 15 or 16, she started hunting by herself. As she got older, her dad put restrictions to make it more complex and challenging; she harvested her first 11-point buck by herself in her first year of college. What started as something to do with her parents has now become her lifelong passion.

MY FOREVER HUNTING PARTNER

When I asked Katie about her husband, she smiled and said their first date was in a deer blind. Katie is the same age as one of her husband's younger brothers. Katie attended Elementary school and church with them and even shared many of the same friend groups as they got older. She was the good girl; he was a little rowdy, and they didn't notice each other until they realized his family had moved to a property that shared a fence with Katie's parents. As Katie said, "I was 20, he was 23, and..... We started talking on SNAPCHAT! How embarrassing of a 'how we met' story! But, we did go hunting as our first date, and we had our

first kiss in a deer stand, and it's been a fairytale ever since!" Katie has had many first-hunting trips with her husband: first turkey hunt, first antelope, and out-of-state bucks. They have also ventured into waterfowl and upland hunting together.

LETTING THE WORLD INTO HER LIFE

At the age of 20, Katie started her journey on social media to educate women about the outdoors initially. She wanted to share her hunting experiences, including the mistakes she

made and the lessons she learned. She also wanted to be a positive and relatable role model for women in the hunting community. However, she has also faced challenges, such as the pressure to conform to a particular way of hunting and the negative portrayal of hunting on social media. Despite this, Katie believes that hunting should not define one's entire life and that it's okay to have other interests and look pretty while hunting.

When asked about her favorite hunting experiences, Katie mentioned her first elk hunt in Canada, where she used all her luck to harvest a 6x7 bull on the first day.





KATIE VAN SLYKE

She also shared her love for whitetail hunting and the fun and camaraderie of opening dove hunts with friends. Katie's favorite firearm is a Cooper Firearms Backcountry rifle, which she received as a gift from her parents. She also loves bringing Reese's treats on hunting trips; thus, it is her favorite item in her range or hunting bag.

On a personal note, Katie has two mini cows named Poppy and Petunia, and is an avid equestrian. She believes one can always learn from others and advises her 16-year-old self to keep an open mind and listen to different perspectives. As a social media influencer in a male-dominated industry, Katie wants to break the negative connotation surrounding hunting and show that women can also be passionate and successful hunters. She also wants to inspire others to pursue their interests and not be defined by societal norms. And, as Katie says, "Ladies, if anyone tells you that you can't wear makeup while hunting, don't believe them and go shoot a bigger buck!"

To learn more about Katie follow her on the following platforms:

Facebook: [katievanslyke96](#)

Instagram: [katievanslyke](#)

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Why I am Shooting the FBI Pistol Qual and You Should Too!

With Pistol Instructor Melonie Kennedy



If you're the sort of shooter who always strives to challenge themselves, you've probably seen the FBI Pistol Qualification mentioned when searching out new drills to try. This test is often discussed in the context of law enforcement and security standards, so you might not think it applies to the average firearms owner. However, anyone can attempt the assessment, and each of us absolutely should do so!

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

On my journey to becoming a certified firearms instructor in 2019, I saw the FBI qualification (or "qual") suggested for training and penciled it onto my someday list with several other goals. In 2023, I became an A Team member of a chapter of A Girl & A Gun Women's Shooting League. As part of this role, I now have the opportunity to become an AG&AG Certified Trainer. To do this, I'll need to pass the FBI qualification test, so as you might imagine, "someday" quickly became ASAP!

Shooting the FBI qualification is an excellent method of assessing one's strengths and weaknesses, particularly for those of us who are carrying for personal protection. We can use the equipment we usually have on hand,

and the test uses 50 rounds of ammunition, an amount accessible for most shooters. Shooting one's initial attempt with no warm-ups provides a baseline and lets us decide where to go next in our training efforts (if we don't get an immediate pass). Those of you who are competitive shooters or law enforcement officers may find the FBI qual

quite doable or easy; if so, give yourself kudos - you are really rocking it at the range! For those who aren't competitors are new to handguns, the qual can help tremendously with learning our true abilities. No matter how long it takes a shooter to accomplish a passing score, in the end, they'll know much more about themselves and their firearm and even have documented

standards on file should they ever need to defend their capability as a hand-gunner.

HOW DOES THE QUAL WORK?

The course of fire for this test has five stages, all timed and ranging from three to twenty-five-yard target distances. Stages include tasks such as:

- Shooting one-handed with both the dominant and support hands.
- Performing an emergency reload and resuming fire.
- Moving from a standing to a kneeling position to shoot.

The accepted times vary per stage, allowing shooters to use point shooting (intuitive shooting) up close and giving more time to acquire a sight picture at greater distances. If you're not already



comfortable performing some of these actions or used to dealing with the stress of being timed, you've got a test ahead of you - and that's where dry fire comes in.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT!

Safe, dry-fire practice of the entire challenge can quickly be done at home, and you can break down each stage into steps to focus on areas where you'd like to improve. If you're accustomed to taking your time finding your sight picture, those time limits will push you to accept "combat accuracy" over tiny groups. If you usually shoot quickly and accept point penalties for misses, you already know you can work that trigger; now it's time to slow down and get strategic. Don't let the FBI qual intimidate you - use it as a ladder of training by choosing a skill to work on until it's mastered. Dawn Rose, A Girl & A Gun National eChapter Facilitator and owner of The Shooting Diva (www.shootingdivatraining.com/), explained that consistent dry fire training will help you pass the assessment much more quickly than you may expect. Rolling through each range session training to a specific stage of the course of fire allows us to celebrate lots of little wins and grow as shooters, and we'll each get to the big win in our own time. And since we're not enrolled in the FBI Academy, we can take this qualification standard and draw it out as long as we like!

RESOURCES

If you're interested in challenging yourself with the FBI qualification, multiple resources are available. The assessment uses the FBI QIT target, which is often available at gun shops but can easily be purchased online as well. (There are even printable scaled versions to practice the longer distance stages on shorter ranges properly.) If you are a member of A Girl & A Gun Women's Shooting League, there are member resources specifically for this challenge; just log in



LADYSHOOTER LIFESTYLES



to your account and search the member archives for "FBI QUAL." Not a member of AG&AG? Check the FASTER Saves Lives website (FasterSavesLives.org) for a video demonstration of the qual and a PDF. You can even sign up for an official challenge with them and support a great organization simultaneously! When searching for resources, ensure you're looking at the 2019 qualification list - the most recent standard- which is particularly important if you plan to use your final assessment score to prove your training efforts.

Working through the process can be enlightening and encouraging, no matter what level you're starting at or how many tries it takes to ace the FBI Qualification. Enjoy the thrill of pushing yourself and seeing what you're made of. We shooting sisters are incredibly capable - so let's get training!

Facebook: @FASTERSavesLives

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Instagram: @FASTERSavesLives

Melanie Kennedy is a freelance writer passionate about building personal and community resilience. She is an NRA-certified Range Safety Officer and Refuse To Be A Victim, Pistol, CCW, & Rifle Instructor. She can be contacted via LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/meloniek/>) and Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/authormeloniek/>).





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Smith and Wesson Barrel Bag Conceal Carry Handbag

Product Review By Katie Ball; Photos courtesy of Rugged Rare

Sharp Shooting Spokane has carried products from Rugged Rare for nearly a decade. Their product lines include Cameleon and Smith & Wesson Leather. Their commitment to fashionable, quality leather goods and safe concealed carry options for women is proven by their industry reputation and our years of experience selling their products. Many concealed carry products on the market are made of faux leather and do not withstand the wear and tear of everyday carry and the weight and strain of carrying a loaded carry weapon. This is why I am very discerning in the products I choose to have a firearm in.

My first Smith & Wesson leather product was the Personal Protection Backpack. I invested early on in this higher-end line from Rugged Rare and was utterly impressed from the very second I opened the box with the luxury smell and feel of the leather. I've continued acquiring and testing their products for personal carry purposes. At ShotShow 2024, Rugged Rare released a new line of camel-colored authentic leather bags from Smith & Wesson leather..., and I am SO here for it!! These new products include the Smith & Wesson Bucket Bag, Classic Satchel, and the model I'm focusing on for this article, the Barrel Bag.

At first glance, the Barrel Bag has the same shape as my Louis Vuitton Speedy bag and is a very similar size, measuring 9.5" x 7.5" x 6.5". I just loved the very traditional and timeless silhouette of the bag. The second thing you notice is the stunning camel-colored leather- the color goes with browns or blacks and is, again, such a classic appreciation of designer handbags with its smooth and uniform appearance. After my sample arrived, I took it out of the box and dust bag (it comes with a monogrammed dust bag), and the smell of the authentic cowhide leather was immediate and welcoming. The leather is smooth and soft, and the stitching is

secure and even, and adds a very high-end feel to the product. The zippers operate smoothly- the top zipper is a sizeable toothed gold metal, similar to my Speedy. But the concealed carry pocket had a smaller plastic-toothed zipper that added to its discretion in appearance and noise upon opening. I loved the gold hardware- it was hearty and yet very elegant. All zippers have leather pull tabs to make access easier and faster. The leather has structure to it as well, so the bag sits up nicely and doesn't fall over.

The bag has a concealed compartment with a hook and loop fabric that discreetly opens from

the side/end of the bag, allowing for quick access to the concealed carry items. It comes with a padded holster with a hook and loop to secure it inside the bag. I often prefer to switch these manufacture holders for a Kydex product, which I did here and it accommodated my Crossbreed Sig Rose Kydex holster and my Sig Rose (equivalent frame size to a 365XL). The CCW compartment measures 7.5" x 10" for reference. While it fits the 365XL, a full sized framed handgun would not fit comfortably. Access is easier when holding the product with the cross-body strap, as the handle drop is a mere 3.5". The retail price is \$159.99, a very midline price





point for concealed carry bags and a low price point when the natural leather is accounted for.

The inside of the bag has roomy and adequate space to accommodate my wallet, keys, and phone- surprisingly large considering its compact footprint compared on the outside. It also has a smaller zipper compartment suitable for a carry knife. The zippers extend partway down both sides, giving the bag a wider opening than if the zippers had run only across the top, another of the well-thought-out features evident with my use of the bag. It is also fully lined, making spot treatment easy (who hasn't had something open inside a bag?!).

I wasn't content to share my aesthetic thoughts, so I tested this product on the shooting range. It is important to practice drawing from this concealed carry bag with an **UNLOADED FIREARM** many times to get familiar with the access points and limitations. I also recommend testing and training with concealed carry products so you are trained in utilization in a self-defense situation. *Check with your local range if they allow this type of training before attempting*. As I stated earlier, this bag accommodates my 365XL, but it fits tight. I was

able to draw and come on target within a few seconds. I square up to my target, get my dominant hand on the firearm (Finger OFF THE TRIGGER!!!), and pull the bag out of my hand. This keeps the gun faced down range at all times. As soon as the bag and my hand are clear, the bag is dropped, and I grip the weapon with both hands. I can go on target and prepare to fire. It is worth noting that in a struggle, it would be difficult to withdraw the firearm with how small the carry pocket is with a midsize carry gun. My hands are pretty large, and I'm carrying a midsize firearm, so note that if you are petite or have a micro-frame, this is likely not applicable to your situation. My biggest argument for carrying purses, in general, is that you can't protect

yourself with a gun you aren't willing to take. **PERIOD.** If you prefer off-body carry, this Smith and Wesson barrel bag is a lovely addition to Rugged Rare's conceal carry line. Check out the larger-sized Satchel from the same line for larger firearms! It accommodated the 365XL easily and could accommodate a full-size frame with a similar aesthetic. The bag is made of such quality that it will stand up to daily use for many years, and I am optimistic this classy and elegant style is one every woman would enjoy!

Katie Ball is part owner of Sharp Shooting Indoor Range and Gun Shop in Spokane, Washington. You can follow her adventures and find more of her product reviews @thatsharpshootinggirl and at @sharpshootingspokane on IG or FB.



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Long Range Rifle with Peggy Houchin

Photos Provided by Peggy Houchin

I love to shoot. Shotguns, rifles, pistols, you name it, I love them all! My interest in long-range shooting began when I was competing in 3 Gun competitions and became frustrated when I wasn't hitting the 200-500-yard targets. I kept putting the bullseye on the target and couldn't understand why I wasn't hitting these steel targets. DUH

My JOURNEY

I'm always up for a challenge, so I took a local long-distance rifle class. And, I have to admit, I was baffled. I was utterly lost when the Instructor started talking about DOPE, mils, moa, wind calls, and holdovers. And being the only woman in the class (with many military and police officers), I was afraid to open my mouth and ask questions. I decided, "What the hell?" and told the Instructor I was baffled. And several other guys in the class said, "THANK YOU"! We are confused, too.

So, after some additional explanations from the Instructor and looking at my scope capabilities, I finally started to understand holdovers. I went out on the range and hit 700 yards with my Turquoise AR-15, and believe me, the guys with the big bolt guns were impressed. After shooting that 700-yard target, I was hooked! I took another class and started to practice.

I decided to buy a Seekins 6.5 Creedmoor Rifle, and my goal was to shoot out more than 700 yards. Along with the rifle, I had to purchase a pretty expensive scope. My goal was to shoot 1000 yards and eventually shoot 1 mile. I was told by several "experts" that I wouldn't be able to fire 1000 yards with that rifle. My next LRPR (Long Range Precision Rifle) class with Russell Anton from Defender's USA came at Cameo Sports Center in Grand Junction. I told him that my goal was to hit 1000 yards, and he laughed and said, "No problem"! With his assistance, my 4th shot, I hit 1000 yards. Then, of course, my goal became to shoot further.

In order to achieve my goal of the mile, I

purchased an accurate long-range precision rifle and a scope, so I bought a Ruger Precision Rifle and a Nightforce NX 8 scope. In addition, I took a 2-day class with Russell, and we did a deep dive into the basics of long-range shooting. More detailed understanding of wind calls, scopes, mils, moa, reading the mirage, zeroing your rifle, dialing your DOPE with your specific scope. I began to understand the importance of having a good spotter to help you achieve your shooting goals. In my case, my husband was my spotter and I was his. Long-range precision rifle shooting can be very complicated. However, your DOPE (data on previous engagement) makes ALL the difference in the world. Keeping accurate records of each shot is critical and helps you determine what to do for the next shot.

In addition, your environmental factors, such as elevation, wind, humidity, and barometric pressure, can also become a significant factor. After the two days with Russel Anton, I hit the 1-mile target!! Holy cow! A MILE!! With Russell's expertise and Steve's excellent spotting skills, I

achieved another primary goal: beating the mile. It took nearly 4 seconds for that steel target to light up. This target had LED lights, so you knew if you hit it. What a thrill!!

NEXT ADVENTURE – GUARDIAN LONG RANGE MATCH

I was invited to participate in my first long-range precision rifle competition with the Guardian Long Range Competition. It was being held in Grand Junction at Cameo Sports Complex, which is a 6-hour drive from my home in Colorado. I didn't feel like I was even remotely ready for a competition, but with some coaching, support, and encouragement from Heidi Beaumont, who is a very accomplished long-range rifle competitor and a woman, I decided to take the plunge and signed up for the competition. She reassured me that she would be with me every step of the way, along with many other LRPR competitors, and that they wanted more women competitors. It is definitely dominated by men, and Guardian is very supportive of getting more women involved.

In addition, Guardian's mission spoke to my heart. Guardian and Gary Larson's mission is to

"Defend the Weak and Fatherless," and all of the funds raised from the Guardian competitions, along with donations and silent auctions, go to a local Child Advocacy Group in the town that is holding the competition. Gary's story is very inspirational, and he reminds us throughout the match that "It's for the kids."

My first day was a ½ day "Train Up" with Chris Way and Josh Lemon to help us tune up for the match. The butterflies and jitters were very intense during that train-up. I started to think that maybe this was a big mistake. When I saw the level of competitors, the custom long-range rifles, scopes, gear, etc., I felt like I was completely out of my league. However, the welcome and encouragement that I received from so many of the competitors and staff was beyond anything that I had ever experienced. They truly wanted me to enjoy the competition, learn from the experience, and come back next year.

My squad consisted of Heidi, me, and four other men. The stages were all situated in the mountains and foothills of Cameo, and the terrain was challenging. It was very hot (in the 90s) and dry, and I had to hike up and down to the stages, carrying my 16-pound Ruger Precision Rifle, my backpack, my ammunition, bags, water, etc. Steel targets were placed strategically all

along the mountains, ranging from 300 to 900 yards. It was challenging to find the targets, set up your position mostly on large rocks and props, hit your target, make corrections based on the spotter's calls, move to the next position, and attempt to hit the next target. In my first few stages, I didn't hit a target; however, at about the 3rd stage, I hit several targets. My squad broke out in loud cheers, and I nearly cried with joy! My squad mates helped me beyond my wildest expectations and continued to cheer me throughout the rest of the stages.

At the end of the first day and 8th stage, I was exhausted but energized even though I had only hit a few targets. After the first day, we met for dinner and held the drawings for the incredible prize table. Instead of giving out prizes, you could purchase raffle tickets to be drawn for prizes. I was thrilled to have my tickets drawn for two incredible prizes: A Leupold range finder and a Bergara 6.5 Creedmoor rifle! Holy cow! What a DAY!!

So, on the 2nd day, we were to be paired with another shooter according to our placement on the first day. I placed it at the bottom of the pack; however, this proved to be the best thing that could have happened. I was paired with one of the top finishers in the match: Pro Shooter for



Kelbly Rifles, Josh Lemon. Josh was the kindest and most encouraging shooter that I've ever met! He took me under his wing, worked with me on the 2nd-day stages, and we placed somewhere in the middle of the pack. I learned more from him during that day than I could have possibly imagined.

In summary, the match was an amazing experience and a highlight of my life! I'm definitely going back next year and will spend this year working on my skills. While the match was challenging, it was more about the journey. The people that I met, the friendships I created, and the support I received were much more than hitting targets.



TO LEARN MORE AND FIND MATCHES VISIT:

[HTTPS://GUARDIANLONGRANGE.COM](https://guardianlongrange.com)



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NAVIGATING THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD

SELECTING APPROPRIATE SHOTGUN SHELLS FOR CLAY TARGET SHOOTING

WITH ANNIES' BOARD MEMBERS ROBIN SHEEHAN AND HANNAH JESSE

Lions & Tigers & Bears & Velocity & Payload & Shot Size Oh my! You may feel like Dorothy when navigating the fantastical world of shotgun shell selection. While it is easy to get overwhelmed, as a clay target shooter, knowing how to read a box of shells is vitally important. At first glance, much of the information found on a box of shells seems counterintuitive, like the higher the gauge, the smaller the shell. The pellets in a size #2 shot are much larger than those in a size #8 shot. We don't need to rely on the mythical 'man behind the curtain' for the answers or explanations. Below, you will find straightforward advice and a sophisticated approach to understanding information displayed on a shell box. As a shell consumer, informed decision-making will lead to more confidence, comfort, and competence in the shooting range.

Choosing the correct shells to shoot matters. There are unique considerations and consequences of your shell selection.

1. Safety – Using the correct gauge and length eliminates the potential for dangerous malfunction.
2. Effectiveness – Choosing the right shot size and speed increases your chances of consistently hitting the clay targets.
3. Comfort – Selecting the appropriate loads helps manage recoil.
4. Compliance – Adhering to local and range-specific regulations ensures legal and responsible shotgun use.

READING A BOX OF SHELLS

Understanding gauge, length, velocity, weight, and shot size will help you make informed decisions about the shells you purchase and shoot.

GAUGE

This is the most important number to consider for safety reasons when choosing shells. Modern shotguns come in 10, 12, 16, 20, and 28 gauge and .410 bore. The most popular for clay target shooting are 12g, 20g, and 28g. The larger the number, the smaller the diameter of the shell. This gauge number should be stamped on your gun's barrel. Selecting the same gauge shell to shoot as is found on your barrel is imperative. Otherwise, the shells won't fit – or worse, they will work but will not fire properly, resulting in a dangerous malfunction.

LENGTH
















The chamber (the part that holds the shells) of every shotgun is crafted to a certain length,

typically two $\frac{3}{4}$ ", 3", or 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". This number should be stamped on the gun's barrel or receiver. So, while you are checking for the gauge size, also take a look at chamber length. You can safely shoot a shorter shell in a longer chamber, but not vice versa. Please keep it simple and match it directly. Most clay target shooting is done with 2- $\frac{3}{4}$ " shells.

VELOCITY

The shot's muzzle velocity is typically expressed in FPS or feet per second. These speeds range from 1100fps to 1500fps. The faster the shot leaves the barrel, the more recoil you will feel, and the harder the pellets strike the clay. Don't be a hero. Choose shells between 1160fps and 1250fps. Shells with speeds higher than 1250fps will likely leave you bruised and flinching. The recoil may have you feeling like you are not in Kansas anymore. 1200fps is the sweet spot for many female shooters.



															
Size	9	8 1/2	8	7 1/2	6	5	4	3	2	1	BB	BBB	T	#4 Buck	000 Buck
Diameter in inches	.08	.085	.09	.095	.11	.12	.13	.14	.15	.16	.18	.19	.20	.24	.33

WEIGHT

The weight of the total shot payload is expressed in ounces. In 12g, this ranges from 7/8 oz up to 2 oz or more for shooting turkeys. The more shot in the shell, the more recoil you will likely feel. 7/8 oz loads are fine, and you can probably shoot more and practice more with these lighter loads. 1 oz loads are industry standard; if you are super tough, 1 1/8 oz may work for you. Start with lighter loads. Pay no attention to the ‘flying monkeys’ chirping; you need more payload to smoke targets. You don’t. Side note: 20g shells are typically standard at 7/8 oz loads, and the shell plastic case cover will always be yellow.

SHOT SIZE

Shot size matters! Unlike rifles and pistols, which launch a single projectile, shotshells are designed to launch multiple projectiles or pellets of “shot” in a pattern that widens as it travels through the air. The number of shot pellets that fit in a shotshell depends on their size. Shot size is expressed as a number from #9 (very tiny) to #2 (large). (see image) This indicates the size of the individual pellets of shot – the larger the number, the smaller the shot. Thus, more pellets will fit in the shell. For clay target sports, you generally want a small shot. Skeet targets are thrown relatively close, and these clays break easily; #9 or #8 work well. Sporting clay shooters often see longer distanced shots and clay targets that are structurally tougher to break, so many opt for the #7.5 shot. Trap shooters typically prefer a #9 or #8 shot at the 16-yard line and a #7.5 shot for doubles or handicap (moving back on the firing line and increasing distance). Test whether you are having more success with #7.5, #8 or #9 shot and move on. While setting you and Toto up for success with the right shot size is essential, don’t overthink it. The clays will only break if your shotgun is pointed in the right place when you pull the trigger, regardless of pellet shot size.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- **Budget** – Shotgun shells are expensive, priced between \$8-\$15 per box (25 rounds). Test out a few boxes in each price range and see if you notice a difference. Buy in bulk if you find shells you like at a decent price. Shells are like ruby red slippers; they don’t expire, and you can’t have too many.
- **Local and Range Specific Regulations** – Most clay target facilities will not allow shot sizes larger than #7.5 for safety reasons – larger shot travels farther and hit harder. Call the facility ahead to be sure your shells are compliant. Hunting shot sizes vary, but you can use #7.5 and #8 for small game birds such as quail and dove.
- **Shot Material** – Clay target shells are typically filled with pellets made of lead. Some clay target facilities and hunting preserves will only allow for steel (or other non-toxic) shot. Again, call ahead to confirm compliance.
- **Testing** – Many shooting ranges will have a ‘pattern board’ available to test your pellets’ patterns (spreads) at different distances. Seeing the pattern for various loads and shot sizes on paper may be a valuable exercise.
- **Availability** – Shell availability ebbs and flows, especially with COVID’s aftermath disrupting the manufacturing supply chain. Don’t expect your favorite shells to be readily available at multiple venues. Be an informed consumer and know the current market price. Typically, shells purchased at a sporting goods store or online cost slightly less than if you are buying at a gun club.
- **A final word on payload and velocity** – It’s worth repeating that purchasing and shooting lighter loads of 1 oz or less and slower than 1200fps doesn’t make you a cowardly lion. Quite the opposite. It

may help keep shooting enjoyable and enhance your ability to practice longer and more. New shooters with an inconsistent gun mount need to shoot lighter loads.

Knowledge is power regardless of where you are on your clay target journey or yellow brick road. Skeet, trap, and sporting clays are challenging to master. Not second-guessing your shell choice will be one less thing to consider before calling ‘pull.’ You should have enough relevant information about shotgun shells to help you make informed purchase decisions. Selecting and shooting appropriate shells with confidence and comfort is essential. Equally important is not getting overwhelmed by ballistics, trajectories, patterns, and physics. Let’s leave that to the (tin) men. Knowing exactly what to look for on a shell box and being secure in your knowledge of gauge, length, velocity, weight, and shot size will go a long way. The next time you shop the shotgun ammunition aisle at your local sporting goods store, you may feel like the Wizard of Shells!

There is no need to click your heels three times to remember all this info about selecting shells; scan the QR code here for a downloadable cheat sheet.



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Hog Hunting with Billie Halverson

WRITTEN BY TWO OWNER KELLY GODFREY
PHOTOS FROM BILLIE HALVERSON



Billie grew up in North Dakota where she participated in various equestrian activities such as showing horses, participating in an equestrian drill team, and team roping and breakaway roping in high school rodeo. Her passion for rodeo became evident when she started riding steers and bulls. For ten years, bull riding became the center of her world as she competed in rodeos across different states. Despite some great wins, Billie also suffered from multiple injuries, including facial stitches, leg, and hand stitches, and five broken arms. Her last surgery left her with 20 screws and three plates in her forearms, forcing her to find a new hobby.

THE WRECKING CREW

After trying different activities like polo, belly

dancing, and tennis, she eventually discovered roller derby. She recalled watching a tournament in a warehouse near Azle, Texas, where she saw strong, tattooed girls skating fast and knocking each other down. She was instantly hooked, but the problem was she couldn't skate. Billie took free lessons at the skating rinks with 5-year-olds, which was a bit humiliating as they were all better than her. She stayed by the walls to hold herself up for months until she improved. Finally, tryouts came around, and although she was the worst skater, she made the Wrecking Crew!

Her goal was to make more practices than any other skater since they were all so much better than her. After three years, she made the travel team and played nationwide, from California to Florida to Wisconsin. She remembers one of their championship bouts

where they were almost tied, and it was the last jam (last opportunity to score points) of the night. Their coach put her in to jam (score points), and thanks to great blockers, she got through the pack before the opposing jammer, scored a few points, and they won the trophy!

THE ROUGHIE

In 2017, she tried riding bucking horses, but she didn't enjoy it as much as bull riding. She missed part of her roller derby season and broke her back in three places while riding a bucking horse. She moved to Texas and became interested in predator hunting after she saw feral hogs for the first time while helping a friend build a fence in east Texas. Although her friend warned her about the danger of these animals, Billie wanted



to learn more about them. She faced the challenge of differentiating between good and bad advice but eventually found that going out and learning on her own was the best approach. She participated in the “biggest hog” hunt at PK Hunting near Graham, Texas, last February. She wasn’t competition-ready, but she entered by herself and snuck up on the last hog of the night that she spotted from 600 yards away at 5 am. She won the contest and got a nice chunk of change to help her buy her capri camper for hunting.

HOG HUNTING

Regarding hog hunting, Billie believes it is necessary to control their population, as they are invasive and can wreak havoc on crops and fields. Wild hogs can reproduce quickly, with a sow (female) able to reproduce as early as 5-6 months of age and having anywhere from 5-15 piglets at a time. They can destroy fields in seconds and are considered a nuisance. However, Billie mentioned that she doesn’t harvest all the predators she sees unless a landowner has asked her to do so. Some predators are part of the circle of life, and it is important to understand the population of predators in your area before deciding whether to hunt them. To determine this, you can set up game cameras on game trails or dead carcasses, look for tracks and scat, and sit in areas for different parts of the day and on

away in the dark. Billie recommends using a tripod, thermal scope, and a 6.5 Grendel to be more successful.

For women who want to get started in the outdoors, Billie has a simple piece of advice: just go for it! They don’t need a boyfriend or significant other to join them. There is public land available, or they can ask for permission from private landowners.

Did you know that feral hogs, also known as wild boars, have been around since before the last Ice Age? Early humans used to hunt and eat them, and they continued to thrive throughout the Stone Age in Europe and Asia. Over time, some domesticated hogs that were left to fend for themselves became feral, and today, the term “feral hogs” applies to both wild boars and domesticated hogs that have become feral.





In the 1930s, Texas ranchers and sportsmen released Eurasian wild boars for hunting, but many escaped and began breeding with feral hogs. This led to a decline in the pure Eurasian strain, and now very few, if any, left in Texas. Feral hogs are adaptable and have a high reproductive rate, which has led to an explosion in their population. They are actually the most prolific large, wild mammal in North America!

Feral hogs are social animals that usually travel in family groups, called sounders, consisting of one or more sows and their young. Weaned pigs stay with their mother until they mate or until another litter is due. Male adults usually stay solitary and only rejoin groups to mate or to feed on a specific food source. Feral hogs forage for food by rooting and can cause damage to crop production, including loss of harvestable crops, consumption of seeds and seedlings, and damage to irrigation systems. In fact, a recent study found that impacts on individual producers can cost upwards of \$200,000 annually when losses, management efforts, and lost opportunities are all taken into account.

There can also be impacts on livestock production efforts that overlap with the range of feral hogs. The rooting behavior of feral hogs can damage pastures and sometimes facilitate weed encroachment. The loss of grazing opportunity can directly contribute to production losses or repair costs. Additionally, feral hogs can cause conflicts in supplemental feeding efforts by consuming the feed intended for livestock. Feral hogs can also impact the health of livestock populations through the potential transmission of diseases. While the impact of hog-borne diseases can be hard to quantify, the costs of additional vaccines can add up quickly for producers. Finally, feral hogs can impact livestock populations through outright predation and have been documented preying on young goats, sheep, and, in some cases, young calves.

Feral hogs also present concerns for human health and safety. The E.coli introduced to natural waterways through feral hog fecal matter can also be introduced into artificial water systems in close proximity to humans. They can also carry a myriad of diseases that are transmissible to humans or pets. Feral hogs can cause property damage, injury, and fatalities through vehicle collisions.

Info: TAMU Cooperative Extension



LIBERTY GUN LUBRICANTS REVIEW

By Melonie Kennedy

As most gun owners know, proper cleaning and maintenance of firearms is vital to making sure they stand up too many years of use and function properly when we need them. With multiple companies offering supplies for this purpose, you can ask any avid shooter which is the best, and each will extol the virtues of their preferred brand. We shooters also know that there's no growth without occasionally stepping outside of our comfort zones, and that includes testing out new-to-us cleaning supplies.

When I was first introduced to Liberty Gun Lubricants, I was excited to learn they are a small, family business that is woman-owned. I was impressed by the number of offerings, which are formulated and produced in-house. As a person who is incredibly sensitive to fragrances, I was impressed by, but skeptical of, claims of a "pleasant odor" to the products.

Liberty sent me a package of items to review for LadyShooter readers, and I'm impressed! Let's begin with the Liberty-Tuff AR/5.56 Compact Cleaning Kit (CCK):

The CCK storage case is well-constructed, with reinforced corners and a zipper that allows it to open completely and lie flat on the work surface. The kit includes two lengths of flexible

cable; full brass cleaning rods (no plastic patch tips that can snap); bags with cleaning patches and pads; bore brushes and a chamber brush; one-ounce bottles of gun oil and synthetic solvent/protectant; a 10cc syringe of gun grease; and even a "toothbrush" cleaning attachment. With an MSRP of \$44.99, one could easily add some pistol caliber bore brushes for less than \$10 a pack and have a larger cleaning kit or a great gift for a new shooter. Many of the products are available in larger 4oz and 16oz bottles as well, perfect for the gun table and refilling your travel bottles.

As for my concern regarding chemical smells,

the spray bottle Tribo-Solve had a very light scent, reminiscent of hand sanitizer. The syringe of Chem-X grease reminded my entire family - (in a good way!) of auto shop class or a tire store and the H.L.P. oil had basically no odor at all. A separate bottle of Gun Solve-Xtreme (solvent and dry-film lubricant) had a light scent that smells like green apple-scented shampoo. That brought a whole new meaning to my jokes about giving my AR a "bubble bath", for sure!

Also, of interest are the BoreCorr Barrel Savers (MSRP \$14.99 for rifle + pistol pack), which are flexible cables infused with a vapor corrosion inhibitor, that have an attached safety flag. The Barrel Savers thus serve dual purpose as an anti-corrosion device and an empty chamber indicator. Included with the cables are chamber plugs which help preserve the VCI by preventing damage if the action of the firearm is closed. The Barrel Savers would be a phenomenal tool for gun safe storage or for gun cases during travel.

Liberty's wide selection isn't limited just to firearm cleaning supplies - they even offer a polymer knuckle protector (MSRP \$14.99) for self-protection in non-permissive areas, where allowed by law. All in all, Liberty Gun Lubricant products are now a beloved addition to my range bag and my home cleaning kit.

For more information or to purchase Liberty Gun Lubricants please visit their website at:

www.libertygunlube.com





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URBN CHC BULLETPROOF BAG

WITH FIREARMS INSTRUCTOR MELONIE KENNEDY

No matter where you are on your concealed carry journey, you've probably seen the wide variety of purses, backpacks, and fanny packs available for carrying a handgun off-body. There are so many options on the market that it can become overwhelming! However, for those who are looking for physical protection that has nothing to do with firearms, there are fewer choices. There are backpacks with built-in ballistic panels, often designed for younger students or with more tactical looks. With the right purse, a separate panel can be inserted, but it must have a large enough pocket to hold the panel in place. What's a gal to do if she wants high fashion and protection in the office environment or for a night out on the town?

That's the question URBN_CHC addresses with their products! URBN_CHC was founded in 2018 to provide active shooter protection that is safe, stylish, and easy to use. Since they offer several lines of handbags, I requested a gender-neutral product for review: the brown West bag from the Juno collection delivered. My entire family examined the bag and dubbed it perfect for the office, errands in town, and even college environments.

Made of high-quality, genuine leather, the West is buttery soft and has a classic and luxurious design without being overly showy. At 8" x 14" x 2.7", it is the size of many standard sling bags; a laptop won't fit, but a tablet or e-reader will easily

slip in along with plenty of other personal items. One would think the IIIA-rated ballistic Kevlar® panel would add significant weight to the bag, but as it only weighs 17 ounces, the overall bag weight is still relatively light. The strap of the West is easily adjusted to use on one shoulder or cross-body, and there's a sturdy carry handle at the top of the bag as well. This ability to switch things up was essential to me, as I like to keep their hands free while keeping the bag securely on my body.

The roomy main compartment is accessed through sturdy double zippers and has three interior pockets (two open and one zippered). An additional large zipped pocket inside the bag provides access to the ballistic panel; technically, one could put other items in that area, but I wouldn't do so. The front of the bag has a large, exterior zippered pocket, perfect for items you want immediately accessible. At the back exterior is a small pocket with a snap closure; because the leather doesn't stretch much, I would use this for flat items you need to secure while traveling, such as a passport, cash, or a small wallet. While my cell phone fits easily in the front pocket of the West, it does not fit in the small rear pocket.

The interior lining is double-layered, with thick rolled seams creating a semi-structured bag. The fabric is incredibly soft and printed with the URBN_CHC logo and a tagline that reads "Stay Safe. In Style." It's a fun print, but my teen mentioned a preference for a solid color or a classic print like one would find on a tie. All the zipper pulls are made of leather and oversized, with the company name embossed on one side. This makes for easy use when wearing gloves and offers tactile feedback that you've got the pull in hand when under stress. This is particularly important for the small zippered pocket on the back of the bag, which holds additional straps for deploying the bag as ballistic protection in an emergency.

URBN_CHC bags are designed to stay on the user while moving away from a threat. Use the main strap to keep the bag on your shoulder while you deploy the harness and waist straps,





Picture shown with a GLOCK inside of the bag

and within moments, the bag is ready to protect the vital organs as you move to safety. (A video tutorial is provided on the company's website.)

This system also means the user's hands are freed up to access any self-defense tools on their body or in the bag; while the West is not explicitly made for concealed carry of a handgun, a universal holster from Rounded is available. If you already have a Kydex® holster that locks onto fabric with an UltiClip®, it can secure your firearm in one of the open pocket spaces. My testing showed that a holstered Glock® 43 or TASER Pulse device would fit appropriately in either pocket, but the TASER fits more snugly in the rear open pocket than the more prominent front open pocket. Since I usually carry my pistol on-body, I took advantage of the rear interior pocket for other tools with pocket clips, such as a folding knife, flashlight, and tactical pen. All fit well, and the thick liner keeps them in place with no unseemly stretching, issues with tearing, or seams coming undone when the items are removed.



While the price point of the URBN_CHC West handbag makes it an investment, the quality craftsmanship combined with the peace of mind of such a self-protection device is right in line with designer bags that do far less. With their fantastic sense of style, URBN_CHC will offer more bag shapes and fabric options - the tech-oriented folks in my family specifically asked for a laptop-friendly messenger bag to be added to the mix.

If you are already investing in high-ticket fashion handbags, consider the URBN_CHC product line when adding to your collection. If you don't have such a collection, don't let the price put you off - holiday sales do pop up on their website, and the bag is worth every penny. With these bags, you can definitely "Stay Safe.With Style."

URBN_CHC West Brown bag: MSRP \$509

Rounded Universal Holster: MSRP \$49

www.urbnchc.com

***Technical rating information: Level III A rating per NIJ standards: handgun ammunition up to .45ACP/.44MAG. For more information, visit: <https://urbnchc.com/pages/ballistics> ***

Picture shown with a TASER inside of the bag





***Join Sharon on a
day in the blind...
SERIES 2***

In the Blind with Sharon Taylor

6:27 am, opening day of turkey season! I settled in the blind, ready to write today's story. I'm in Mountain Home, TX, and boy, it is dark and cold out here. I was unprepared for the 51-degree temperature I woke up to this morning! When I packed for the weekend, it was in the 70s, so I packed lightweight clothes! I hit the road with my hunting buddy, and a few miles away from the house, he happened to comment that temperatures would be in the 40s! Thank goodness I found a sweatshirt at Buc-ee's. This morning, I'm wearing my flannel PJ bottoms over jeans under lightweight camo pants, two pairs of socks, and a t-shirt under my lightweight camo long-sleeve fishing shirt, with the sweatshirt courtesy of the Beaver over that. I'm in a pop-up blind and probably won't move much, so the nontraditional hunting garb won't be too detrimental to my day.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER!

I was a little late to the turkey party. I'm 50 years old, and last year was my first experience with turkey. Where I grew up hunting in East Texas, there were none. But last year, I went on a turkey hunt and fell in love! The game of call and response fascinated me. Just before the season opened, I had the opportunity to attend a calling class with Mr. Robert Linder, and I bought my first turkey calls - a slate call, a box call, and a diaphragm call. Mr. Linder taught several fundamental calls using the slate and the box, and my goal for the season is to call in my own turkey!

So this morning, I'm alone. Listening to the quiet roaring around me. A gobble breaks the stillness. Not too enthusiastic. Seems like the turkeys are waking up. Shortly after that, gobbling all around, but they're still in the roost. Since it's relatively dark still, I'll stay quiet.

A little more light out now. A choir of gobbles surrounds me on three sides. They're more active,

and I believe they're moving off the roost, so I pull out my calls and give a little purr. Immediate reaction! What a confidence boost! I spend a bit "talking turkey," and the group around me is friendly enough to respond, but they just don't seem pleasant enough to come to find out who the new kid on the block is.

At 8:02, a hen comes in from my left. She just clucks around a bit and moves out of sight. That's ok; I think I can hear some gobblers behind her. But what's this other sound? I keep hearing some kind of thumping behind me on the right. I finally turn and ease open a tiny slit at the top of the window.

Oh! My! Goodness! There's a Tom! He's HUGE, but as he's sneaking up on me, he's keeping a cedar bush between us. I can see him puffed up, and his fan is gorgeous! 20 yards. Come on, buddy. Just walk another 5 yards so I can get a clean shot! I'm holding my breath, being as still and quiet as can be. Aaannndddd....he's turning the wrong way. All I can do is sit here and watch him go. I don't think my heart has raced this fast or beat this hard in quite some time!

LET'S TRY THIS AGAIN...



A bit deflated, I turned back around and faced front because I still had some gobbling in front of me. Cross my fingers that one comes in. I see a little movement on the far side (maybe 70 yards?). It's the tip top of a gobbler's fan tail. He's blown up and seems to be walking in a small circle. I give a light cluck. He just stands there... and now the fan is gone. Strike 2!

But wow! What a beautiful morning. Hunt's over. No turkey down. But that's ok. The only guarantee of hunting is that the sun will rise, and yes, it did. Loved every minute of it. Now, the

work begins. Fill corn and protein feeders for the deer - the reason my hunting buddy lets me tag along!

It's now 5:58 on a beautiful evening! I tossed my stuff in the pop-up, loaded the shotgun, and went for a VERY short walk. I took the route my big Tom was on this morning. Why did he stop? Why did he turn around? Scouring the ground for clues and snakes, bam! I walk up on an 8-point whitetail shed. My lucky charm! I get settled in the blind. It's so lovely this evening! Just a slight breeze moving in the trees.

TALK TO ME

After about 30 minutes, a hen strolled by at 60 yards. She didn't stick around; she just said, "Hi, see you later," and was gone. Just for fun, I went ahead and gave a call and, to my surprise, got a gobble in reply. Can I tell him to stop teasing and just come see me? Call, respond, call, respond. I can tell he's behind me, but I don't have a window back there. Just have faith. Eventually, he'll come into view. And holy smoke, it happens! And there's 4 of them. The last in line is the biggest. Heart racing! Gun off my lap. Get a line. Get the stock in the pocket of my shoulder. Safety off! Draw a bead. Pull the trigger. CRAP! In my excitement, I'd already disengaged the safety when I picked the gun up off my lap! Try again.

Safety off (for reals this time!). Change windows.

Follow that 4th one. Let him get clear. Draw a bead. Boom, shaka laka! Tom down! Woo-hoo!

AND THE ADDICTION BEGINS

Oh! My! Stars! This is so addicting! My first experience last year was fabulous, and I had a great guide and caller who walked my rear end off (5 miles Saturday and 5 miles Sunday). I got two jakes as the reward for the walking, but this experience is different as I am solo, sedentary, and doing my own calling. What a rush! And now a lone gobbler just started calling pretty close again - I wonder if it was the giant from this morning? Let me unpack and reload, though there will be no shooting unless his beard drags the ground! Regardless, this hunt has been exhilarating. CRAP - hold on. HOG! 70 yards, maybe? The range finder is at home. Switch guns to the 25-06. Safety off - really. Sight. Boom! Pig down, kicking, and squealing. Anyway, as I was saying, I'm addicted. What could be a better weekend? A shed, a turkey, a pig, and top it all off with a beautiful sunset! Thank you, Lord, for Your beautiful creation.

Until next time shoot straight...



LADYSHOOTER LIFESTYLES



Join us for

AN EXCLUSIVE EVENT TO BENEFIT YOUTH SHOOTING SPORTS

Blaser



APRIL 10-12
2024

JOSHUA CREEK
RANCH
BOERNE, TX

- LIMITED AVAILABILITY
- CUSTOM GUN FITTING
- PRO-STAFF INSTRUCTION

Industry leader Blaser, is proud to partner with MidwayUSA Foundation, a public charity focused on funding youth shooting sports, to provide a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shotgun shooters of any level. Stay at the beautiful Joshua Creek Ranch and receive professional sporting clays training while indulging in spectacular meals and endless comradery...all to benefit young shooting sports athletes.

A donation of \$2,995 to a MidwayUSA Foundation endowment provides a 3 day/2 night stay at Joshua Creek Ranch and sporting clays training from Blaser pro-staff. In addition, MidwayUSA Foundation will match the donation and non-shooting attendees can join for \$750. This fundraiser is open to only 12 attendees.



MIDWAYUSAFFOUNDATION.ORG/BLASER-EXPERIENCE.COM

CONTACT SARAH HALL, SHALL@MIDWAYUSAFFOUNDATION.ORG | 673.303.0889

SPECIAL OFFER TO ATTENDEES



During this event, attendees have the opportunity to purchase a custom Blaser shotgun. Blaser Professionals will fit those interested to a F3 or F16 and generously donate 50% of the MSRP purchase price to the MidwayUSA Foundation endowment of your choice. That donation will also be matched by MidwayUSA Foundation.

SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, APRIL 12TH

-Arrival at Joshua Creek Ranch | 6 p.m. Welcome dinner

SATURDAY, APRIL 13TH

-Breakfast | Announcements & safety briefing

-Custom fitting to F3 or F16 shotguns

-Training including gun mount & and patterning

-Lunch

-Additional training, including visual & mental game

-Social hour & dinner

SUNDAY, APRIL 14TH

-Breakfast | Check-out

AMMO, EYE, AND EAR PROTECTION PROVIDED



ALL INSTRUCTION DURING THIS
EVENT WILL BE GIVEN BY
BLASER PRO-STAFF SHOOTER
BILL MCGUIRE.



While visiting Joshua Creek Ranch, attendees may take advantage of everything the ranch has to offer during their downtime which includes: a resort style pool, upland bird hunting, fishing, and additional sporting clays and shooting opportunities.

JOSHUACREEK.COM





CHANGING THE FUTURE OF
YOUTH SHOOTING SPORTS

The MidwayUSA Foundation

Leaving a Legacy

Photos By: Roger Marks

Written By Matthew Gay

Many have heard of the MidwayUSA company and have likely purchased firearms parts or other outdoor items from them online. The MidwayUSA Foundation is not the same organization but has its roots with the founders of the MidwayUSA company, Larry and Brenda Potterfield. You've probably seen Larry on commercials advertising MidwayUSA where he ends his comments with, "we have just about everything for..." and closes the commercial with his famous tagline, "I am Larry Potterfield with MidwayUSA, thanks for your business." Larry and Brenda have spent their lives building a successful business and continue to give much back to the industry and community that

has supported their company since inception.

The primary barrier to participation for some youth who would like to explore the shooting sports is the cost

associated with the game. These shooting disciplines we enjoy so much are not exactly cheap. Seeing this as the major roadblock for potential youth shooters, Larry and Brenda established the MidwayUSA Foundation. The Foundation exists solely to assist youth programs with fundraising and direct funding for team operations.

Having explained the design of the program to the leaders of both school and club-based programs, I am often met with skepticism. It sounds too good to be true...right? Well, no. It's a brilliantly thought-out methodology by which teams can create an endowment account, utilize products supplied by the Foundation to conduct fundraisers, send some of the proceeds back to

the Foundation to be matched, then those funds are deposited into the team's respective endowment account. These accounts are managed for steady growth, with the objective being to maintain the principal balance while simultaneously earning adequate interest which covers the five percent cash grant which each team is eligible to draw once per year.

With the fundraising products program, the Foundation provides the product to raffle off, some of the proceeds from that raffle are returned to the foundation to be matched and the rest is kept by the team for associated costs of running their program. Direct contributions to your local team's endowment can be made through the MidwayUSA Foundation website. The goal is to build these endowments to a level where cost is no longer a barrier and youth in the United States can participate, no matter their family's financial position. This is brilliant a perpetual funding mechanism.

The contributions and funding programs to support youth sport shooting does not end with the endowment. The Foundation has multiple programs which fund range improvement, coach training, support state partner agencies and facilitate the same for organizations which share the mission of the MidwayUSA Foundation. The Foundation also hosts different events and special programs which, not only assist teams with building their endowment balance, but also helps the Foundation expand into different areas of support for the same programs.

Hometown Challenge is a month-long sweepstakes that allows donors the chance to win quality prizes just for giving to their favorite youth shooting team endowment. Industry sponsors generously provide over 100 prizes to make Hometown Challenge a success. Other events are on the horizon for Midway from the Day of Clays in May of 2024 at Rice Creek in Minnesota to the exclusive Blaser event at Joshua Creek Ranch in Boerne, Texas which provides an



exclusive experience, limited to 12 attendees, and every registration is a donation to the youth shooting program of your choice. These and many future events will be announced and extensively covered here, in the MidwayUSA Foundation's very own section within Clay Shooting USA magazine.

Stay tuned for more information on how you can help your local youth team build for the future and assist the MidwayUSA Foundation with their vital work. Visit the Foundation at:

<https://www.midwayusafoundation.org/>





In the Kitchen

with Holly Hearn

Thai Basil Venison over Coconut Rice

A SPIN ON ASIAN CUISINE

Serves: 3-4

Total Time: 30 minutes

Spring means white wine, sporting clays, and beautiful afternoons on the patio writing. This dish perfectly complements your spring white wine and is best enjoyed after a long day at the range! Following a particularly challenging round of sporting clays, especially on a hot day, I last want to spend hours at the stove. I love this dish for various reasons, mainly that it is delicious. On top of having a ton

of flavor, it comes together in 20 -25 minutes—the savory, sweet, and spicy venison pairs beautifully with the fatty and rich coconut rice. If you have never cooked with coconut milk, you can find it on the international aisle of most major grocery stores. When choosing coconut milk, opt for a full-fat variety instead of light. The flavor profile in most lite coconut milk is pretty mild compared to the regular version.



Mercer Culinary Genesis 6-Piece Forged Knife Block Set is a great knife set with a price point under \$200.

INGREDIENTS

Venison

- 1 pound of ground venison
- 1 red bell pepper (you can use any color but red is the prettiest)
- 2 tbsp of coconut oil or high temp oil such as avocado
- 1 white onion, julienned
- 8 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 handful of Thai basil
- Sauce for the meat
- 1 tbsp sambal
- 4 tbsp low sodium tamari
- 3 tbsp fish sauce
- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 lime, juiced

For the rice

- 1 can of coconut milk
- 1 cup jasmine rice

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Bring one can of coconut milk to a boil over medium-high heat. Add your rice and stir once the milk has come to a slight boil. (Don't skip this step! Depending on the fat content of the coconut milk, it can stick to the bottom of the pan.) Turn the heat to low and cook for 15 minutes.
2. In a small bowl, mix all the ingredients for the sauce and

3. Add 2 tbsp of high-temp cooking oil over medium-high heat in a separate skillet and add onion and bell pepper. Once the onion starts to look slightly translucent, add your



set aside
ground venison and stir. Once the venison begins to brown, add minced garlic and mix to combine.

4. After approximately 10 minutes, the meat should be mostly cooked through. Add in the sauce and simmer for about 5-6 minutes.
5. Serve meat over coconut rice with fresh basil or cilantro. Enjoy!

Contact

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*Bon
Appetit*

LADYSHOOTER LIFESTYLES



Tallow Candles

with Homesteader Tori King

Having like-minded friends is great because you don't have to worry about being judged for being different. For example, my friend and I wanted to render venison fat for soap and lotion, so we decided to do it together.

Tallow is a substance that comes from melting down the fat of ruminants like beef, sheep, and deer. It has many uses, including cooking, soap-making, lotion-making, and candle-making. I wanted to learn how to make tallow because it's a budget-friendly way to become more self-sufficient and a great activity to do with kids.

Tallow is good for your skin because it contains many beneficial nutrients that your skin needs to stay healthy. These include Vitamins A, B12, D, E, and K, which are all important for skin health. Vitamin A, for example, is essential for cell differentiation, while Vitamin D helps with calcium absorption and immune system function.

Before the 1900s, tallow was the most common fat used for cooking. It was prized for its stability, taste, and availability and was used for everything from frying to adding flavor to soups and stews. Tallow has a high smoke point and does not go rancid like other oils, making it an

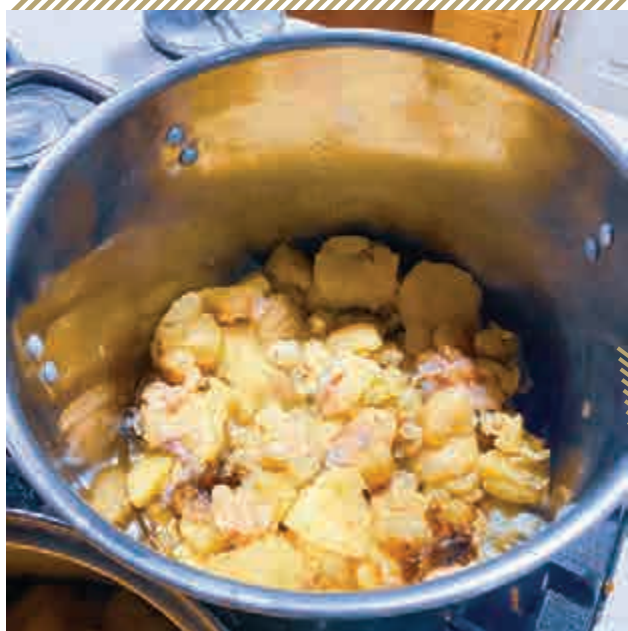
excellent choice for cooking.

To render tallow, melt down the fat in a pot or pan until it becomes liquid. Then, you can strain out any impurities and let the tallow cool and solidify. Different methods for rendering tallow exist, but my friend and I did it on the stove for quicker results.

WET METHOD PROCESS:

1. Place the fat and about 4-8 cups of water in the crockpot, along with 2-3 Tbsp sea salt. Cook on low for 8 hours.
2. Next, strain into a pot and bring the tallow, sea salt, and water to a very low simmer for an hour.





MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Container
- Wick
- Tallow
- Popsicle Sticks/Skewers
- Essential Oils
- Tape

As long as you render your tallow correctly and store your candle in a cool dark place when not being burned, your candle will last for a long time and not go rancid.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place the Wick- Before you pour the wax, place your wick into the appropriate vessel. We like to use an empty candle container that was previously used up—it's both eco-friendly and budget-friendly!
2. Heat the Tallow- Set up the pot over a heat source, such as a hot plate or electric stove. Add the tallow and allow it to melt. Add essential oils to the melted tallow in the pot, if desired.
3. Transfer the Tallow- Carefully pour the hot tallow into the container. Use skewers or popsicle sticks to help keep the wick in place. Let the tallow cool completely and then trim the wick down to size.

3. Then, pour the mixture through a fine cheesecloth into a metal bowl and place it in the fridge to harden.

4. Pop out the tallow from the bowl, and you will have a "tallow cake." Underneath will be the salt water and impurities. If necessary, scrape away any discoloration/impurities on the bottom of the tallow cake and repeat as many times as necessary.

If you are only planning on cooking with it, the dry method is acceptable, but if you want less beefy tallow, I 100% recommend the wet method! You now have a shelf-stable product!



SUGGESTED ESSENTIAL OIL COMBINATIONS:

Lavendar/Rosemary

Citrus/Clary Sage/Lemon

Vanilla/Cinnamon/Nutmeg

Spearmint/Clay Sage/Eucalyptus

Bergamont/Orange/Rosemary

Lemon/Clary Sage/Cedarwood

Use food grade essential oils for best results.

CANDLE MAKING

My first project with my completed tallow was to make simple tallow candles. It is super easy! You already did the hard part. All you need is to buy candle-making supplies and find glass jars to pour your tallow into. I chose to get creative and be resourceful. I used a pint mason jar, some Oui yogurt jars that a friend saved, and a cute stoneware dog dish I bought at a yard sale.

Check out my results! These were free to make and will last indefinitely. I hope you enjoy this process as much as I did. In the next issue, I will show you my tallow body butter and lip balm process. My family loves it and you will too!



SKINCARE SPRING CLEANING

WITH LICENSED ESTHETICIAN NATALIA GONZALEZ
OWNER AND CREATOR OF ESTHETICIAN SKIN

The snow melting and blooming flowers may be your first clue that spring is approaching. On February 2nd, 2024, Punxsutawney Phil did not see his own shadow; thus, the early arrival of spring is predicted. I live in Houston, Texas, where seasons are just a vivid dream, and we get to live about 30 days a year in real life. I am being generous with that qualification. We mostly have hot, super hot, and humid. But, for those 30 days where we experience perfect spring/fall weather, it is heaven on earth here. I understand that most of the country experiences actual seasonal changes. Good for you. There is only a mild amount of jealousy in that statement. I have written about the changing of the seasons many times, the importance of sunscreen, and the importance of finding the right moisturizer, like Goldilocks, that is not too heavy, light, or full of junk for your skin type.

With spring cleaning being the season's theme, applying that to your skincare and makeup is essential. Especially tools used to apply makeup. Cleaning out your skincare and makeup collection will not only make your bathroom less cluttered but will help you eliminate a lot of guesswork with your routine. In my skincare practice, I have a lot of new clients that need clarification. They need to figure out what is causing their random breakouts, cannot nail down a consistent routine, and are completely overwhelmed with the number of products they have purchased. From TikTok influencers to ads on your Facebook, it is almost impossible not to be swayed into some less-than-ideal purchases.

LET'S START WITH MAKEUP:

The basics should include;

Foundation: liquid or powder or both. I recommend using a tinted moisturizer as your liquid foundation product. You can set it with powder with more foundation color, or it is clear and used only for setting. If you require full coverage, then, of course, use a proper liquid foundation, but be sure to research ingredients. Many famous and expensive foundations still use harmful ingredients that could be causing the problems that you feel the need to cover up with the foundation in the first place. The irony is not lost on me here ever. Ideally, your foundation will also contain SPF, but most don't, so apply an SPF beforehand.

Blush: Again, this can be liquid, creme, or powder. The rule of thumb regarding makeup is to keep things like things alike. If you use powder in your foundation, then use a powder blush. If you only use liquid foundation or tinted moisturizer and don't set it with powder, then use a liquid or creme blush.

Contour: Liquid or powder contour is usually used to enhance the natural shape of the face and can help sculpt a beautiful jawline for those of us who suffer from double chin. Contouring is so effective at changing the illusion of shape on your face that men use it to imitate looking like women in the drag queen world.

Eye Shadow: Liquid or powder is equally effective in creating eye dimension and shape. When colors are correctly placed, the effect of opening up the eye or lifting the brow can be achieved.

Mascara: The single most helpful tool of makeup. Mascara makes me look instantly refreshed, awake, and pretty. I have spent many years trying different brands and types and have concluded that all mascaras are inferior to the only one I will ever use. Tubular mascara is the greatest invention of the 2000s. Rather than stain your lashes with a gunky product that, by the end of the night, has produced an unflattering raccoon eye on your face,



tubular technology allows you to have the all-day wear benefits of waterproof mascara without the impossible-to-remove part. I use Thrive Liquid Lash Extensions by Thrive Causemetics. The trick is to start the hot water in my bathroom sink and place the mascara tube under it while applying my other makeup. When I am finished, I use warm mascara, which glides on perfectly every time.

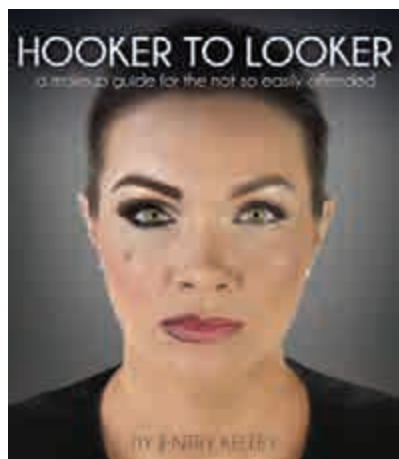
<https://thrivecausemetics.com>

I recommend using a different and customized brush for all of these makeup products. For example I would not use a blush brush to apply my powder foundation. I use three brushes to apply the eyeshadows based on which area it is applied to. One needs about six brushes for all purposes to keep things as simple as possible. It might be time to edit if you have significantly more than this. Some people use sponges to apply foundation, giving you a perfect photo finish. The only downside to this is the

cleanliness of it. I recommend replacing them frequently to eliminate contamination and potential skin problems.

If you have multiple bottles and compacts of these products and must remember when you bought them, it may be time to clear some space. Narrow down your favorite, and get rid of the rest. I use Jentry Kelly makeup. It can be purchased online and shipped to you. They have an excellent color-matching service that will ensure you get what you need for your skin color. Jentry Kelly also has a hilarious presence on social media and tons of helpful application tips and tricks. They are ingredient-conscious, and my clients and I have never experienced breakouts from their makeup.

<https://www.jentrykelley.com>



BASICS FOR YOUR SKINCARE:

Cleanser: Cleansing is the most essential first step of skincare. This can include a liquid and lathering cleanser or a foaming cleanser, but God forbid nothing encased in a wipe. You could also use a toner as a liquid or a presoaked pad. I double-cleanse, lather, rinse, and repeat on my cleanser. I also use presoaked brightening toner pads most days. Some days, I also use my calming toner spray to freshen up.

Serums: Serums is a generic and all-inclusive term for a product with a purpose. Vitamin C, Retinol, and Hyaluronic Acid are just some of the main ingredients and buzzword products used by most people. I have one of each. I also have an antioxidant serum for my mild rosacea. That puts me at four total serums. I use only some of the four daily and different routines from AM to PM. My point is that I, as a licensed and practicing

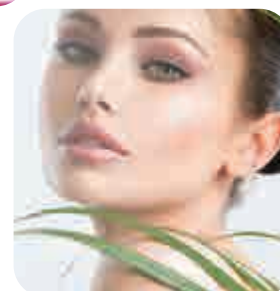
esthetician, only use four serums regularly. If you have more than 4, you should reconsider what you use on your beautiful face. Most of my new clients come in with 5-10 serums they have picked up over the years and never know what they do daily. The only common thread is they have spent lots of money and need help to part with these products. I understand the frustration, and I empathize. This is why they have entire television shows dedicated to helping hoarders. Don't be a skincare hoarder.

Moisturizer: It is one of the most basic and necessary products for all of us. With a wide range of types, one can fine-tune the essential level of humectant for your skin type. I have one. I use one. One is all I need. I apply it once or twice a day based on the weather and humidity in the air. If you have more than one, it's time to edit. Find one that you love and use it forever. Medical-grade products have something that non-medical-grade products don't. FDA-regulated manufacturing. They have high-quality ingredients that guarantee improvement and care for your skin. Averaging \$100 and up may sound like a lot, but trust me. You get what you pay for. A medical grade product should be your goal for all your skincare. You need to buy it from an esthetician to obtain the best.

I have always maintained that if you invest more in your skincare, you will need to invest less in your makeup. Although makeup is fun and can be a great way to express your creativity, most clients use it to cover up rather than enhance it. If you are struggling with your skincare and are frustrated with improving your skin, please reach out. Schedule a virtual consultation on my website, and let me help you find your skincare routine.



<https://estheticianskin.com>



LADYSHOOTER LIFESTYLES



Heart Health

WITH CERTIFIED YOGAFIT INSTRUCTOR MELONIE KENNEDY

Did you know:

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death for U.S. women and can affect women at any age.

Heart attacks, along with their risk factors, are becoming more common in younger women.

- Women can display different symptoms of a heart attack than men.
- Hispanic/Latina and African American women have higher rates of risk factors for heart disease than White women.
- Women are statistically less likely to receive lifesaving CPR than men.
- Women can take steps to proactively protect themselves from heart disease and learn methods to help other women in the event of a heart attack.

This time of year, with Valentine's Day candy and jewelry ads surrounding us, a lot of emphasis is placed on emotions, romance, and even self-love - but the shopping and dinner reservations may distract from the message about something that can affect us more than a card from our sweetheart: the importance of heart health. As women, we may receive societal pressure to sacrifice our mental and physical health in the service of others, causing us to miss vital signs of health issues or have risk factors and symptoms overlooked and even blatantly ignored. However, the female firearms enthusiast is used to seeking

out her own resources, getting educated, and pressing on when her questions and concerns are pushed aside.

If you've ever had one of those gun counter salesmen offer you the pink revolver when you were looking for a new shotgun or tried to adjust camo pants meant for men to your curves, you know exactly what I mean. To flip the old phrase, what's good for the gander is NOT always what's good for the goose.

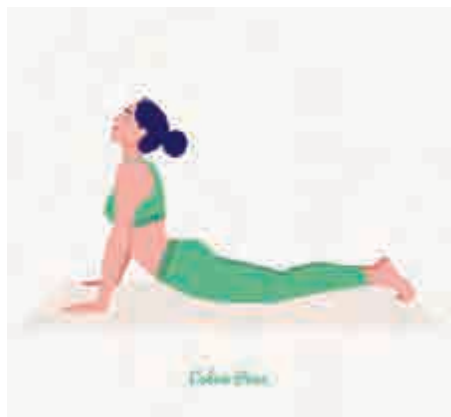
First of all, it's essential to know that, just like at some gun shops, women may not receive the best customer service from their healthcare providers. According to Harvard Medical School, "many women say their physicians never talk to them about coronary risk and sometimes don't even recognize the symptoms, mistaking them instead for signs of panic disorder, stress, and even hypochondria." Even though heart attack symptoms can sometimes present as much as a month before the occurrence, women may be less likely to be correctly diagnosed as having a "real" problem!



Secondly, different risk factors (such as diabetes and metabolic syndrome) and atypical symptoms (such as fatigue and nausea) can make a diagnosis more difficult for females. In contrast, physiological differences in arteries can make treatment and recovery more difficult for us than for men.

So what's a girl to do?

- Talk to your healthcare provider about your risk factors: from broad statistical risks like race and life stage (e.g., pregnancy or menopause) to your unique risks, such as family history of heart disease, blood pressure, cholesterol ratios, weight, and waist circumference, know your risks and discuss methods of mitigating them where possible.
- Get a second opinion! If your healthcare provider isn't listening or doesn't provide adequate resources, keep going and find someone who is a better fit.
- Get screened, some pharmacies and clinics sponsor "Go Red for Women" programs, offering free heart health screenings; some public health departments also provide screenings at women's events.



Take responsibility for your health where you can: add movement to your day, eat healthy meals, research healthy ways to minimize and cope with stress, focus on getting enough sleep, and consider a cessation plan if you are a tobacco user.

Consider adding yoga, breathwork, or meditation to your day. According to Healthline.com, studies have shown that yoga can provide stress relief and may help with anxiety and sleep issues, which will positively affect our mental health as well as our heart health and decrease our health risks from stress. Yoga and breathwork improve cardiovascular function and reduce inflammation, strengthening that hardworking heart. Plus, breath work and mindfulness practices can be harnessed on the range and the hunt - that's mighty handy for the woman who enjoys shooting! (See below for a yoga practice focused on heart health and chest-expanding poses, just for Lady readers.)

Lastly, ask everyone in your household and office to take the American Heart Association's "Be the Beat" challenge and learn hands-on CPR. Research has shown that hands-on CPR is just as effective as CPR with rescue breathing, and bystanders who know hands-on CPR are more willing to perform it due to lower risk from infectious illnesses. Even if you don't have the time to attend a full-length CPR/AED/first aid training, you can learn these two simple steps and potentially save a life.

The "Be the Beat" challenge, found at newsroom.heart.org, is as follows:

- 1) Call 911 if you see a teen or adult suddenly collapse; and
- 2) Push hard and fast in the center of the chest to the beat of a familiar song that has 100 to 120 beats per minute. Some examples are "Stayin' Alive" by the Bee Gees, "Crazy in Love" by Beyoncé featuring Jay-Z, "Hips Don't Lie" by Shakira and "Walk the Line" by Johnny Cash.

By understanding women's heart disease and

heart attack risk factors, we can better understand how to take our heart health in hand. Taking positive steps today to address health issues will help our heart's health and well-being at many levels. Knowing how to perform CPR and encouraging our friends and loved ones to learn these steps will help us become more prepared and resilient through life's ups and downs. Here's to heart health!



Melanie Kennedy is a yoga instructor with multiple YogaFit teacher certifications, currently enrolled in additional training to earn her 500-Hour Registered Yoga Teacher designation. For a special heart-focused yoga practice created for LadyShooter readers, please visit: <https://www.tummee.com/yoga-sequence/N84Uz>.



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MAKE every MOMENT count
just BREATHE
enjoy the things
Mindfulness
Live the MOMENT
Grateful
LET WORRIES FADE AWAY...

MINDFUL SHOOTING FOR WOMEN A JOURNEY TO EXCELLENCE AND HARMONY WITH MENTAL TRAINER DAWN GRANT

In shooting sports, where precision is king and strategy queen, mindfulness emerges as a critical piece of the puzzle, particularly for women shooters. This exploration into the power of mindful shooting delves into how a state of heightened awareness and focus can significantly elevate a woman's performance in competitions and hunting scenarios.

THE ESSENCE OF MINDFULNESS:

Mindfulness, a practice of being fully present and engaged at the moment, is a game-changer in shooting sports. It goes beyond simple concentration to a more profound, intuitive connection with the environment, the weapon, and the inner self. For women who often bring a unique blend of patience, precision, and intuition to shooting, mindfulness can significantly enhance these inherent strengths.

DEEPENING FOCUS THROUGH BREATHING:

Controlled Breathing Techniques: The key to mastering mindfulness in shooting lies in controlled breathing. This technique steadies the body for more accurate shooting and calms the mind, ensuring a transparent, focused approach to each shot.

Breathing as a Centering Tool: Beyond just a physical technique, breathing serves as a mental anchor, drawing the shooter back to a state of balance and focus, especially under pressure.

SENSORY AWARENESS IN PRACTICE:

The Role of Sensory Inputs: Sensory

awareness involves tuning into the tactile, auditory, and visual aspects of shooting. This deepened sensory connection can refine a shooter's alignment with the target, enhancing accuracy and consistency.

Integrating Sensory Practices: Regular practice sessions should be an opportunity to engage deeply with the sensory aspects of shooting, from the feel of the trigger to the sound of the shot and the visual alignment with the target.

VISUALIZATION AS A MENTAL REHEARSAL:

Imagining Success: Visualization is about mentally rehearsing successful shots and scenarios. This practice helps prepare for different field conditions and build adaptability and confidence.

Detailed Visual Scenarios: Detailed visualization involves imagining various shooting scenarios right down to the specifics of environmental conditions, the behavior of the target, and the emotional responses involved.

CREATING MINDFUL SHOOTING RITUALS:

Developing Pre-Shooting Routines: Establishing a set of rituals before shooting that promote mindfulness, such as a moment of quiet reflection or a series of visualization exercises, can set a positive tone for the session.

Consistency in Practice: Incorporating mindfulness into regular practice sessions ensures these techniques become second nature, seamlessly integrating into the shooting process.

HARNESSING MINDFULNESS IN COMPETITIVE SCENARIOS:

Managing Stress with Mindfulness: In the competitive atmosphere, mindfulness helps manage stress and stay focused amidst distractions, which is essential for maintaining emotional balance and achieving peak performance.

Elevating Precision Through Mindfulness:

As female shooters advance in their sport, incorporating more profound mindfulness practices becomes crucial for fine-tuning precision and skill. When practiced consistently, advanced mindfulness techniques can significantly enhance a shooter's performance, turning proficient shooters into exceptional ones.

ADVANCED MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES:

Targeted Visualization for Complex Scenarios: Employ visualization to navigate challenging shots or conditions. This mental practice involves imagining overcoming difficult obstacles with skill and confidence, preparing the mind for varied field conditions.

Emotional Mastery in Shooting: Emotional mastery is about developing the ability to recognize and regulate emotions. Shooters can prevent negative emotions from affecting their performance by understanding how emotions impact focus and precision.

MINDFULNESS IN THE REALM OF HUNTING:

Mindfulness Beyond Precision: In hunting, mindfulness extends beyond precision shooting; it encompasses an attunement to nature and ethical decision-making. It involves understanding the terrain's nuances and anticipating the target's movements, fostering a respectful and ethical approach to hunting.

Strategies for Mindful Hunting: Cultivating patience and timing through mindfulness ensures that shots are taken immediately, enhancing effectiveness and aligning with ethical hunting practices.

CONNECTING WITH EQUIPMENT MINDFULLY:

Understanding Your Firearm: An essential aspect of mindfulness in shooting is developing a deep understanding of your firearm. Familiarizing yourself with nuances, such as how it feels, sounds, and reacts under different conditions, can significantly enhance your shooting experience.

CREATING A PERSONALIZED MINDFULNESS PLAN:

Tailoring Your Mindfulness Approach: Develop a personalized mindfulness plan aligning with your shooting and hunting goals. Regular assessment and adaptation of this plan ensure it continues to meet your evolving needs as a shooter.

In our exploration of mindful shooting for women, we've journeyed through the transformative power of mindfulness in shooting sports. This journey underscores the immense

benefits of integrating mindfulness techniques such as controlled breathing, sensory awareness, and visualization. These practices are more than just techniques; they are gateways to a new dimension of shooting where focus and precision are enhanced, and a profound sense of calm and control is attained. Through these practices, female shooters improve their aim and accuracy and empower themselves, embracing a serene confidence that resonates both on and off the field.

Delving deeper, we discovered how advanced mindfulness techniques, when applied thoughtfully in hunting scenarios, refine precision and elevate the overall experience in the field. These practices transcend the conventional boundaries of skill enhancement, ushering women shooters into a realm where excellence is achieved with grace and confidence. Mindfulness in shooting thus becomes not just a method but a harmonious approach to the sport, blending skill with intuition and respect for nature.

Ultimately, the essence of mindful shooting lies in its remarkable ability to transform the shooting experience for women. It elevates the sport from pursuing precision to an art form rich in presence and awareness. Whether navigating the competitive intensity of tournaments or embracing the tranquil connection with nature during hunting, mindfulness is a testament to the focused and harmonious mind. This journey with mindfulness allows female shooters to achieve heightened performance and forge a deeper,

more resonant connection with their sport, surroundings, and inner selves. In this way, mindful shooting becomes a path to personal growth, inner peace, and unparalleled excellence in the field.

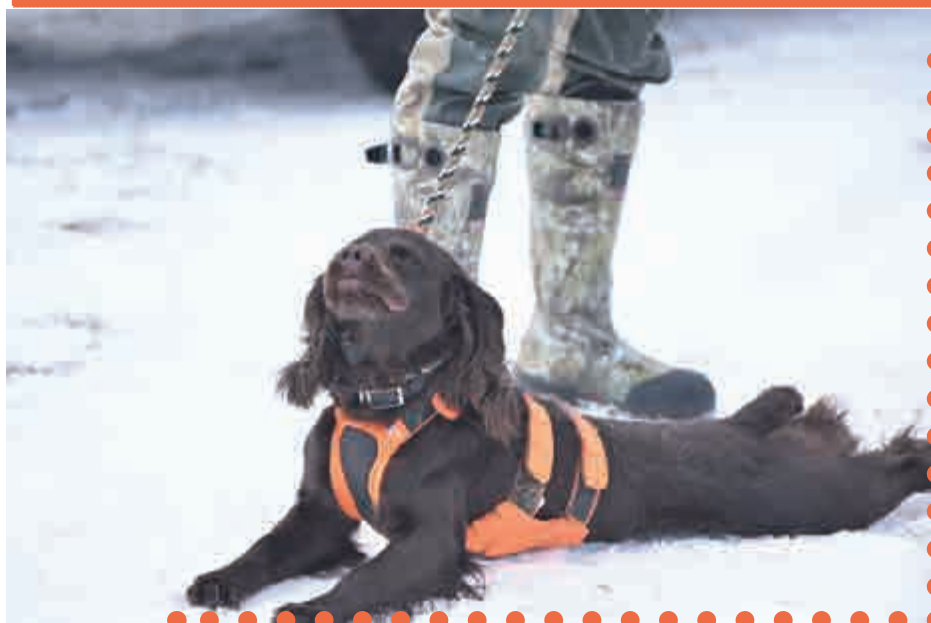
Dawn Grant is a renowned speaker, trainer, and author specializing in mental training and hypnotherapy since 2001. Her expertise in enhancing athletic performance has made her a sought-after figure for elite athletes globally. She conducts lectures, clinics, and workshops internationally and at her shotgun club, Amelia Shotgun Sports in Yulee, Florida. Dawn is the author of "7 Strokes In 7 Days" and the creator of the Mind Mastered app. Discover more about her transformative training programs at DawnGrant.com. Check out her shotgun club at AmeliaShotgunSports.com



THE BOYKIN SPANIEL

AN AMERICAN ORIGINAL

WRITTEN AND PHOTOS BY WING & CLAY LIFE PUBLISHER MATTHEW GAY



With these small boats the hunters had to be cognizant of weight. Large retrieving breeds just added to the challenge by limiting space and weight in the small swamp boats.

Whit Boykin offered to take Dumpy and train him as a retriever. Dumpy would be the foundation of the breed we know today as a Boykin Spaniel. This breed has genetic links to Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, Springer Spaniels, Cocker Spaniels, and American Water Spaniels. All excellent retrievers and flushers. With careful breeding and close attention paid to the desired individual characteristics he was looking for, Boykin was able to produce the Boykin spaniel, a breed which is as versatile as a Swiss Army knife.

DISPOSITION, APTITUDE AND PET

The Boykin is well known for its biddable nature. This breed exists to please their humans. They are just as content busting through a cattail slough chasing wily roosters, as they are holding down the couch cushion nestled up next to their favorite person. When looking into the eyes of a Boykin, one could get the feeling this little brown dog is capable of peering into one's soul. The gentle eyes radiate pure loyalty and a desire to be connected at the hip with their humans.

Many of the most revered hunting breeds in the United States do not originate on this continent. However, some of the best specimens of these various breeds are cultivated in the US, through breeding programs that produce the very best traits desired in a hunting dog. One truly American hunting breed that, without a doubt was envisioned, honed, and bred here, is the Boykin spaniel. Also known as the "little brown dog," the love affair with this breed is undeniable. After spending a few minutes with one you'll completely understand the sentiment.

HISTORY

They say necessity becomes the mother of invention. In this instance necessity facilitated the existence of this little brown dynamo which has become the state dog of South Carolina. It all started with a spaniel-like stray by the name of "Dumpy," whose gentle nature and personable disposition found a new home by chumming up to a banker named Alexander White. White found Dumpy, or maybe it was the other way around, when he was walking down the streets of Spartanburg, South Carolina on his way to church. Alexander adopted the little guy and soon recognized that Dumpy showed great

promise as a retrieving dog.

White spent many a day hunting with his friend Whit Boykin. The challenges faced by the hunters in this area and during this time revolved around their method of transportation to the hunting grounds. When hunting the Wateree River Swamp, small boats were necessary in order to negotiate the shallow cuts and sloughs.



They are considered “Velcro” dogs for a reason.

As a pet, this spaniel breed is a joy to have in the home and is excellent with young children and other dogs. They require adequate mental stimulation but are very efficient couch potatoes. Their wavy coat protects them from the cold elements on a snowy day afield but also serves a purpose in the heat by regulating temperature. It is recommended that they are regularly groomed (not shaved) to keep them looking handsome and free of matting.

As an avid spaniel fan and owner of both an English Springer and an English Cocker, this writer is intrigued by the Boykin. I was able to spend a day with the Great Lakes Boykin Club for their annual hunt and was thoroughly impressed with the quality and gentle nature of these little brownies. They’ve been characterized as princes and princesses in the home, while transforming into tenacious, bird-finding little maniacs when set loose in the field. They appear to have a functional indoor and outdoor switch, with their overwhelming motivation being to please their human. The Boykin Spaniel is a wonderful addition to any home, and a true American original.



Facts:

HEIGHT

15.5-18 inches (male)
14-16.5 inches (female)

WEIGHT

30-40 pounds (male)
25-35 pounds (female)

LIFE EXPECTANCY

10-15 year

COAT TYPE

Double, Wavy, Medium Length

COLOR

Liver

HEALTH

Generally healthy, need to be screened for hip dysplasia, juvenile cataracts, and exercise-induced collapse.

GROOMING

Low maintenance, a weekly brushing to remove dirt and debris.

EXERCISE

Medium to High Energy

TRAINING

Eager to please, early socialization

To Find a Boykin Spaniel:

<https://www.boykinspaniel.org>
www.boykinspanielfoundation.org





2A Advocacy with range owners Katie & Jeremy Ball written by Melonie Kennedy, Photo by Jenna Starr, Starr Images

Local gun shops aren't just a handy place to grab a box of shotgun shells or trade in an old pistol for a new match gun. While we may think of our local gun shop as a regular retail establishment, many are at the forefront of offering education in their communities. They can be found deep in the trenches of Second Amendment advocacy. While large sporting goods stores with gun counters may have a staff that can answer questions and get you set up with a new firearm, their employees often have varying levels of training and interest when it comes to the more in-depth matters beyond whatever the most recent forms and legislation are. A good locally-owned gun shop can be a trustworthy community resource, providing a place to get gear, information, and fellowship that aren't always available at big box locations. A growing number of women-owned gun shops and ranges

are leading the way.

One such shop is SharpShooting Indoor Range & Gun Shop in Spokane, Washington. Now owned by Katie and Jeremy Ball, SharpShooting is a second-generation, family-owned facility celebrating 30 years of serving their community. Initially opened by Robin and Steve Ball in July 1994 with the name "Safe Shooting," the company ran into some trademark issues and had to pivot - and they did quickly! While Steve flew as a pilot for the U.S. military and a commercial airline, Robin jumped into the male-dominated industry with both feet, running the company and proving she could learn anything and everything she needed to know. Earning multiple certifications as a firearms instructor and NRA Training Counselor, she participated in manufacturer advisory groups, sat on industry boards for the National Shooting

Sports Foundation (NSSF), and testified at Congressional hearings as a firearms expert for the NRA and the NSSF. But it didn't stop there! Robin and Steve Ball's passion for the industry and community involvement was instilled in their oldest son, Jeremy, and his wife, Katie.

Jeremy Ball was only eleven years old when his parents opened their business, and he worked with his mom while in high school. After serving in the military, Jeremy returned home to Spokane, and in 2011, he and Katie married. He then worked his way up in the business to manage the facility. Ultimately, in 2021, Robin retired, and Jeremy and Katie bought SharpShooting.

Jeremy now runs all operations and is the president of the company. Katie is passionate about community outreach and handles all their marketing and social media. That's why readers



nationwide will recognize the SharpShooting name today! Jeremy's account offers training for all advanced shooters, but Katie focuses almost exclusively on women. As an educated young mom who loves everything fashion, Katie's account shows followers that "a woman CAN conceal carry without changing her wardrobe or looking 'tactical' or 'outdoorsy.' She can safely carry even when she has young children."

With a legacy of serving women shooters, one of the things Katie and Jeremy are rightly proud of is that of their staff of seventeen; five of the team are women. They explain, "When you walk into our shop and range, you SEE women. They help you make purchases, teach classes, and shoot matches." Offering weekly ladies' nights on the range side and a women's event every August, SharpShooting leads the way in an industry where the market share is becoming evenly split between male and female buyers. They provide an example of what we, as women, can request from the men behind the counter at local gun shops and events to look for

as we support the women-owned shops and ranges we find.

They also show ways businesses and firearms owners can become more involved in their communities. Seeking to "help lift [their] community" and "never stop giving," they learned that their local school district planned an outreach about firearms safety to the 30,000 students in the district. The Balls described contacting the planners and offering to help by providing firearms locks at no cost to any family in the district, stating, "One thing we found we can get anyone to agree on is that kids shouldn't have access to firearms

unsupervised." The effort went so well that they have now had multiple other school districts join them in the program!

On the legislative side, Jeremy and Katie have seen many changes over the years. They share that "Washington has become one of the most restrictive states in the nation for firearms purchases. ... The voter turnout and engagement for pro-gun issues are not representative of the number of gun owners in Washington. What that means is a lot of people are still sitting on the sidelines and are not participating in voting, and allowing a small number of politicians in a geographical area to take away their rights." In the first two years of owning their business, the company and Washingtonians faced anti-gun legislation such as magazine capacity restrictions and a so-called "Assault Weapon" ban. The combination of the two impacted about 90% of the guns that SharpShooting sold and thus affected their revenue. After fighting the bills prior to passage, Jeremy and Katie have now joined with the NSSF as plaintiffs in a federal

lawsuit against the ban, suing the state of Washington and "challenging the constitutionality of the bill among other issues that are more complex."

When asked how women can become more involved locally and nationally, Katie and Jeremy advise: "We would encourage readers to become members of their local shooting range. Take a class. Follow all their social media channels. Get informed, and get in the fight. Major anti-safety organizations like Moms Demand Action & Everytown are extremely well organized and have a foothold and influence in your state already. Nowhere is exempt from attack."

That's one more reason we, as women firearms enthusiasts, should delve deeper when we find a local gun shop, range, or shooting club we mesh with. Whether we own firearms for hunting, target shooting, personal defense, or all of the above, we can help make great things happen by teaming up with the individuals and businesses that are invested in our neighborhoods and stepping into the gap as our rights come under attack.

As Jeremy and Katie exhort us:

"Just keep your head up and stand strong in your values. ... You CAN be a part of the positive in educating and bringing change to the way people view gun ownership."

LadyShooter LifeStyles thanks Katie & Jeremy Ball for sharing their insights via electronic interview. To learn more about SharpShooting Indoor Range & Gun Shop, visit them online at www.sharps shooting.net and on Instagram at

@thatsharpshootinggirl,
@thatsharpshootingguy,
@sharpshootingspokane .



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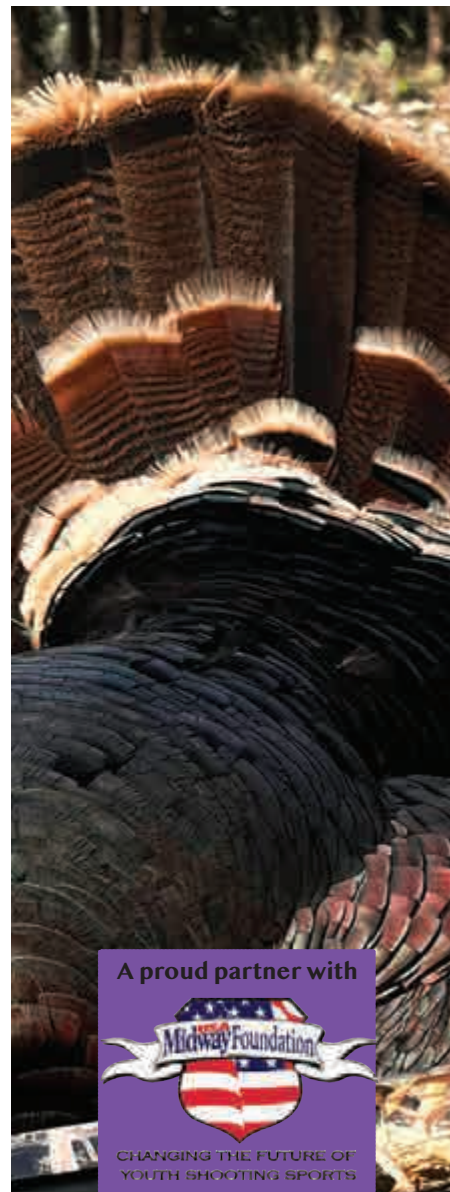


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