



SHOOTING STAR

The **ELIZABETH LANIER** Story

by

Clarke C. Jones

Photos courtesy of Elizabeth Lanier



You know, the battle of the sexes is just not fair. You go through life thinking you know something about a thing or two you can claim as your own, and daggone if some woman doesn't come along and show you up. Now I know I'm not going to be as good a golfer as Sorenstam, even if she lets me hit from the ladies' tees. Sharapova wouldn't work up a sweat in a three set tennis match with me across the net. And after being humiliated several years ago in a game of "horse" by the point guard of her high school basketball team, I now know my fade-away jump shot has done just that, faded away. Despite the reality that my physical triumphs are evaporating into myths, I still held on to the fact that when it came to shotgun sports, I could easily outshoot a woman. Now I am not so sure.

This disturbing revelation came to me the other day when I was invited to meet with a number of women who share friendships and a love for breaking clay targets. Consisting of professional women such as a lawyer, a minister, and administrators and garden clubbers and homemakers, their ever increasing numbers are led by Elizabeth Lanier who resides with her husband, Owen, and three children in Goochland County. Upon arriving at the Old Forge Sporting Clay Range in Providence Forge, I noticed a friendly looking

group of attractive women carrying shotguns, and being male, I approached them hesitantly with the careful consideration that they *were* carrying shotguns. Emerging from the crowd came Lanier, who walked up to me with her contagious and warm personality, and introduced herself and her shooting companions. Lanier's group call themselves G.R.I.T.S., short for Girls Really Into Shooting, and they could very well be considered the poster girls for women having fun shooting.

When you meet Lanier, one of the first things you recognize about her is how delighted she is that you are interested in a sport she now champions. It is this unimimidating and sincere passion for shooting sports, which she spreads around like a magic potion, that makes you feel you are going to have a good time shooting, even if you have never done it before. Her outgoing personality alone is one of the reasons so many women she has met, who have never shot or even held a shotgun, have given shooting a go and enjoyed themselves. They have also come to learn the other benefits of belonging in some aspect to a shooting community.

How did Lanier become one of the strongest advocates of women participating in shooting sports in central Virginia? It seems it was simply by giving her husband the gift of a series of shooting lessons by Henry Baskerville at Cavalier Shooting Sports in western Hanover County. Because of time constraints, her husband could not use all of the lessons and suggested that she take the balance. As Lanier explains it, "I gave him the lessons but I was the one who got hooked." At various parties or social events, Lanier would talk to women about this "new found fun" and with her personality, encouraged other women to join her in shooting clays. As attorney Eva Tashjian-Brown relates her beginning shooting experience, "I met Elizabeth through Lydia Strickland who was shooting with Elizabeth. Lydia had been telling me how much fun the group





and shooting was. I finally decided to go and later told them, ‘you told me it would be fun, but you didn’t tell me it would be THIS fun!’”

From clay shooting, Lanier progressed into hunting when she joined her husband for a trip to a Southern quail plantation and discovered she enjoyed wing shooting. Her love of wing shooting has opened the door to travel with her husband and other shooting couples to pheasant shoots in Scotland. Lanier rarely shoots competitively, but when she does compete, she usually brings back a trophy. Her latest prize was the runner up trophy in the women’s 20 gauge competition in the Southern Side by Side Championship in Sanford, North Carolina. It is only natural

then, that Lanier would want to share her shooting passion with others by becoming a shooting instructor and has now achieved a Level I rating and is working toward Level II status.

Bill Kempfer, owner of Deep River Sporting Clays in Sanford, North Carolina, is the gentleman who certified Lanier as a Level I instructor and was most impressed with her ability and her enthusiasm. When asked, what Lanier as a woman adds to the shooting community, Kempfer explained. “When a woman goes to a shooting club, which is currently a male dominated sport, it can be intimidating. Therefore, women tend to put undue pressure on themselves to do well in a sport which, for most, is foreign to them.

Finding only male instructors or all male participants can add to the intimidation. Coupled with that, most all women have heard that shooting is loud and painful. With proper equipment and instruction, it should be neither. A good instructor tries to set up a student’s first experience for success and fun. Lanier’s way of teaching helps overcome the certain challenges women may see in shooting. She knows what women may be thinking, what their concerns may be when trying to learn, and makes learning less intimidating. Women see her as someone like them who can do it and makes shooting look easy.”

Lanier was recommended to Kempfer as a good candidate for an Instructor’s Certification by David Judah,

Manager of the Homestead Shooting Club at The Homestead Resort in Hot Springs, Virginia. Judah has seen many shooters come and go at the Homestead Club, but felt there was something special about Lanier. “Elizabeth is very quick to assess a problem a student may be having. She is sure of herself but not in the slightest bit conceited. To watch her shoot is a great confidence builder for beginners, as she is relatively new to the sport, and to see how far she has come in a short time is very encouraging to ALL shooters, not just women. She shoots and teaches for the right reasons, to have fun and enjoy what you are doing. With a little effort she could quite easily be one of the best female shooters in the country.”

Studies have shown that men and women learn differently, and Lanier takes that bit of information into every lesson. She is a strong believer in teaching the fundamentals first. “Before we shoot the first target I ask a lot of questions. I like to know why the student is there. Do they want to break targets or learn to shoot? It may sound like the same thing, but there is a difference. Men may be fact based and have a narrow focus. They want little detail other than how do I break the target. Women may need more information. They are multitaskers and want more concepts. So I may go about teaching each sex differently.”

Lanier’s philosophy of how one learns to shoot clays helps the student relax and enjoy the learning process. “My job as an instructor is to guide the student through their success and mistakes. I try to get the students to focus on *why* they missed the target, not *where* they missed the target. Even if they miss the target, students will still make progress by learning what they did wrong on that particular target.”

An improper introduction to shotgun sports may be one of the reasons women and adolescents have shied away from clay shooting in the past. Often times, those of us who think we know something about shooting know only half of what we

should when introducing a child or girl friend to shooting. Lanier points out that, “Often times, women are given (because of their size difference) a light gun when they receive instruction from someone other than a trained instructor. However, they may be given a hot or high powered shell to shoot because that is what may be handy at the time. This is only asking for a painful introduction. A light gun with a light load may be fine if you are hunting all day and may only shoot a few times, but if you are shooting a round of clays, which would mean you are shooting 50 targets, you would be better off with a heavier gun because the recoil is likely to be reduced.”

What is the next step if a student has been bitten by the shooting bug and wants to participate in clay shooting or hunting in a big way? “If you have gotten to the point that you want to buy a gun, I think paying the extra money to get a proper fit to your body type is well worth it.” Lanier emphasizes, “Sometimes a bad fit will cause you to lift your head, and then you have the recoil bumping your jaw.”

Lanier may well be one of the new faces of today’s woman shooter, and she is quickly becoming recognized as a very good shooting instructor by those who have been teaching the art of shooting moving targets for years. As her husband Owen states, “Elizabeth really enjoys watching other people succeed and is genuinely thrilled by their success. She is able to put the beginning shooter at ease and puts them in a place that removes fear and inserts fun.”

Elizabeth Lanier can be contacted at (804) 370-0096.

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