

Making a Difference



By Genie Jennings,
Contributing Editor

Uncle Richard said, “You are going to ruin this club.” He said it for the first time in 2006 when I first approached the South Berwick Rod and Gun Association with the idea of hosting a women’s introductory program. He has said it every time we have a women’s program, and every month when I give a report on what is happening with gun laws and related topics.

He means “change it.” I did not set out to change the club. I did suggest that women would determine the future of guns in our country. Women comprise over half the population, women vote, and women are bombarded with anti-gun propaganda. For gun clubs to survive women need to be brought to our side of the divide.

Mean time, while he has focused his attention on my activities, Lois Kupersmith entered under his radar. The real architect of change not only went unnoticed by the guardian of the gates, she was embraced.

At Home on the Range: Lois Kupersmith of New Hampshire

Several years ago, I suggested that women come together to practice. (A Well-Regulated Ma-litia, *Women & Guns*, July/August 2008) I placed a public-service ad in the local paper and on-line news service announcing such a meeting at our club, and promising that there would be at least one other woman at the range.

Lois Kupersmith was one of the first respondents. There were

own and operate NJM Gallery in Portsmouth, NH. In addition she is an artist, creating her own works. Small business couples do not have the luxury of spending time away from their shop together during extended work hours, so Lois was looking for a range where she would feel comfortable without her husband. She thought it would be fun meeting and hanging out with women who shared her interest in firearms.



Some of the women of the South Berwick Rod & Gun Club: from the left, Patty Glynn, Gina Semprini, Paula Dougherty, July Simpson, Lois Kupersmith and Sandra Jones.

other women who had come to our Introducing Women to the Shooting Sports, and some wives of club members, but Lois had no connection to the club.

She and her husband, Lee,

The meetings were set for Thursdays, one of the days the trap range is open to the public, thus assuring that non-members could get through the gate. It did not take long before all attendees

including Lois joined the rod and gun club.

When winter took me north, Lois took on the responsibility of being the Woman-on-the-Range. She has remained so ever since. That is one of her finest qualities. When she sees something needs to be done, she does it. Lois warmly welcomes any woman who comes to the club. She aggressively encourages each one. She knows everyone! She coerces women who come to her shop to give shooting a try.

Most of the daytime habitués are trap shooters. Although she had come to shoot her pistol, Lois soon became intrigued with their sport. They were thrilled, when she sought instruction, to create another addict. She became a

formidable pigeon destroyer, as well as becoming totally immersed in the Thursday culture.

In warm weather there is a tent over picnic tables adjacent to the trap range, where people gather before, after and between rounds. (Except for the cribbage players who hang out in the little trap shack.) Although the rifle and pistol ranges close at dark, there are lights on the trap range; eventually, everyone ends up there. And, when the shooting is done and the equipment is stored, most who are left proceed to the shack for adult beverages and conversation. Usually, someone would bring simple snacks, such as potato chips or crackers and cheese.

During the afternoon most of the men are retirees. After work

hours a new crew arrives. Lee would come down after closing the gallery. The Kupersmiths are very social people, so they almost always stayed until the end. However, there was no dinner ready at home, since both of them were at the club. Chips did not suffice. The first major change was the introduction of the potluck supper. People began bringing real food. As the quantity and quality of food increased, so did the participants.

Lois and Lee became more and more involved in the club's functions. Lee is the webmaster. Lois is the NRA Representative ready to sign-up new members at almost every meeting. She began volunteering with the shotgun section of the women's

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introduction program, soon after she learned to shoot trap.

Over the past year she has completed her NRA Pistol Instructor certification, and now teaches the NRA Home Firearm Safety Course on an almost monthly basis. This course qualifies as training for the Maine concealed carry permit. There has been an upsurge in people applying for these licenses, in addition to people who just want to keep themselves and family safe with firearms in their homes.

A couple years ago the Kupersmiths instituted holiday get-togethers at the trap shack. For people away from family during those times, the club became the 'home' at which to gather. It was not a big leap to bigger, more elaborate meals, for a fee. We have had pig roasts, and lobster bakes. The modest ticket price has generated a small profit. When it accumulates enough, Lee is planning to use it to buy a smoker.

The rod and gun association has recently done some upgrading and expansion. We have a new bigger, better Trap Shack complete with indoor restroom. We have a brand-new much larger pistol range and berms. Those were improvements that would have happened regardless of the increased social aspect.

But the social aspect is what has changed most. For more and more people, the gun club has become a real club. The Thursday after-parties are rarely a few of the guys. Most often there are wives and mothers and children, most of whom have spent at least a little time on one or more of the ranges beforehand. Thursdays now begin

with brunch.

At the last meeting, I couldn't help kidding Richard about the number of women's faces I saw when I was addressing the members. "I told you you would ruin the club," he grumbled for the umpteenth time. "At least the new curtains aren't pink."

One of the recurring complaints I hear from women when I am traveling or on the Internet is the difficulty in being accepted in the "old boys" atmosphere of gun clubs. Thankfully, this is something I have never encountered, although I know I have felt a little apprehensive driving up the usually narrow windy road to a new club of strangers. I have yet to meet gun

men who are not welcoming. There might be some teasing such as Uncle Richard likes to dish out, but when you are in your eighth decade as he is, you are entitled, and, besides, we know he really likes us. Men test each other, so being tested should be considered a compliment. It means you are being accepted as an equal.

If you would like to infiltrate your local club, try Lois's technique. Be friendly, smile a lot, ask for help, enjoy what you do, take the effort to include newcomers, do the things you see need doing, and know that you will be accepted. Lois didn't deliberately set out to change anything. She just made herself at home on the range.

W&G

Defensive Strategies

Continued from Page 11

person to do here at home, as one Iraq and Afghanistan veteran named Corey Thompson recently found out, when someone was trying to break into his home.

"When I'm dealt with a stressful situation, ... it's natural. I just jump into combat mode. I told him, 'I'm going to give you a warning shot,'" Thompson explained.

Thompson then followed his verbal warning with one warning shot from his AR-15 rifle into the ground.

Faithful readers of this column know, first of all, that someone breaking into your home does not give you justification to use lethal force against them. They might be there to steal stuff, not to harm you. Only if you or another innocent person is in immediate and unavoidable jeopardy of death or grave bodily harm, can you use

lethal force.

Thompson has been charged with several gun-related crimes, and of course his gun has been seized. I wish him well in the legal situation he is going to face, but that is what can happen when military procedures are followed at home.

Please, if anyone you know is a veteran home from Iraq, Afghanistan, or any other place where serious action has been going on, have a talk with them about what they should, and shouldn't do at home in situations like this. Help them understand that what seems sensible and effective isn't necessarily legal.

So, you have absolutely NO DUTY to warn someone that you are about to shoot them. Give a verbal warning, if circumstances are right, but don't make warning shots part of your plan.

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