

The Los Angeles Silhouette Club

Old School Gunology

By: Jim Taylor

John Linebaugh introduced me to that phrase years ago, using it on the masthead of his now-long-gone magazine **The Shootist**. It aptly describes what his philosophy of the sixgun was and is. It also describes my philosophy and that of many others, I might add. It is not something that a person tries to get as much as it is a *mindset*, a way of looking at things. It is akin to what folks mean when they talk about "the **Cowboy Way**".

In the first issue John said of the Old School Sixgun way of thinking: "we hope... to keep this knowledge alive and circulate it to those who consider themselves a part of the Old School style shooter... While we... are in favor of any sport that burns powder ...our byword is *PRACTICAL* ... like the Silhouette and Short Rifle shooters our interest is firearms. We just look down a different set of barrels...."

In a later issue he stated: "We simply advocate the man and his skill with his gun. This is all you have when your back is to the wall."

Not Equipment Oriented

This way of looking at using firearms is first of all not "equipment oriented". By that I mean that we understand it is not so much what the person uses as it is *the person using it* ... their personal skill and ability. There are many shooters who seem to have the idea that a more expensive gun will make them a better shot... as if technology can somehow replace competence. Or they seem to think that if they remodel the gun it will somehow make up for a lack of skill.

I am not against expensive guns or remodeling them. I have remodeled quite a few of my own. But I learned a long time ago that it is the *man*, not the *gun* that gets the job done. And that does not come by doing something that makes you feel better or more self-assured. It comes from practice, use, and familiarization ... until you hit what you shoot at simply because you can.

The guns that Ed McGivern used to set world records were factory Smith & Wesson and Colt's revolvers ... unmodified. The trigger pulls were not lightened. The hammer springs were not changed from factory springs. Many had factory grips left on them. **HE** was good. It wasn't the gun. It was the Operator.

My Dad shot competition with the Law Enforcement teams when he worked for the Department of Corrections. He has a room full of trophies that he won over the years. He won so many matches he was asked to set out some of the meets and give some of the other guys a chance! In the first instance of being asked that, he asked if he could shoot the match totally "weak-handed" and they said, "Sure". He came in 2nd that meet... by about 3 seconds behind the First Place winner.

His gun was his old 586 S&W .357. It was totally as it came from the factory other than he carved and whittled the factory grips down to where they fit his hand. It was and is not pretty. It is not any more accurate than the run-of-the-mill Smith's. His competition loads will stay around 2" at 25 yards from a rest. But **he** was good! His ability to win matches came from *his ability* first and foremost, not from his equipment.

Time and Work

Elmer Keith wrote in Sixguns: *"More time is required to master the handgun than any other type of firearm. To become an expert sixgun shot, one must live with the gun. Only by constant use and practice can one acquire a thorough mastery of the shotgun. You must work and play with it, eat with it, sleep with it, and shoot it every day - until it becomes a part of you and you handle it as surely as you would your knife and fork at the table."* (Sixguns - page 57)

This type of commitment to learning and maintaining a skill is not found in a lot of people in our fast-paced, "**I want it now**", society. It requires that you get a different paradigm if you will, a different mental model than the **instant results** that we are unconsciously bombarded with by the media, (*we see it in advertising: Do you want a girlfriend? Buy this car... use this toothpaste... and suddenly you will be popular*). While we may laugh at the notion, this type of thinking has unconsciously invaded our culture and affected how we view the world and ourselves.

I realized it in me one day when, standing in front of the microwave waiting for a baked potato to get done in 4 minutes I found myself getting impatient. And I suddenly flashed back to when I was a kid. Mom baked them in the oven of a coal stove and it took 40 minutes!! In those days we did not start getting impatient until 35 minutes had passed. The "I WANT IT NOW!" syndrome had gotten to me!

Reading Ed McGivern's book I noted that one time he was told that it would be impossible to hit a can 5 or 6 times before it hit the ground when dropped from a height of 20 feet. He said that after 30,000-some rounds he

found he could do it quite easily. And he said it in an off-hand manner, as if that were a normal course of affairs! (it was, for him) A lot of shooters don't fire that many rounds a lifetime, let alone in a few months. That kind of dogged determination is what sets the Old School shooters apart from the rest.

Quoting Elmer Keith again: "pistol shots are not born. They get that way by constant hard work and steady practice, studying each and every move and perfecting their technique..." (Sixguns page 59)

With the competing demands of a family, work, and all the pressures that life today brings to bear, it does require a singular mindset to stay focused. Those sixgunners who are able to do so get my salute. You are Old School!

Shooting

Please do not think that I am against you making your firearm better, or customizing it, or working to increase its accuracy potential. Not at all. What I am trying to say is, beware of **substituting** those things for old-fashioned work. If you are a collector and have no interest in shooting them, that's fine. If you just like to tinker with them, that's great. If you want to be a good shot, don't let other things get in the way.

I get emails from young shooters who are just starting into the game. Usually they ask something like: "I only have one gun. If I _____ (fill in the blank here- "*re-barrel*"... "*lighten the trigger*"... "*put on a scope*" etc) will it make it better? My normal answer is to tell them to shoot it. Shoot it a lot. Get to where that gun is an extension of your arm. Above all, don't feel inadequate because you cannot afford a "better" or "fancier" or "more powerful" gun. Use what you have to the best of its ability. I have seen guys who had guns that "were not as good" as some others, but who could do wonders with them.

I met a young man years ago who had broken his neck in a sky-diving accident. He was a quadriplegic for some time, then began to get some movement back through therapy and the Lord's help I am sure. Dad and I introduced him to handgun shooting. Because his hands were weak he decided to buy a semi-auto pistol. He could not afford much and looked around until he found a copy of the Luger, imported by Erma ... a cheap .22 rimfire.

He shot that thing everyday. He started out shooting at 10 feet. When he got to where he could hit a paint can lid consistently he backed up to 20 feet. At first he could not hold the gun up for more

than 3 or 4 shots. But he kept at it. Eventually he was shooting hundreds of rounds a day... sometime going through a whole brick of .22's at one session. By the time he got rid of the gun it was junk. He had shot it totally loose. But he could hit anything he shot at. One range session I watched him use that old .22 to beat 3 riflemen breaking gallon jugs at 100 yards! He did not have a better gun than they did. *He was better!*

That is Old School Gunology.

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