

One on One with Terry Hetrick

Enthusiastic, positive, talented, respected, popular, loyal friend and gentleman

by Morris Gresham

Young Terry Hetrick was no stranger to shotguns. He'd done a bit of hunting with his father on an old farmer's place in Pennsylvania where he was born and raised. He'd also shot a few clay birds on the farm that his father tossed with an old hand trap. It wasn't until he was about 13, however, that he got a look at a skeet field.

"We were driving home from church," Hetrick remembered, "and one of the department stores in town had a banner welcoming the Pennsylvania State Skeet Shooting Championships that year in Huntingdon. My dad and I decided we'd go up to watch because my uncle, Nick Hetrick, was an excellent skeet shooter. Shortly after that, we got the bug and my uncle took me out and gave me my first taste of skeet. Uncle Nick was my coach up until his death several years ago. We shot a lot together and I'm grateful that he and my dad got me into the sport. They sacrificed a lot of their own shooting so that I would be able to shoot."

Hetrick shot quite a few registered targets as a junior, but he tapered off dramatically, he said, when he "left the roost and got away from home." Critical factors, such as limited income and newly discovered living expenses, limited his shooting.

"I remember when Terry used to drive to shoots in an old car and sleep in a tent at the skeet shoots," said Denny Crawford, a long-time friend and two-man team partner. "In fact, over in Greenville, there was a time we used to let him sleep in the clubhouse. Terry was always an absolutely fine shooter, a fine pointer of the shotgun. It was a shame that he didn't have the financial backing years ago that some of the fellows did because with his talent Terry could have been a top All-American 20 years ago."

"I was starting to raise a family so I didn't get to shoot as much as I'd like," Hetrick admitted. "Some years it seemed to be more profitable to do some refereeing as opposed to shooting, so I only got to shoot one or two shoots. I've been shooting for 30 years, but a lot of guys have a lot more lifetime targets than I do because a lot of those years I was reffing and loading traps and stuff like that."

Between shoots, young Hetrick served for a time as an officer on his hometown's police force. Then he worked for a mechanical engineering firm as, he said, "sort of a gofer." From there he traveled to San Antonio where he served as NSSA's special projects coordinator. He followed that with eight years as a sales rep for Briley Manufacturing.

"I met Terry at the Midwest Open twenty-something years ago when it got down to him and me in the 28 gauge championship," Crawford related. "I work for General Motors and moved to Texas seven years ago for about five years. When I moved to Texas, Terry and I renewed our friendship and we started shooting two-man team in Texas. We won three or four Texas State two-man championships and shot all over Texas. Terry worked for Briley which was nice because he gained some

financial stability. Dieter Krieghoff helped Terry set up a K-80 the way he wanted it and helped him become an All-American. In fact he made Honorable Mention Open team in 1999."

"Terry is a real good friend that I've known for many years, going back to when he lived in Pennsylvania as an up-and-coming junior shooter," said Phil Murray. "Now he is a top All-American adult shooter. Over the past few years he's developed the ability to concentrate and a desire to win. He has those attributes that are important to become a top shooter."

"I think I met Phil Murray at the World Shoot in Savannah in 1973," Hetrick speculated. "He was shooting as a member of the Californians and he was one of the guys that I read about every month in the Skeet Shooting Review and I thought, 'Boy it's going to be something to get to meet and shake hands with a guy like Phil Murray.' We've remained friends over the years and, lucky me, he moved to Houston several years ago and he's now my two-man team partner, my squadmate and my best friend. It's just another good fortune that I've been blessed with."

"Terry is a good guy," Murray reciprocated, "a throwback to the days of the old skeet shooters. He knows everybody. Everybody knows him. Everybody respects him. During the years that he worked at NSSA, he developed an excellent track record in dealing with people. And working for Briley, he had to work with the public. And that's one of his strong points. He's always smiling and in a good mood."

"The most impressive thing I can think of about Terry is his enthusiasm," said Cliff Moller of Briley. "If you are slightly interested in skeet, he makes the game so wonderful and so beautiful and so interesting. Terry just fills you with passion when it comes to shooting. This year he has been teaching a lot of folks. He and Tom (Fiori) teach a lot. Terry has been extremely successful in bringing on some real new shooters. He teaches them the fundamentals well and they have had tremendous success. Christian Webb is one and, of course, Teddy Gutierrez who shot the youngest 4-by-4 at the time is the most impressive. Terry also teaches dove hunters and just anybody interested in swinging a shotgun."

"Everybody knows about Terry," Moller continued. "He's great to travel with and to shoot with ... and from a PR point of view, he's absolutely fantastic. From a business point of view, he's great. He's great with customers. Terry does a lot of one-to-one with them and just makes them feel like they're going in the right direction. He's honest with them. He knows everybody and everything that has ever happened in skeet. If it happened in 1942 on April 13, he knows it. Terry and Robert Paxton like to challenge each other on who knows who. They play qu'en es mas macho with skeet trivia."

"Terry is a real trivia expert," agreed Christian Webb, one of Hetrick's passionate students. "He likes to sit around ...and ask questions that no one would ever know except maybe Paxton. Terry and Robert and Mary try to stump each other with questions like, 'Who is the only step-mother/step-son team to be on All-America teams at the same time?' Who cares? But they know. They sit there and ponder on it and they're right very often."

"I really cannot say good enough things about Terry," Webb stressed. "I've been shooting for 3-1/2 years and when I first met Terry, there were some people helping me, giving me advice. I was having some problems with high 2s, high 6s, low 4s ... just all over the field. So, one day I walked up as Terry was practicing and asked him, 'Can you just look at me and maybe give me some advice about what I'm doing wrong.' He said, 'Sure.' And it turned from a few minutes into an hour and a half ... and at no charge, although he was an instructor.

"During that time it became apparent that there were a lot of things that I had to change if I wanted to get better at the game," Webb smiled. "I was shooting 94s and 95s and was getting really frustrated. So I booked three lessons for myself and five lessons for my wife. My wife got to shooting 18 to 20 in less than a week and Terry fine tuned my game. I took one lesson and I shot a 100 the very next weekend. Then I took another lesson and I shot a 2-by in the 12 and 20 the week after that. So I am a firm believer in Terry Hetrick.

"His principles are just perfect," Webb said. "He believes in keeping everything simple. The hardest thing for me when I was starting was where are my feet supposed to point? Where am I supposed to be looking? Where is my hold point? Terry has these very basic things that you follow, where you look, the way you think and a routine when you step onto a station here you do the same thing every time. It works real well."

"I met Terry for the first time in person this year (1999)," said George Urick. "He helped set up my new Krieghoff for me and today he asked me if I was satisfied with it. He said he'd like to go down to one of the practice fields (at the World Shoot) to make sure the gun was shooting the way it should be for me. As far as I'm concerned, Terry is one fine person and I'm glad I met him."

"Terry is very helpful to people around him," Barroso said. "You'll find that true with most skeet shooters, but Terry is probably one of the best teachers you'll find. Skeet is a way of life for him. Everything he does has some type of connection to skeet. Terry is very well respected in this sport and he's very popular, very popular. I think that's probably because of his goodness of heart."

When asked who helped him reach his current level, Hetrick answered quickly, without hesitation. "No doubt about it," he said. "It was Ken Sedlecky, a Hall of Famer and former world champ. Kenny was living in Butler, Pennsylvania at the time and working for Winchester. He met me when I was a kid and, fortunately, he took a liking to me and took me under his wing. My dad inspired my interest in hunting and shooting, my uncle taught me the game and Kenny taught me how to win."

"I didn't do a very good job," Sedlecky joked, "because he's still not winning." Then, turning serious immediately, he rejected that notion. "Terry is one of the better shooters out there," he said. "He has a twinkle in his eye and that sense of humor. He's a great team man and he never complains if he misses a bird. He's a great sportsman. Sometimes I think if Terry has one weakness, he just doesn't have

enough fire in his belly and charge as an individual. He's more concerned about the squad and about his students than he is about him winning."

Hetrick was concerned enough about his shooting to post victories almost from the beginning, however. He won several junior state championships in Pennsylvania, won a North-South junior championship and made the Junior All-American team. In addition to those wins and some local wins in his youth, he has won a number of major gun championships in recent years. None of them, however, rank as his most memorable skeet shooting moment.

"I've been lucky enough to win a couple of good ones and I've met a lot of nice people," Hetrick admitted, "but probably my one most treasured memory happened in my fourth or fifth year of shooting ... when I wasn't a junior any longer. My mother and dad were camping at Prince Gallitzen State Park near the 7-H Skeet Club in Patton, Pennsylvania. My good friend Ralph Holtz and his family operate the 7-H and they were having a little 50-bird, non-registered handicap shoot that afternoon. So my dad and I entered. We shot as a two-man team and won the two-man team and ended up shooting for champion and runner-up. The shoot-off got down to just him and me and although you'll never read that in the Skeet Review or the Records Annual or anything like that, those were the two medals that mean the most to me. The best is not always the biggest."

So you beat your dad?

"Yeah, I did," Hetrick smiled. "You have to understand that he didn't get to practice much because he had been paying for my shooting."

A suggestion that he describe his shooting style elicited a chuckle. "I would hope that I look like Bob Uknalis out there, but I think that's wishful thinking," Hetrick laughed. "I try to go back to the basics that I learned from Ken and do it his way. He was a pretty straight up, straightforward, keep it simple type of shooter. I try to make it as easy as I can. Unfortunately, I don't get to practice a lot any more."

During most of his youth, young Hetrick had less practice time than many of his peers. "Early in the game," Sedlecky said, "I told him, 'You don't have to shoot a lot, practice a lot, but every time you go out onto a field, learn something. If you don't learn something every time you go out in a practice round, you're hurting yourself. You don't have to shoot a lot. Just shoot 25 or 50, go back into the clubhouse and analyze what you've done. Then, go back out and try to correct your errors. Terry didn't have a hell of a lot of money at the time. He couldn't shoot a lot and he didn't get to travel much."

"When I do get to practice," Hetrick said, "I try to concentrate not on breaking 25 straights, but working on good fundamentals and maybe practicing a particular shot that I'm not comfortable with. I'm a firm believer that when you go out to practice, you ought to kinda do it like a golf pro does. When Fred Couples goes to the driving range, he may hit 20 balls and work on nothing but his take-away. Then he may hit another 20 balls and work on his follow-through. I kinda like to practice that way. Instead of going out trying to break 25 straights, I work on different elements of my game that may not be as strong as they should be. I think it's a good idea to shoot

about four boxes of practice. There's a little bit of exercise you need to do to be in shape to shoot this game well. And I think you need to shoot a fair amount. I'd like to shoot a lot more than I do, but..."

His work with students helps him stay in touch with basics, of course, and he teaches basics in much the same manner as his own mentor. "Instead of taking Terry and trying to mold him into the way I shot, I took his strongest points and worked with him on them," Sedlecky related. "At one time I led off for a squad of four juniors that I shot with in registered shoots, and Terry was one of them. I got to know him and his family real well. When we had a shoot over in the Newcastle or Pittsburgh area, Terry would come over, stay with us and shoot on my squad. I worked with him a lot, but probably the most important thing I taught him is what I call the power stance ... that he still teaches and believes in.

"Terry is a good shot and he's an excellent coach," Sedlecky continued. "Terry absorbed a lot of what I taught him back then. And his primary effectiveness in coaching is that he develops an individual's strong points instead of molding them in a different way. The fun of coaching is watching your students develop and Terry is coming along danged good."

"For a new shooter, the first thing you have to work on is what he does with his eyes," said Hetrick the instructor. "We've heard all of our lives that if you want to hit something with a gun that you have to aim at it. Of course, that's not what we do here. It's not that easy in skeet. You have to really teach them how to use their eyes, how to look at targets, how to stay in focus ... right off the bat. I think that philosophy is why some of the new, young shooters that I've had have come along strong. I've really been lucky. I had a young fellow that I started to teach a couple of years ago, Teddy Gutierrez. He broke a 4-by-4 in 1999 and that was a really proud moment for me. If we expect to keep ahead of them, we've got to get the Gutierrez boys interested in girls," he laughed.

When asked about the most common problem encountered by AA/AAA shooters, Hetrick answered, "That varies from shooter to shooter, but I usually find that it's the same thing that kinda turned it around for me. Once you really learn how to focus and look at a target, you can overcome a lot of incorrect fundamentals and bad habits ... when you learn how to actually see a moving target. We work a lot on that. I'm not a big one to change someone's style 100%. I try to take what they're using and make the best out of it. It seems to work every once in a while."

Hetrick, an excellent .410 competitor, has some interesting views on the little gun. "I'm from the old school," he stressed, "and I can remember one of the first magazines I ever received. The cover had about 12 different guys pictured in a circle around a .410 shell. They were the shooters who had broken 100 that year with the .410. These fellows coming up now just don't realize

100 that year with the .410. These fellows coming up now just don't realize how difficult it really is.

"For some reason, last year (1998) I just started to click in with the .410. If I use good, solid fundamentals and basics, then the .410 is just as easy as anything else.

For years and years, the philosophy was to shoot the .410 like you shoot your other guns. I've come to the conclusion that if you shoot your other guns like you shoot your .410, you'll be a better overall shooter."

Hetrick the skeet shooter has a few other interests for fun. He's a hunter at times, and a frequent philosopher. "I had a renewed interest in hunting after I moved to Texas. I really enjoyed the Texas hunting seasons with my friends Bill Brookshire and Earl Barroso. I really like getting out to shoot some of these birds down here. I love to spend time with my kids. That's the very best thing. In the great scheme of life, skeet shooting, the actual breaking of targets, is pretty low on the list. There are a lot of other things that are more important, most of all Adam, Jessica, Christa and Nicole, God's greatest blessing on me.

"As far as promoting this game," he continued, "we need to help all the clubs understand that not every shoot that we throw has to be a major 4-gun shoot. I can remember some tremendously enjoyable shoots when I was coming up where we shot maybe 100 12 gauge only. It allowed the club shooters, the league shooters, to come out and shoot some registered targets and it still makes for some good competition. Not everybody can enjoy this game by traveling miles and miles on weekend after weekend. It can be really enjoyed on a local basis by the guy who is not devoted to the travel. If we want to be involved in an individual sport and make all kinds of money, then we all ought to go to a golf club and learn how to play golf. But this game is for fun. That's really where we need to keep it.

"I love being able to be in the industry, trying to make a living from something I really enjoy," Hetrick said in late 1999. "From working with Briley, with Jess and Cliff, being involved in sales and helping other folks with their equipment. I'm pretty fortunate to be able to do that. "

Then, in late summer of 2000, Hetrick made yet another move within the shooting community, accepting the job as manager of the Nashville Gun Club. "I'd been to three tournaments at the Nashville Gun Club," Hetrick revealed. "I came to the Volunteer Open last year and I enjoyed the place so much that I came to the same shoot this year. I also came to the Russell Dorris Memorial Shoot this year and found that they were looking for somebody to run the club. That's how it all started.

"Now I'm manager of the club and I'm an official Briley dealer over here with a nice little pro shop," he continued, "and we're working real good together. Now Briley has a dealer who worked at the factory for eight years. I love it here. The weather is great and the club has such great potential. It's located, believe it or not, on a highway named Briley Parkway and it's about halfway between downtown and Opryland. It's a perfect location with terrific potential.

"Everybody at the club has been so helpful," he stated. "We got a really good start the first weekend that I worked the club. We hosted the Louise Mandrell Celebrity Shoot which is a charity shoot that benefits the Boy Scouts of America. So I got to meet a lot of the club members through that shoot ... and I got to hang out with a lot of the Nashville stars like Mike Snider, Ricky Skaggs, T.J. Clay and, of course, the whole Mandrell connection, Ken Dudney, his wife Barbara Mandrell and Louise Mandrell, just to name a few."

When asked what keeps his enthusiasm so high, Hetrick didn't hesitate. "It all comes back to the people," he said. "It's the people who bring you back to the shoots. Also, I guess it's a never ending drive to beat your last score ... to try again to better yourself."

When asked what he'd like to be remembered for, he hesitated, smiled, and gave a Hetrick answer. "Just that I'm a guy that likes to shoot and enjoys the outdoors," he said, "a guy that loves his family and wants everybody to have a good time."

"Terry is not only a great skeet shooter, he's a great person," said Christian Webb. "He's a true coach for me when I'm having problems. He can watch me and in one sentence fix a problem."

"One of the outstanding things about Terry is his dedication to the sport," Ken Sedlecky stressed. "He loves the sport and wants to see it grow. He's a hard worker in the industry. Look at the years he spent money out of his pocket to go to the Junior World to run that for them. He spent a lot of his own money developing and promoting the shooting sports. I don't know anybody who dislikes Terry. He's a good person."

"Terry is a pretty positive person," Phil Murray concluded. "He's a good shooter, a good friend and a real credit to the sport."

No doubt about it!

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