

# Lighter Side

## Look Who We Met at Dinner

Life and business are made up of people and our interactions with them. You often don't know the experience, knowledge or connections of whom you are talking to. I have had chance encounters that have provided me with valuable information; some made me aware of potential opportunities, two in particular had a dramatic impact on my life and some were just sheer entertainment. That is what happened to me on the second Sunday in October of this past year.

Periodically on Sundays, my wife and I attend one of the numerous local dinners offered by the various volunteer fire companies in our area. While each fire company does things slightly differently, the dinners revolve mainly around turkey, ham or a combination of the two, with an occasional Swiss Steak dinner or chicken barbecue tossed in for a change of pace.

When we originally started to attend these dinners, it was so my wife didn't have to prepare a large Sunday meal for just the two of us and I didn't have to clean up what always looked like a pile of every pot needed to cook Thanksgiving dinner for the First Army Division. In return, we had a good meal and helped support worthy organizations.

Over time, we found some other interesting benefits as well. We began to recognize others who also made the "dinner circuit" a habit and on random Sundays, depending upon the time we arrived, we potentially met some new people as well as some old dinner partners we had shared a table with before. These meetings normally resulted in some interesting dinner conversations but the aforementioned Sunday set a new standard for us.

That was the day we met a lady named Dorla Shaw. As Dorla approached our table, she was the perfect picture of a grandmother who you might expect to see on a Pillsbury Angel Food Cake box. She was a slender lady, neatly dressed in immaculate casual jeans and a white lacy top. Her silver jewelry accented her curly, close-cropped gray hair and her friendly smile seemed a yard wide. We welcomed her to our table and shortly, Dorla and my wife were deeply involved in conversation. I continued talking to a bowhunting friend seated to my right when all of a sudden, I thought I heard the word "motorcycle." Now, with my failing hearing, I think I hear a lot of things that are not true or even relevant to the conversation but this one, I had to check out. Turning in Dorla's direction, I asked, "Did I hear you say you ride a motorcycle?"

"Yep, sure do," she replied. "As a matter of fact, I just got a new bike this spring." Slowly, I pulled my jaw out of my mashed potatoes, trying to look as if it were nothing unusual.

Dorla went on to explain that she bought her first motorcycle in 1996 and she had over 162,000 miles on it, so she decided to trade it in. This spring, she took possession of her



by John Kasun

new Honda Goldwing 1,800cc trike (about 118 horsepower). She went into great detail as to how she "tricked out" her new ride, discussing each option with the knowledge of a motorcycle technician. For those of you not familiar with the word "trike," it is a three-wheeled motorcycle and a favorite of older riders who have a harder time lifting a two wheeled bike. "I had to get a trike," Dorla said. "My legs are too short to reach the ground when I stop on a regular motorcycle."

"Dorla, forgive me, but how old are you?"

I asked, not sure if I would get hit with a spoonful of noodles or possibly a bike chain. I knew I was stepping onto shaky ground.

With a smile wide enough that she could have swallowed a banana sideways, Dorla replied, "I will be 81 years old on my next birthday."

"I didn't take you for a biker babe when you sat down," I laughed. The sharp jab in my ribs from my wife told me to mind my manners but I was already in too deep and the words were already spilling from my mouth. "Dorla, I am sorry but you have to tell me; do you have any tattoos?"

"Of course," she said, rolling up her short sleeves and exposing delicate flower tattoos on each shoulder. "I would get some more but I am on blood thinners and the doctor said I should not risk it, as I might bleed to death," she said, almost blushing.

Over the course of the next 20 minutes, we learned a lot about Dorla and life through her eyes. She had been a widow for many years and her son had also passed. Her eyes twinkled when she smiled and her smile went all the way to her soul. She kept an active social life, often throwing parties for singles to get together. She cooks, bakes and does the maintenance around her home. She also manages a mobile home court and cuts the grass and plows snow for the residents. We learned there is not much Dorla does not do. She told of the time she and her husband had to cut down some trees and her husband bought a chainsaw to make the job easier. Dorla claimed it was too heavy and used a bow saw instead. Laughing, she said, "I think I cut as much wood as he did."

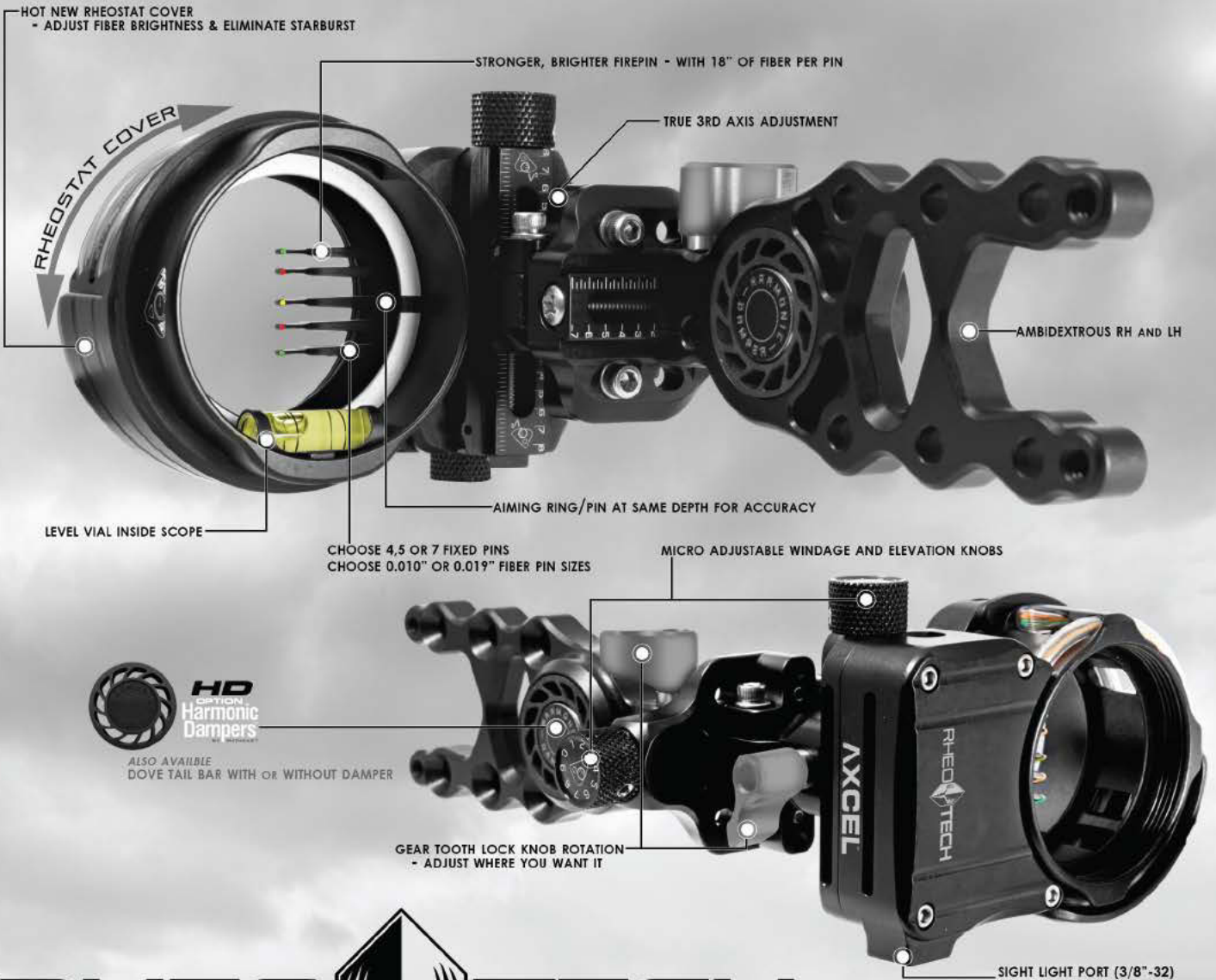
The meeting with Dorla was a chance encounter but she was a person to remember and the time spent with her added value to our lives. You never know when a chance encounter is going to take place, so sometimes it pays to listen and learn. It is hard to look into the life of a person like Dorla and not look at yourself to see how you can do better.

When it came time to leave, I ordered a cup of coffee. The funny thing is I don't drink coffee. I just wanted Dorla to leave first. If she saw how hard it was for me to get up after I have been sitting for a while, she may have come around the table to help me and that would have been embarrassing. ←



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