



"If it flies, it dies," says shooting instructor/hunter Elizabeth Fennell (center). "That about sums up my thinking, and those who know me have heard me say it hundreds of times." (Photo/courtesy of Elizabeth Fennell)

Shooting for "Successful Beginnings"

Britney Booth



Listed among a handful of women as a National Sporting Clays Association (NSCA) Level III Shooting Instructor, Elizabeth Fennell is an all-around lover of wing shooting, clay shooting and fostering other women into recreational shooting sports. Elizabeth and her husband Will run Fennell Shooting School, a private facility in South Carolina where everyone, from beginners all the way to top competitors, go for shooting instruction and clinics.

Additionally, in 2006 Elizabeth founded the group Girls Really Into Shooting (GRITS) to introduce other women to a no competition, no score, fun and exciting environment for sporting clays. From a thought born at her kitchen table, Elizabeth has grown the program to a national level, with 500 members and 14 chapters around the United States.

Elizabeth sat down to share her introduction to the sports and her advice to women who are interested in becoming involved.

How did you get started in upland bird hunting and clay shooting?

Years ago, I gave a guy who was an avid wing shooter his first actual shooting lesson with a local instructor, Henry Baskerville. Henry insisted that I give bird hunting a try as well, and so I did. The result of that first lesson has grown more and more apparent over time; it would become a sport I not only learned to love but also one that led to a career in the shotgun sports. How is that for "the rest is history" saying we hear so often?

What about the GRITS group; why did you start it?

I started GRITS after coming home from a shoot in

Scotland in an effort to find a few other women to shoot with. While there, I discovered that shooting shotguns was going to be my new hobby. In other words, doing it more than three to five times a year. I wanted to try to shoot at least once a month while my kids were in school.

I found a few ladies who wanted to participate, and the more I talked about how much fun we were having, the more folks wanted to try. I remember driving to my son's private school after a quail hunt one day and walking into the school still dressed from the morning hunt. Some of the other moms were looking at me like, "Who is this redneck?" I had on my LeChateau boots, tan cords and a blaze orange and tan Filson hunting coat. I obviously hadn't been to the tennis courts. Funny how the times have changed — and for the best! I think sometimes it's hard to step out of the box and try something new, but if you lead, others will follow.

A lot of instructors talk about the competitive side of the sport, but my strong suit is taking people who are a little leery and making them comfortable. I think it's important to set realistic goals. I like to put people at ease and give them a safe place to enter the sport. I can coach anyone, but I take great pleasure in introducing new people to the sport. I like to do things in a creative/fun way that they enjoy and will remember.

GRITS, therefore, became a mission of mine: to help women understand the sport of shotgunning. To help them know it isn't just a man's game, it's not just about hunting, and that they, too, might enjoy it if they are willing to give it a "shot."

What's the most memorable upland bird hunt you've been a part of?

It's hard to narrow it down to one memorable hunt. They all have had their special moments. We have had so many trips that just went miserably wrong, and yet we made the most of them all.

My first trip to Argentina for dove hunting was in 2002, and it started with the airplane having mechanical difficulties at Dulles International Airport before we even left the United States. This bad luck continued right through to the electricity going out while I was in the shower, shampooing my hair, getting ready to go home. Naturally, the well pump shut down, and 45 minutes later, I got to finish my shower. Did I mention that I was the only woman on this trip with 16 men? The other men all said they wished their wives loved to shoot as much as I did.

The next big trip was when I took 14 women to Argentina. While flying into the country, Santiago, Chile, had a massive earthquake. Yes, we were going to Argentina, but we were flying on LAN, which is headquartered in Santiago. In all the chaos (unannounced to us) while changing planes in Peru, our

luggage did not make the connection because all the transfer records went down; our luggage (including guns) was lost in transit. Three days later, our guns arrived, one full day ahead of our clothes. We were slated to travel in Cordoba for two days before hunting with an English interpreter, who failed to show up as well. We were happy to, at least, start shooting — dirty clothes and all. All 14 women made the best of the worst of situations, laughed the entire time, and when our clothes finally got there, we celebrated by drinking champagne and jumping into the pool in our clean clothes.

Every time I take a new group of ladies (often first-timers) to wing shoot, the pleasure for me personally is derived from knowing that I have introduced another group of ladies to the sport and watching as they hoot, holler and celebrate every successful shot. It's quite a sight to see.

I've taken women's groups on trips all over the United States to hunt birds. It's always fun, and the women, even

those who are a bit wary of shooting a "live" bird, come away hooked. I always say, "Wait 'til you pull the first feathers, and I guarantee you'll be more than ready to pull the trigger on the next bird that flies!"



One of only three women in the United States listed by the National Sporting Clays Association (NSCA) as a Level III Shooting Instructor, Elizabeth Fennell enjoys fostering other women into recreational shooting sports. (Photo/courtesy of Elizabeth Fennell)

What's your favorite species of upland bird to hunt?

If it flies, it dies. That about sums up my thinking, and those who know me have heard me say it hundreds of times. I love the beauty of a great quail hunt, and I'm just as enamored with driven pheasants — so much so that I often work as a loader on other groups' driven shoots, just to be part of the experience.

Where would be a good place to start for women who are new to upland hunting or clay shooting?

My advice to anyone, not just women, is to have a well-honed gun mount before expecting consistent success with wing shooting. You'll have luck because of hand-eye coordination, but harder shots are made with practice and patience. It's certainly easy to achieve — it just requires the time to learn. Often, we put too high of expectations on ourselves. Good lessons, the right gun and realistic goals put you on the fast track to getting there. Shooting clay targets is the way to prepare. If you are a new shooter, get comfortable shooting the gun with incoming targets. Then go to slow outgoing targets, learning where to look for the target and when to start the gun. There's a process, and finding a good coach to guide you through it is the best advice I can give.

We want to grow the sport, and that growth comes from successful beginnings!

For more info on the Fennell Shooting School:
www.fennellshootingschool.com.