

Brian J. Luke

Traditional Archery

My Second Second Chance

“Archery is supposed to be fun.” We have heard that statement repeated over and over again; but what are we to do when it just isn’t fun any more?

Since we are all unique, I could not possibly address the infinite number of ways we can somehow manage to disrupt the intended natural flow of a proper shot sequence. When that flow is disrupted in such a way that it seems beyond our control, it isn’t long before the sport we once loved becomes our worst enemy. In my forty plus years behind the bow I have approached archery from an experimental point of view. At least I can say some learning comes from that sort of approach, as opposed to just quitting in which there is none.

Over the years I have learned way more of what not to do about shooting difficulties than actual practical remedies; however I have played with a few things that just may help you or someone you know. This article is about one of these.

First, I am going to give you a little background on my archery experiences to help give you a better understanding of two things: for one, the struggles I have gone through but, more importantly, some insight into the mindset of the person who is trying to give you advice.

First and foremost and one of the things I have learned for sure is that children with a bow in hand need responsible supervision. To skewer a perched squirrel from it’s feeder with an arrow in the park will highly upset the kind little old ladies who come there to feed bread to ducks.

This I know from personal experience.

At around kindergarten age, I got bored with the bow and suction cup arrows I had received for Christmas. Off came the suction cups and into the pencil sharpener my arrows went. I could now impale cardboard boxes, I could even draw things on the boxes to try to hit. My elder brother shared in the fun even though he should have been old enough to know better than to do the thing I am about to tell you. I had this desire to see what an arrow actually looks like from the target’s perspective, so into the box I went while my brother shot arrows at me. Eventually I caught an arrow right above the eye. It laid open my entire eyebrow, but luckily my cheap fiberglass bow was no match for a thick skull. This is definitely one of those experiments not to try.

On and off for about ten years I shot inexpensive fiberglass bows that I bought from Kmart. Eventually I purchased a bow I could hunt deer with and, at the age of sixteen, I shot and killed a six-point buck with a single arrow. Around that same time a cousin of mine stopped at my parents house and noticed me practicing archery in the back yard as I often did. He was interested in that my “Cousin Eddy” (Ed Grant) was a past tournament archer (unbeknownst to me). Cousin Eddy is about 18 year my elder and shot N.A.A. and P.A.A. target tournament throughout the 60s and early 70s. Cousin Eddy could keep up with and sometimes beat a few of

the best archers on the circuit.

With good intensions cousin Eddy began to instruct me about proper shooting technique. Up until then I would just look at your target, pull 'er back, and let 'er fly. The first thing Eddy had to do is correct my bow arm. It seems from years of shooting and watching the arrows fly my bow arm would move out of the way after each shot for a better view. This reaction to the shot somewhere became a reaction on the shot. I developed a trained reflex where my bow arm would lose tension on or just before the shot. Week after week, arrow after arrow Eddy had me shoot at a blank bale, ten feet away looking at nothing but my bow arm. It finally looked like I had this bad habit licked and I wanted to give target archery a try.

I was then introduced to a sight, stabilizer, and finger sling. I set aside my 50 lb Herter's recurve hunting bow and purchased a used Bear Takedown target bow of around 35 lbs draw. Eddy's stories about target archery sounded intriguing. I joined a JOAD class at a local archery range. I kept at it until I got to the point where

“I tried multiple form changes and each time, each change worked, but for just a few weeks or so.

It was so bad I even collapsed on the shot while I was shooting with my eyes shut for form feeling practice.”

I expected to hear the sound of arrows clanking together by the second or third shot at twenty yards. This was a time, a very brief time, when archery seemed incredibly easy. This was so much fun I just wanted to shoot more and get even better, but it seemed I was just getting worse with practice. Consoling Cousin Eddy was quick to



The under the chin anchor I used for the palm out style using the bow sight; little finger tucked under the jawbone, back of hand flat and snugly against neck, and the string bisecting the nose.

point out my original bad habit was plaguing me again. It was not the bad collapse on the shot like it was when Eddy first saw me; it was a mere twitch of the bow shoulder at the instant of the shot. It was enough to spoil the whole shot and the harder I worked at it the worse it got. I blamed it on the sight, lost interest in target archery and just went back to shooting instinctively with my hunting bow. I remained that way for the next fifteen years until

1992.

It was at that time I discovered Robert Elmer's book "Archery" in our local library. I became intrigued with the all wood longbow and arrows that you could build yourself. Reading Elmer's book several times over got me interested in shooting traditional target rounds. With his book and the records the NAA kept, I could shoot an American Round in my back yard and compare my scores against the scores of those archers of old.

It was great fun and one afternoon I was talking with Ann Hoyt while ordering supplies from Sky Archery and she informed me that a man named Norm Graham was shooting the longbow also and I should hook up with him. Norm informed me of a shoot in Nashville, Indiana called the Brown County Open and there would be a class for the traditional longbow. I showed up that very year.

I was hooked; I was shooting target archery again, but this time with a wooden longbow, wood arrows, and no sight on the bow. I naturally found myself wanting to get better and worked very hard to improve. I did not shoot instinctively as I did for hunting, but rather I used the traditional target method of the point of aim for my sight. I would simply align my fully drawn arrow point on a reference mark on the ground that would give me the proper trajectory to hit the target.

It did not take me long to realize the bad habit from my past had never really left. My bow shoulder would lose tension just before the shot, making consistent shooting nearly impossible.

Continued on the Next Page

By now I was really into making my own wood longbows and arrows, I loved it; but what fun is it to make this stuff and not be able to shoot worth a darn. I was going to beat this thing once and for all.

I went back to the blank bale training. I shot arrow after arrow watching nothing but my bow arm. When I resumed normal shooting it was not long before the twitch was back. I tried multiple form changes and each time, each change worked, but for just a few weeks or so. It was so bad I even collapsed on the shot while I was shooting with my eyes shut for form feeling practice.

I was desperate. I got out my very best wooden footed shafts that I had spent countless hours in making. They had Purple Heart footings, horn nocks, and brass piles. They were just beautiful. I set my target in my basement against the cement block wall. A bow arm collapse could cause a shot off the target and sure disaster for any wooden shaft. I really put the pressure on because I really wanted to beat this thing. I figured I should just face my fears head on and charge ahead. Well that advice may be helpful for some things in life, but it is a really bad idea for archery. I ended up destroying all but one of those footed shafts.

It was at that moment I decided to try some advice my cousin told me about and switch from right-handed shooting to shooting left-handed. Finally, I had my second chance. I could develop muscle memory shooting left-handed and this time I had an idea of what made up a good shot. It was like starting all over, I could not even



My side of the face anchor using the palm out method. I can now shoot with both eyes open, little finger snugly under cheek bone and string drawn into the bone beneath the eye brow. It looks like I crept a little posing for the photo.

nock an arrow at first, but in time I learned to shoot that way and my scores started to climb, higher than I was able to shoot the traditional longbow right handed. I have shot that way for the last eight or nine years now and continue to enjoy the sport.

You are probably thinking right now “I read all of the above just to hear something I already knew? Switching hands is something I just cannot do! I cannot do anything with my opposite hand!”

Calm down . . . I could not do anything with my other hand either, but when I got to the point where it became impossible to do the thing I loved with the one hand, it was worth the effort to learn how to do it with the other. It was time consuming and you will have trouble just keeping an arrow on the rest at first, just like it was the first time you picked up a bow. But in time you can and will be able to do it if you really want to.

If you will recall, I stated that switching to left-hand shooting gave me a second chance, but the reason for this writing is not just about my second chance, but rather my *second* second chance. Let me explain.

In one of my many conversations with Cousin Eddy he told me how he wanted to shoot with his drawing hand palm out instead of the normal palm in. He felt it would produce a cleaner release with less chance of a flip out. He explained the only problem was that it was very hard to keep the arrow from falling off the rest. The more I thought about this the more I became interested in trying it. He was right, it was very hard if not nearly impossible to keep the arrow on the rest shooting this way, but I concluded to solve that problem you would have to shoot off of the other side of the bow. In other words you would shoot a left-handed bow right-handed or a right-handed bow left-handed if you wanted to draw it palm out. That way the torque on the string would be in a direction that would keep the arrow on the rest and against the arrow plate or plunger.

I tried this at first with my longbow. The bow has no rest or arrow shelf, you shoot the arrow while it is resting on your knuckle, however if you shoot “palm out” the arrow is on the other side of the bow and must therefore rest on your thumb.

The results were disastrous! If I shot palm out left-handed with the arrow on the left side of the bow, the arrows flew dramatically left even though I had the entire shaft in line with the intended target. I just did not understand, so I managed to draw an arrow back palm out shooting left-handed on the right side of the bow, as



My under the chin anchor I used for the palm out style using a bow sight; little finger tucked under the jawbone, back of hand flat and snugly against neck, and the string bisecting the nose. It is not necessary for me to wink the non aiming eye, I am just in such a habit of doing it now because it was necessary for me to close my dominate eye shooting left-handed.

a normal left hand shooter would do. It was hard to do and keep the arrow on the rest (my knuckle), but I could eventually do it. The results were equally disastrous, this time with my arrows shooting dramatically to the right.

The release felt crisp and incredibly fast, but why did the arrows act as they did? My only potential cause for the dilemma was the fact the longbow is so far out of center shot. To test my theory, I got out a lightweight right-handed recurve. It was a newer, introductory level Win and Win bow I picked up on eBay. Even though I am a left-handed shooter now, I bought the bow to use as a teaching tool for any right-handed person who may be interested in learning how to shoot. I practiced drawing the arrow several times and tried to establish a comfortable “under the chin” anchor. Shooting this right-hand bow left-handed, palm out was pleasant surprise! The arrows flew straight in line as I had aimed them. Maybe I was right about the “palm out style” requiring a bow that is nearly center shot. In that first afternoon I was shooting some groups that were really not bad at all. From such a dramatic form change, I had not expected to group at all.

I was so excited I could not help but call Cousin Eddy. He sounded a little confused as to what I was trying to do and a little concerned, too. He was worried about all the work I went through teaching myself the shoot left-handed might be lost if I practiced something so dramatically different. He suggested that I might want to just play around with this palm out shooting right-handed. Since my right hand shooting was a disaster any-

way, I would not be risking ruining my hard won left-handed form.

This seemed reasonable and I had several left-handed recurve bows I could use to shoot right-handed, palm out. Just so I am not confusing you, I was shooting a left handed bow holding it in my left hand and drawing it with my right hand, palm out (see photos). I practiced drawing the bow until I could do so without a great amount of difficulty.

Some things felt very awkward, and some things felt quite natural. At first the left handed grip on the bow felt strange drawing it right handed, but after a while I noticed that it felt very good. The ridge on the one side of the grip lay nicely along my lifeline. The next thing I noticed is that I needed a left-handed finger tab to shoot right-handed, palm out. If you try using a right hand tab shooting right-handed, palm out there would be two fingers above the arrow and one below. I tried this at first but the arrow kept lifting off of the rest. I was drawing to an “under the chin” anchor and was confused as to what to do with my pinky (little finger). I could either keep it with my other fingers and let my pinky rest under my jaw bone, or I could try to relax it and let it ride over my

Continued on the Next Page

<http://www.trueflightfeathers.com>
TRUEFLIGHT FEATHERS
 Less Weight -- More Guidance!

Fletching	Weight
2 inch Plastic	15 grains
4 inch Feathers	7 grains

TRUEFLIGHT
 MANUFACTURING COMPANY, INC.
 P.O. Box 1000
 MANITOWISH WATERS, WI 54545
 (715) 543-8451 • CALL DAY OR NIGHT
 email@trueflightfeathers.com
 World Leader in Precision Feathers for Over 50 Years

“The thing that really amazed me is that I did not need to change my sight marks at all when I began shooting that left-handed bow right-handed, palm out. Once I was able to shoot a group the arrows grouped where I was aiming just as they did shooting that same bow left handed!”

jaw bone along my face. I settled on keeping it with my other fingers, so now there are two fingers under the arrow and two fingers above the arrow. The pinky is just barely resting on the string doing little or no actual pulling. After a little practice I felt very comfortable and I found my comfort by raising my drawing elbow slightly, allowing my drawing hand to lay flat, tightly up against my neck and snugly under my jaw bone. You can really get under the chin this way because the thumb is out of the way. I checked my alignment in the mirror and feel it was actually easier to get in line with the arrow on the same side of the bow as the drawing hand.

The left hand bow I was using had a sight on it because I had just started (once again) to shoot target style with the recurve. I had been shooting nothing but the longbow 13 years and this change of styles was fun.

My next decision regarded string alignment. If I were shooting a normal right-handed bow right-handed, I would align my string just to the right of my sight aperture because I do not use a peep and I do not like looking through the blur of the string. On a normal right hand bow the string would then be aligned near or on the edge of the sight window.

Shooting a left-handed bow right-handed, palm out with the string on the right side of the sight aperture, the string will be away from the sight window. Since the position of the sight window is now different, I kept my string aligned just as I would normally shoot a right-handed bow with the string on the right edge of my sight aperture.

I had already sighted in the bow for me shooting it left-handed (normally). The thing that really amazed me is that I did not need to change my sight marks at all

when I began shooting that left-handed bow right-handed, palm out. Once I was able to shoot a group the arrows grouped where I was aiming just as they did shooting that same bow left handed!

The bottom line here is that if you experience seemingly insurmountable difficulties in the sport you love, don't hesitate to try something that seems strange. I will be writing more about my experiments shooting "palm out."



Brian Luke is a husband and a father of three young adults. He has worked as a tool and die maker since 1979 and has played with the bow and arrow nearly all his life. Brian has developed a deep respect and admiration for the accomplishments of the early target archers of the NAA. This admiration began in 1992 as a result of reading Robert Elmer's book "Archery" (circa 1926). From that time on Brian's quest has been to experience all that he had read about in Elmer's book from the making of his own wooden bows, arrows, and linen strings to competing in the traditional rounds of the NAA. Since then Brian has won six out of the seven Indoor Nationals and five out of the eight Outdoor Nationals he has attended, all shooting in the Traditional Longbow division of the NAA.