

CHICKS BREAKIN' CLAYS!

Like many females, when I grew up, daddies didn't teach their daughters how to shoot guns. Daddy took my brother hunting occasionally — some doves, but mostly jackrabbits on Grandmother's farm in West Texas — while I got to play with my Barbie dolls in the back of our '67 Chevrolet Impala station wagon and watch from the window. My father shot skeet when he was in the Air Force, but I didn't know anything about that until an aunt mentioned it 20 years after he died. So 33 years ago was my first encounter with shooting a shotgun. Thankfully, I came back many years later to try it again after receiving instruction on its use.

On a crisp fall day, my soon-to-be husband, Brent, and I were at his grandparents' farm. All of his family was there — parents, brothers, cousins, aunts, uncles — and the men decided to go dove hunting. I was invited to tag along. I'd never held a shotgun, much less pulled the trigger on one, and now I had a loaded 12-gauge Winchester 1400 MK II in my hands as we walked through the pasture to the trees where we'd surely see plenty of doves. Then we sat and waited for what seemed an eternity, Brent to my left and his two brothers to my right. Finally, a couple of doves started flying our way. The adrenaline started pumping. I raised my gun and started tracking a dove flying from right to left, finally pulling the trigger somewhere above Brent's head. Realizing what I'd done and what the result could have been, I shakily handed the gun to Brent, thanking the good Lord for keeping me from ending my fiancé's life before we even started the marriage. I didn't want any part of shooting after that near-disaster.

Fast-forward 22 years to 2007. Brent and I moved near the tiny town of Arcadia, Oklahoma, about 4 miles from the Oklahoma City Gun Club. One of Brent's co-workers told him about a women's instructional shooting clinic at the club she thought I might be interested in, so I signed up. The Women On Target event, which OKCGC hosts annually on the second Saturday of September, teaches women and girls how to safely handle a variety of firearms in a safe environment. It is the biggest WOT event in the nation, with 400

to 600 women and girls attending each year. I first shot .22 rifles, then an AR-15, and next a variety of pistols, but the final range of the day proved to be my favorite — shotgun! I couldn't wait to get home and tell Brent we were going to join that club and learn how to shoot skeet!

We jumped in with both feet, taking skeet lessons and shooting in the spring skeet league. The next year we were helping with the monthly beginning skeet class, volunteering for the annual WOT, and we soon became NRA shotgun instructors. As

who've never handled a shotgun to take the NRA FIRST Steps Shotgun class with Brent and me. FIRST stands for Firearms Instruction Responsibility and Safety Training. After completing the three-hour course, the ladies feel more confident in handling a shotgun safely, and I'm also better assured no one will have an accident with their gun.

During its short time in existence, Chicks Breakin' Clays has grown significantly, and I've added more sessions to accommodate those wanting to learn. Part of this growth



we continued to practice and improve our shooting, we started doing registered shoots in 2010. My love of working with beginning shooters led me to become an NSSA Level 1 instructor in 2014 — and, of course, Brent joined me in this venture. Also during this time, I was asked to take over the chairmanship of OKCGC's Shotgun Division, the club's busiest division, which I did with Brent's help.

In the summer of 2017, as I worked with one of the ladies in our club on her skeet shooting, the thought occurred to me that we needed a specific time each week for any female to come and learn to shoot in a safe, female-only environment, so I started a weekly women's instructional shooting group. We work repetitiously on each station (shooting incomers, out-goers, and doubles on stations 1, 2, 6 and 7) rather than jumping in and shooting a round of skeet. This group had to have a name, so "Chicks Breakin' Clays!" was hatched. It originally started as a Tuesday morning group with eight retired and non-working chicks ranging in age from 18 to 65, and I quickly added an evening group so the working chicks could also participate. We require students

can be seen in the spring skeet league at the OKCGC. This popular annual event has nearly 150 shooters split over three nights of shooting. When I started participating in spring league in 2008, I was one of just three ladies shooting. The 2018 spring league included 18 female shooters, some of whom had only been introduced to the game two weeks prior. As more and more women and girls are becoming interested in learning the game of skeet, we also need more females to become instructors, so my next goal is to recruit some of my chicks to get certified so the CBC will continue to grow.

I am so thankful I came back and tried shooting a shotgun again and that I learned the game of skeet. Brent and I have met the best people we know through this sport and have gained many lasting friendships as a result. Even though I never got to shoot skeet with my dad, I have to think he's smiling down on me from the big skeet field in the sky, where the weather is always perfect for shooting, there are no ammo or gun malfunctions, and everyone breaks 100 straight every time — and he's saying, "Job well done, Sis!"

— Contributed by Paula J. Tate