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By Maria Veres

Growing up in the 1970s, Suzi Rouse stayed home while her father and brothers went hunting. "No one thought about including me. I never thought about asking," she says. "Girls just didn't hunt."

Today Suzi is an enthusiastic bird hunter, the president of OKC Gun Club, and a mentor to many hunters and shooters. Her love of bird hunting has led her into a new calling, training service dogs for veterans.

A Natural Leader

Suzi's involvement with OKC Gun Club began through her husband, who had served on the U.S. Marine Corps shooting team. When he joined the organization, so did she. Then a club event called Cowboy Action Shooting sparked her interest, and she decided to give it a try.

The all-male group of shooters at the event was unsure about her at first. "My second time, I brought chocolate chip cookies," she recalls. "My popularity skyrocketed!" Soon the men encouraged their wives and sisters to try Cowboy Action Shooting, too.

It wasn't long before OKC Gun Club decided they needed more outreach toward women. "I was the mullet who stepped up to coordinate it," says Suzi. From there, she became a board member, then club president.

OKC Gun Club sponsors activities in almost every discipline of shooting. Suzi doesn't personally oversee everything, but you can often find her at the club headquarters near Arcadia, supporting her fellow members.

Women on Target

One of Suzi's favorite club events is the annual Women on Target Fun Shoot. Designed especially for women who aren't very familiar with guns, the event gives participants a chance to handle and shoot a variety of firearms in a safe space. Suzi Rouse

Expert volunteers offer instruction as the students rotate through four different ranges.

"Before the first event, the guys told me, 'Honey, you'll be lucky if you get ten women,'" says Suzi. "We had fifty-seven!" Now the event, always held the Saturday after Labor Day, attracts up to four hundred people.

"The women are nervous at first," says Suzi, "but by the end of the day, I love seeing how empowered they feel."

Honoring America's Warriors

Suzi's enthusiasm for shooting eventually led her into hunting. When her husband surprised her with a young bird dog, she wasn't sure she wanted it. But she soon fell in love with the puppy and the sport of bird hunting.

Suzi's husband lost a three-year battle with melanoma in 2019. Needing a new focus, she said yes when a friend asked her to train service dogs for veterans through a nonprofit organization: Honoring America's Warriors. "My friend told me if I could train bird dogs, I could do this," she says.

The dogs, which are owned by Honoring America's Warriors, live with the vets from the time they're just three months old. Veterans bring their dogs for ongoing training several times a week. Suzi's job is to coordinate the training and assist both dogs and veterans in becoming a great working team.

Suzi has come a long way from the little girl who watched the guys go hunting without her. But despite all her accomplishments, what she values most is the lives she has touched. "I need to feel like I'm giving something back," she says. Whether she's training a service dog team or encouraging the next generation of sport shooters, she is fulfilling that mission.

To learn more, go to www.okcgunclub.org