

ARCHERY that's something else

The shoot was very busy and a bottleneck had occurred at number 13, Fred laid down his bow carefully, after all it was one of his prized possessions, in fact when he thought about it, as he often did, it was his only prize possession.

There would be others, who if asked the same question, would unhesitatingly name as their nearest and dearest, a person, often a wife or a husband, a child or an especially valued friend, not so Fred.

Fred had been through the phase of partners, until she left him one day, aptly whilst he was out in the woods with his bow, he returned to an empty house, literally...the neighbours recounted the moving van as having blocked the cul de sac for over an hour.

Strangely he was not surprised, though there hadn't been any warnings, or if there were, Fred had totally missed the signals..... but Archery that was different, Fred listened to his bow, the sound it made when the string was released, the swish of the arrow against the rest and the 'thunk' as it hit the boss.....he was alert to those signals and acted upon them. Inspecting his equipment every day, even when he wasn't going shooting, measuring the straightness of the arrows, reattaching flights if he found one even a fraction out of alignment, adjusting and micro adjusting.....well anything that could be adjustedand the many happy hours on the computer in archery websites and in reading archery catalogues.

If pressed Fred might, just might, have admitted that he enjoyed owning the equipment as much as shooting. Yes the light and shade of the trees, the companionship of colleagues, the sense of achievement when he made a kill, these were nice but transient, and fleeting.

For Fred Archery was an end in itself, he and his bow,..... he glanced down at the bow where he had left it carefully leaning against a tree trunk. One he had checked for any potentially damaging splinters or green mould likely to be transferred to its shining surface, before placing the thing that was in his heart, in position.

He stood a few paces away, near enough to watch 'her', surely a bow was feminine in character despite its power, it had grace and a delicate nature, vulnerable,..... placed near enough to ensure no one else could compromise her, for she was his.

It was a clear day no rain, Fred didn't like rain, his bow didn't like getting wet or at least Fred didn't like the thought of her getting wet. He worried like others would worry over a child who had gone out without a coat. It wasn't too hot either; Fred did have concerns that too much heat was also undesirable, as indeed it was when cold. Steel and aluminium, wood and laminates were not designed to combat extremes of weather, Fred didn't mind changing his clothing but the bow, well, bows didn't wear coats or hats or gloves.....

Still keeping an eye on the bow, nestled by the oak, Fred turned one eye to his quiver and thoughtfully removed his arrows, one by one, holding them up to the light, turning them slowly in his hand. Checking the identification labels, the fletchings, the nocks and the points, balancing the slim projectiles on his hand and taking pleasure in the levelness of them, the 180 degree-ness. Arrows were like his children, the ones he never had, and Fred often had a feeling when he notched an arrow, a secret, quite, unspoken worry, that when released it might never come back, like a grown child finding its own direction in life.

Fred always was first to the boss to check his arrows and welcome them home. On the occasions when he missed, it was an obsession to search and search until the lost arrow was found. His regular companions put this down to meanness, "*Fred can't bear to have to pay out for new arrows,*" they used to joke. The truth was different Fred often bought new arrows even when he had plenty, he liked to discuss the length and circumference, the options for points

and vanes with the shop before selecting and leaving with a new set of 6. No it was a much more personal loss if an arrow was unrecovered, and Fred would go quiet and look inside himself, what had he done, why had he been so careless, he must have been gripping wrong, he must have aimed too high..... the internal recriminations were only silenced when he or one of his companions shouted with glee "*Here it is*" as the lost arrow was retrieved from the undergrowth. Even then Fred would carefully place the lost and now found arrow into his quiver, it would not be shot again that day, not until at home, Fred had carefully examined, cleaned and caressed the wayward child, before allowing it back into the quiver.

"*Fred...Fred*", the voice broke through his self contained state, "*We're on, come on you're up first*". Fred smiled and lifted the bow carefully, feeling the sensation that now moved from sight to touch, the coolness of the grip, the tension of the string....he selected an arrow ready, carefully checking it as he stepped towards the peg, he aligned himself, he gave his mind overall to one thing, he aimed, he released, he breathed, he heard the sound of impact and was content.....yes archery, archery was better than anything, archery that was something else.

Malcolm R Pattman