

He remembered it well, it had been 13th September 2008 at 10:13 am, a date and time that had come to have great significance, a quirk of fate that changed his world, a situation he could not have foreseen, never mind control.

It was on shot number 13, the more superstitious minded might have already noted the confluence of three 'thirteens', he did not, until someone kindly pointed it out sometime later. But we get ahead of ourselves, let's start the story again and see what facts we can deduce and maybe what lessons we can learn.

Steve was a quiet man, no one hated him, no one particularly even disliked him, but then neither did many count him a friend or a confidante. He had come to archery later in life and found it pleasant and interesting, a distraction from his working and home life, though neither of them sparkled. He regularly went round the course with a variety of members and generally shot moderately but not spectacularly, his form was erratic and on a good day he could score kills, on a poor day, was forced into taking a close interest into trees and undergrowth to retrieve lost arrows.

One day however things changed, on the advice of a fellow archer, whom had reputedly read it in a book, he selected his 'best arrows'. A painstaking process of shooting and noting which arrows were most consistent and using these to the exclusion of the others. He didn't mind the time spent on this shortlisting and then final selection process but worried rather about the £50 worth of arrows which were deemed not best and were to be consigned to a cupboard if the theory was to be applied. He toyed with the idea of asking for a refund on these from the archery shop but thought that he was unlikely to get a warm reception, nevertheless the waste of money prayed on his mind for a while. It wasn't that he couldn't afford it, not then anyway, but his upbringing and own demeanour trended to thriftiness and value for money.

This however receded when he started shooting solely with the best arrows the 'chosen shafts' as he mentally thought of them. They were carefully marked and equally carefully attended to after shooting. One in particular, which he had marked coincidentally as "Steve One", became the arrow he always started with and as befitted such an arrow it was often the only one he needed to use, as the shots landed straight and true, time after time after time.

Steve's reputation was established in the club and buoyed up by this success and approbation he entered several open shoots, where the chosen arrow did not let him down, even on strange grounds and newly laid out courses with different targets, he was scoring well and consistently.

All was well until that fateful day in September, it wasn't a competition and he was just wandering around his home course with a couple of new members, one of whom was quite promising, the other less so, the second reminded Steve of himself prior to finding his best arrow, erratic. Steve had taken to offering to escort new and potential members around the course, a lesser man would have done this to show off, but Steve's motives were not ostentatious, he genuinely wanted to help new archers and delighted in passing on the advice regarding chosen arrows.

But then disaster struck, at the 13th, for reasons unexplainable then and now, the chosen arrow, the great 'Steve One' flew from the bow but not straight and true but left and down. It needs to be explained that Steve One was a carbon arrow, light and true, not liable to bending like aluminium, nor shattering like wood, but at something approaching 300 feet per second, its energy had to go somewhere when it hit the rock. The scientific explanation involves Newton's Third Law and the theory of the conservation of energy. The arrow hit the rock square on, the rock was ancient, massive and had been there for all of recorded time, it wasn't going anywhere, the steel pile of the arrow was cast and hardened in the furnaces of man, the unbreakable hit the unmoveable and science dictated that the pile was forced down the path of least resistance, that is into the hollow carbon shaft. The shaft did not snap, but the force split the fibres into a regular spreading pattern and the pile ended up three inches down the

shaft.....Steve One was no more, fit only for salvaging any parts still intact and perhaps relegated to a useful but expensive stake for a plant.

The round continued, the sympathetic voices of his companions lost as Steve was overtaken by an overwhelming sense of doom. A feeling made only more so by the fact that 'Steve Two' and 'Steve Three' did not perform, they did not suffer the same fate but they did not score better than a wound for the rest of the course.

Steve forced a watery smile as he thanked his companions and bade them farewell. He was last seen driving off slowly down the road.

In the next six months no one else from the Club ever saw Steve again, letters, emails and telephone calls were unanswered, he had for all intents disappeared from the face of archery. Members occasionally talked about Steve and his chosen arrow, in fact he probably was more of a topic of conversation when absent than when active.

It was the next March when the Club Secretary happened to notice an article in the newspaper, she was skimming a paper she did not usually take, whilst waiting in the Dentist. The report led on the fact that a man had been shot dead by armed police called to a siege at an archery shop. It explained that the man, and the picture clearly showed it to be Steve, had held the staff and customers at bow point after the assistant had tried to stop Steve firing every arrow in the shop towards the end wall, mumbling something about 'Come on Steve, you're here somewhere'

The story concluded that Steve had been acting whilst the balance of his mind was disturbed, it transpired that in a few months period, he had been made redundant, his wife had left him and moved to Canada with his children, he had crashed his car, been mugged and then hospitalised for three weeks. Up to the time of the incident he had taken to drink, had been cautioned by the police several times for accosting strangers in the park asking them if they had seen 'Steve One' The report concluded that the Independent Police Complaints Authority had investigated the use of lethal force but had ruled Steve having clearly suffered major trauma in his life which had resulted in him taking the steps he had, there had been no sensible information gained by the negotiator, and no one could explain why he had been in the Archery shop.

The Secretary tore out the article ready to be passed onto the Newsletter Editor for an obituary for Steve in the next edition and maybe a word of advice on choosing best arrows but a word of caution in placing over reliance on them. Strange business this Archery, she mused as the Dentist called her through.