

They make loud noises: they break things. They love a four-letter word, as in, “PULL!” And then things fly and guns go boom. They holler and shout and dance the woo-woo jig when they blow clays to bits. They are GRITS—Girls Really In To Shooting, the shootinest group of women you’ll ever hope to meet. They share a passion for shotgun sports and have more fun together than anybody has a right to.

GRITS members come from a diverse background. The 40-plus members include doctors, soccer moms, lawyers, teachers, artists and retired professionals. They range in age from their late 30s to early 70s. Many are crack shots, but surprisingly, most have been shooting for less than three years. The GRITS’ camaraderie and support create a psychologically safe environment where they develop their shooting skills at a much faster rate than would be possible in a more intimidating old-boy’s club setting.

Elizabeth Lanier, owner of Lanier Shooting Sports, came up with the idea for GRITS after she began to shoot with her husband, Owen. She quickly became hooked on “Ready...Pull!” but found she was one of the few women having fun with a gun. At a pheasant shoot Lanier and another shooter, Lydia Strickland, agreed that more women should share the fun. They exchanged phone numbers written on the tops of empty shotgun-shell boxes. They spread the word, and four years ago their goal of sharing the gun fun turned into GRITS.

Currently, the GRITS get together to shoot clays on the third Monday morning of the month. They may shoot at Lanier’s range in Goochland County, Virginia or at other sporting clays venues within easy driving distance. Occasionally, they will shoot in the late afternoon to make it easier for GRITS with hectic schedules to attend. Twice a year they take an overnight shooting trip to such events as the Southern Side-by-Side, or to The Homestead and its well-known

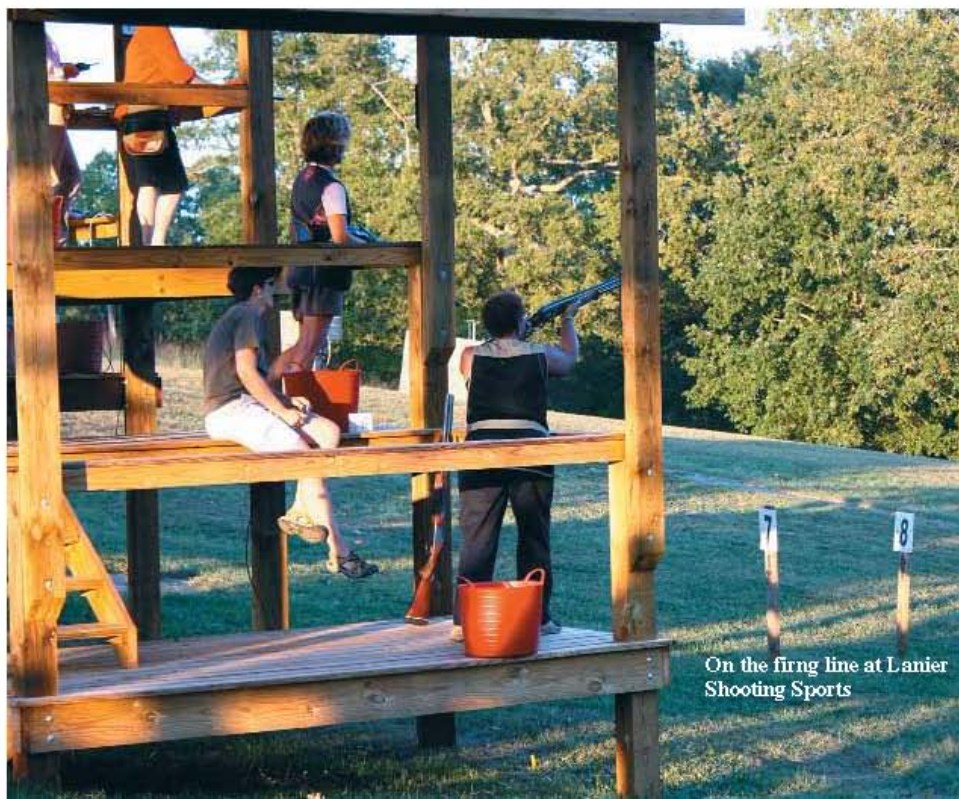


Elizabeth Lanier coaching BJ Korol

# GRITS

Not Your Average Women’s Club

by  
John Shtogren



On the firing line at Lanier Shooting Sports



**GRITS at the Southern Side-by-Side in Sanford, NC (L to R) Jane Brown, Carol Long, Glenda Moore, Eileen Judah, Debbie Clay, Hiede Kaser, Sandy Nunnally, Elizabeth Lanier and Hay Hardy**

Shooting Club. In the spring The Homestead will host the GRITS' first-of-its-kind, Shotguns & She-nanagins, a weekend for women and the shotgun sports.

Lanier herself is a perfect example of what is possible for women and shotgun shooting. Eight years ago she didn't own a shotgun. But three years ago she earned her certification as Level 1 National Sporting Clays Association shooting instructor and this year her Level 2, making her one of the few women in the country at that certification level. And forget the old saw about "those that can't do, teach." She recently won High Overall Lady at the spring and fall Southern Side-by-Side events and 20-Bore High Lady at the Vintagers' World Side-by-Side at Pintail

Point in Maryland. How good is she? David Judah, head of The Homestead Shooting Club, thinks, "She could easily be one of the best female shooters in the country." Lanier proves that women can rise quickly in the shotgun shooting sports in a relatively short period of time.

While Lanier loves "Ready ... Pull!" and busting clay targets herself, she enjoys teaching others even more, especially other women. "I love to see other women get involved in the sport," Lanier says. And when she says it, you can hear the passion. Her ability to create a positive learning environment on the shooting range starts with her understanding of women's unique needs. "Women need to understand what is happening to feel comfortable." She

has an extraordinary ability to quickly diagnose a shooter's strengths and weaknesses but doesn't lecture about what to do next. She uses a soft Socratic method, asking her students questions about what happened when they hit or miss, so they come up with their own answers and gain a sense of personal control. As she works with her students, Lanier conveys a contagious "Yes, you can do it!" attitude that encourages risk taking. As one of her GRITS students put it, "Liz gives you a gentle push to try something you've never done before, to overcome feeling insecure or intimidated." Lanier's combination of passion, understanding and encouragement has helped many GRITS come a long way in a short time.

#### **True GRITS—Vets and Newbies**

Sandy Nunnally is a charter member of the GRITS, having joined the group when it started three years ago. It was definitely not something her longtime friends would have predicted for this very girly-girl. Nunnally has been a lifelong member of a very different GRITS group—"Girls Raised in the South." Says Nunnally, "I was raised not go near lawn mowers, not drive on back roads, and never drink out of cans, let alone play with guns." Her college-age son gave her a Christmas-gift shooting lesson with Lanier, which was definitely not on her wish list. But having been raised right, she had to accept. When she showed up for her first lesson at Lanier's range, she was wearing high heels. "When I started breaking targets, I was sure Liz was somehow pushing a button to make it happen."

That was three years ago. This year she won the Holland & Holland 12 Gauge Preliminary High Lady trophy at the Southern Side-by-Side. She now operates the complex set of trap machines at Lanier Shooting Sports. She has come a long way from a few years ago when she was leery of lawnmowers and didn't know a barrel from a buttstock. But she hasn't forsaken her

**At Lanier Shooting Sports (L to R)**

**Kay Barquin, Anita Vere-Nicoll, Elizabeth Lanier, Derenda Reynolds and Shirley Walker**





A very successful first-ever upland hunt for shooters (L to R) Debbie Clay, Toni Brown, Tina Nyczevir with coach Elizabeth Lanier at Primland Resort



Sandy takes one for the GRITS (L to R) Elizabeth Lanier, Sandy Nunnally and Mimi Wingfield.

girly-girl heritage: She works closely with Lanier on The Whole She-bang, a shotgun-themed line of earrings, necklaces, bracelets and other items appealing to GRITS and women who love shotgun sports. For Nunnally, the shotgun sports and the GRITS experience are liberating: "It helps you be the person you want to be, not the one you were told to be."

Mimi Wingfield started shooting soon after Nunnally. She hadn't shot before, although she certainly had the opportunity. Her husband is a competitive shotgunner and outfitter of African Safaris. "It just

never occurred to me to give shooting a try until I saw how excited Liz was about it." Wingfield credits Lanier for starting her off right in what could have been a very short and disheartening experience. "Liz immediately saw that I was left-eye dominant even though I was right-handed. So she had me shoot left-handed from the start. I'd have missed everything right-handed and quit—who needs another thing you're not good at?"

Wingfield is happy she didn't quit. Last fall she won the 28 Bore Ladies Championship at the Vintagers' World Championship Side-by-Side. Soon she will

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Lanier (R) coaching Angela Case on a wing-shooting trip in Argentina

be moving up to 12-gauge because, "I want to put more lead in the air so I don't just crack them, I blow them up!"

Brenda Jernigan is one of the newest GRITS. She has been shooting with Lanier for six months. Like many women, she had no real shotgun experience, other than in her early teens when her country-doctor father took her squirrel hunting. But she was hooked at her first lesson: She'd finally found a sport she could be good at – really good. "No one ever said I was overly coordinated. I can't hit a ball – tennis, golf or whatever, and I only swim in shallow water. But Liz showed me I can do this!"

Like other newcomers, Jernigan's shooting improved quickly. "I've never been better than a 3-out-of-10 in any sport, but I'm already shooting at the 8-level!" And like others, she describes a new-found sense of empowerment: "I'm out on the line all alone, and when I say 'Ready... Pull!' and then blow it out of the sky—it's perfect! I did it, just me! I love to do the woo-woo dance!" To picture the GRITS' woo-woo dance celebration, imagine Belushi and the Blues Brothers singing, "Bend over, let me see ya shake a tailfeather."

Here is how Lanier sees the GRITS and opportunities for other women to join in the fun: "So many people who shoot sporting clays are concerned about their scores as a mark of how well they shot. So often we are consumed with worry about poor performance that we forget the recreational side of this great shooting sport.

"The GRITS rarely take out their score cards at the end of the day. We are there to shoot, and shoot as well as we can, but at the end of the day it is the hits we want to remember, not looking at the card and counting all the misses. The hits and the laughter, all derived from a great time shooting with friends—that's what we talk about.

"I think that a lot of women would really like to give shooting a try, but because it is stepping out of the norm of activities for the average woman, they are not sure how to get started. Shotguns & She-nanagins will be all about fostering a love of the shotgun sports. And always keeping the shooting safe, but shooting for the pure enjoyment of it. This is our goal with the GRITS and with Shotguns & She-nanagins as well."

For more information on Lanier Shooting Sports, The GRITS and the May 12-14 Shotguns & She-nanagins at The Homestead, see [WWW.Laniershootingsports.com](http://WWW.Laniershootingsports.com).

John Shtogren is the senior editor of *Virginia Sportsman*. He is an outdoorsman, farmer and international management consultant whose travels often take him to the far edges and borderlands. He welcomes comments at [jashtogren@yahoo.com](mailto:jashtogren@yahoo.com).