

Robin Hood Misses the Mark

The other day I was in the local hardware store and noticed in a locked display case several Daisy air rifles for sale. It brought back memories of 60 years ago when as a boy of ten I received my first air rifle. In those days young boys would dream of owning a Daisy. The ability to walk down the dusty streets of Laredo ready to defend my family against the Dalton Gang or desperados from out of town motivated all sorts of dreams.

My parents decided I was responsible enough to own a gun when I entered the fourth grade in St. Louis. However, since we lived in the city there was little chance of finding any sizeable game and there were even fewer gunslingers available to round up. So, I scouted the yard for intruders. One Saturday morning I detected motion in the hedge near the front of the house. The bushes rustled, I aimed, the culprit appeared, and I fired.

Whatever I had shot squawked once and fell over flat on its side about twenty feet away. I ran to inspect my quarry and found a large red robin dead on the ground with a BB piercing its breast. My world immediately centered on the bird. What had I done? The robin couldn't be dead could it? But, sure enough, it didn't move, and it soon became evident that I was a murderer. I pushed the dead bird under the bushes, so no one would see what I had done and ran into the house. I put my gun away and thought about my actions for weeks and didn't use the gun again for some time.

But, on another Saturday when memory of the event had faded and the glamour of using my gun re-emerged, I searched for a new target. I decided I wasn't going to shoot live animals any longer but only inanimate objects. I began shooting leaves on the tree in my back yard, knot holes in a tree trunk, and metal soldiers in the sand box. About the time I was getting bored with the lack of action from shooting things that didn't move, my sister, Billie, descended the steps into the back yard. She was eating an apple and I got a brilliant idea. Didn't Robin Hood shoot an apple off the head of one of his assistants? What if I were to convince my sister, who was only six, to stand very still with an apple on her head

and I would successfully shoot it off and win the applause of all who were watching?

It took some cajoling to get my sister to agree to this idea. First, she didn't want a BB in her apple and second, she was afraid I would miss the apple and hit her. After promising I would remove any BB that ended up in the apple and that there was no danger from being hit by a BB, she finally agreed. After all, I was a crack shot and had never missed yet. I carefully placed the apple on her head, which was no easy task, because it kept falling off. Then I walked about 30 feet away and took aim. But, the apple fell off her head again. I put down the gun, replaced the apple, returned to my position, and quickly took aim. Because I was afraid the apple would fall again, I took a fast shot.

The apple fell, Billie raised both hands to her forehead, and began screaming. I dropped the gun, ran to her and pulled her hands away. The BB was stuck in her forehead, directly between her eyebrows. My first job was to get her to stop crying so my parents wouldn't hear. The second was to remove the BB. And, third to placate her.

Fortunately, the BB wasn't embedded deeply and came right out with no bleeding. But now, the problem was figuring out how to keep her from tattling on me. Billie slowly calmed down and sobbed while I offered her every bribe I could think of: I offered her part of my comic book collection; I plied her with gum; and I even considered letting her select some trinkets from my secret cigar box. After the pain subsided she agreed to terms. And, she kept her word. I don't think she ever told our parents what had happened, even when they questioned her about the strange wound in her forehead. Of course, I was always fearful she would crack, and my Daisy Red Rover Air Rifle would be confiscated, never to be used again.