Just My Luck

By Alan Liere

I have a friend who says if he didn’t have bad luck, he would have no luck at all. There have been times shooting this year when I felt the same way, though I must admit I have been blessed with a fair amount of luck in other endeavors.

On three occasions last winter, I hunted California quail with two friends in Franklin County. We basically hunted the same draw each time—they on one side and I on the other. We were no more than 30 yards apart, but every flush on every trip seemed to go out their side. Both of them shot well, taking near limits, but at the end of each morning, I had not popped a single cap. One of them, Dale, took to calling me “The Hoodoo.”

A month later, at Dale’s Super Bowl party, I won $40 in the football pool. He won nothing. It was the second year in a row I had won a nice pot at Dale’s Super Bowl party. It seems to me, that’s pretty darn lucky. Hoodoo indeed!

It is interesting to ponder the question of whether “good luck” or “bad luck” should even be part of the equation for something like shooting or hunting. I believe there are reasons beyond luck that I do or do not kill as many pheasants or clays as my friends; I believe there are reasons besides luck that dictate everything. Perhaps I do not believe in luck at all.

I know birds aren’t supposed to have a sense of smell, but I think the quail in that Franklin County draw are repelled by the smell the Bag Balm I put on my feet each morning to keep them from cracking. I think I also shoot fewer birds over the course of a season because I am not very organized. When I hunt alone, I spend far too much time at the truck, fiddling with gear and trying to find the shells I put in the glove box on the last trip that have mysteriously disappeared. I can kill an hour or more looking for my water bottle, repacking my lunch and getting the electronic collar situated just so on the Brittany.

I am reluctant to knock on doors seeking permission to trespass, preferring to hunt the same ground week after week. And once afield, I like to meander rather than stride, and I take a lot of breaks to just sit and listen or to lie down beside my dog and scratch her ears. She seems to like this a lot, and I often feel jealous that there is no one around willing to scratch mine.

There are a lot of interesting quotes about luck that may or may not have to do with hunting and shooting: “You make your own luck” is one of them. I’ve been saying this forever, but one of my acquaintances is still banking on winning a couple million at Lotto to pay for his retirement. Other than purchasing a weekly ticket, he’s put nothing else into it.

When I buy a new shotgun or take some exotic trip, he says, “You’re so lucky!” I think he really believes it. I am more inclined to think that struggling through college, holding down a job I hated for 30 years, saving my money, reloading my own shells and not doing everything I wanted when I was young have had more to do with my comfortable retirement.

“Ill luck seldom comes alone” is a quote I find eerily true. This past fall, a tree fell on me, crushing my right shoulder and breaking four ribs. A few weeks later, I ran over one of my own dogs, killing him instantly. Right after that, I got the flu, and right after that, a urinary tract problem caused me to suffer some of the most humiliating, uncomfortable series of tests you can imagine, administered by a young female urologist that looked very much like the girl I took to my high school prom. The attending nurse also had her way with me with a cotton swab.

The flip side of this is that the tree missed my head by a scant inch and I am recovering. I can put no positive spin on the death of my dog except that he was very old and debilitated and I was not looking forward to taking him on that last ride to the vet. The flu could have been a lot worse had I not gotten a flu shot a couple months earlier, and all the tests and probing by the urologist found nothing to be concerned about.

“Watch out when you’re gettin’ all you want. Fattenin’ hogs aint in luck” is undoubtedly a quote that originated with our pessimistic forefathers—who had every right to by pessimistic, what with pestilence, famine and a religion that preached the sinfulness of enjoying yourself or expecting anything good. They didn’t have trap and skeet clubs either, to bring som e cheer to the bleak, empty winter months, to give then something to look forward to. It’s no wonder you never see a picture of a smiling pilgrim.