

[Send to printer](#) [Close window](#)

Adventure Chick

To Loose an Arrow at Harrisburg Archery Club

BY M. DIANE MCCORMICK



I was aiming for a record. Could I pass my score of 10 points in the last end – that’s archery-speak – of shooting? Arm straight back, sight set on the target, left hand in just the right relaxed grip on the bow, I let the string ease off the fingers of my right hand.

Thwack! Arrow hits yellow circle on target, making my score 15 points.

“Oh, there we did it!” cried my instructor, Ed Feese. “Set the record!”

This is hardly championship archery, but there are few things in sports more gratifying than hitting that target.

Adventure Chick took a short jaunt to the Harrisburg Archery Club (hbgarcheryclub.org). On 30 wooded, hilly acres between the Rockville Bridge and Fort Hunter, club members sharpen their indoor and outdoor skills, and new archers learn the basics in winter classes.

Archery has a way of weaving itself into legend. Archers, it seems, have the daring and nerve to strike at the heart of oppression. Thwack! Take that, corrupt King John and your taxes on the poor. Thwack! Take that, President Coriolanus Snow, you murderous poisoner.

Before I went to the club, I was asked if I saw myself as a Robin Hood or Katniss Everdeen model of archer.

Katniss? So serious. So determined. So grim. Ah, but Robin Hood. Merry, you know. Always laughing his way out of

trouble and winning tournaments by splitting the opponent's arrow right through the bull's-eye. That's my kind of freedom fighter.

And in fact, there's a logo of Robin Hood painted on the floor of the Harrisburg Archery Club's indoor shooting range. That's my inspiration for the day. I was there to meet Ed Feese, club president, 30-year archer, instructor and a past state champ.

"We've had a lot of good shooters over the years," Feese told me. "National champions. State champions."

The evidence is on the wall and in display cases all around – plaques and trophies collected at countless competitions. The club is cultivating new generations of archers, too.

"These past two years, we've been growing," Feese said. "I think The Hunger Games has started a lot of interest in archery. We get calls all the time from people wanting instruction."

For Adventure Chick's visit, Feese condensed about three lessons' worth of instruction into one. We started with an introduction to archery equipment in all its detail. The grip, shelf and riser on the bow. The wheel and "cam" of the compound bow that ease the weight and essentially lighten the draw. The Robin Hood- and Katniss-style recurve bow, so called because it curves and, duh, recurves at the top and bottom, giving the string a little more clearance.

"Olympics only shoot recurve," Feese said. Seems that compound bows are a U.S. thing, and rather expensive, but other countries are starting to adopt the compound, "so eventually, we're going to have compounds in the Olympics."

Not all bows are pulled back strictly with fingers. Feese explained the types of "releases" – gizmos that go over fingertips and hook to the string, which are then released to let the string go and the arrow fly.

"I was just thinking the other day that I have about \$1,000 in releases," he said.

I thought about the money pits that we all stumble into with our enthusiasms – my husband with bicycling, me with knitting.

Feese read my mind. "Archery's like any sport," he said. "You can spend an eternity amount of money. A good, unlimited setup very easily could have \$2,000 or \$2,500 in it."

Totally worth it. And now, it was time to pick up a bow for myself, starting with a compound. Feese directed my stance. Feet shoulder-width apart. Knees back but not locked. Body and head straight up and down. Shoulders relaxed. Left elbow turned outward to avoid getting whacked by the string (although I was also wearing an arm guard). About 60 percent of weight on the balls of feet.

"You don't want to be perfectly flat, and you definitely don't want to be on your heels," Feese said. "You'll lose your balance if you're on your heels."

Nice for once that Adventure Chick isn't doing something that threatens to land me on my butt.

"Try to be the Statue of Liberty," Feese said. "You really can't control the arrow. All you're doing is holding the bow and letting the bow shoot the arrow."

I took my spot in front of the wall – much, much closer than the official 20-yard shooting line – and took hold of the bow in that supposedly relaxed grip. He explained anchoring, pulling the string hand back and placing the thumb-forefinger "V" right against the jawbone.

“As soon as you’re ready, just relax those fingers and let it go,” he said.

I’m gonna hurt my face, I whined. But I let go. And, thwack!

“There you go,” Feese said. “You got your first arrow off. You looked like a champ.”

Yes, those Olympians had better be looking over their shoulders. Still, I was remembering what I liked about archery units in school gym class. The form suited me, even though there is so very, very much to think about in the simple act of pulling back a string.

For starters, the back muscles are supposed to do most of the work. A typical instruction before shooting one arrow: “Get all three fingers on the string. One above, two below. Roll your arm a little bit. Pull with your back. Anchor to the same place, tight under the bone of your chin. Take the tension on your back, and relax your hand.”

Thumb pointing forward, too. Feese assured me that my form – straight body, elbow up and all that – was excellent. But hitting the target was, well, hit or miss.

“This stuff isn’t easy to do,” Feese said. “It takes a lot of practice.”

He handed me a recurve to try, and I stood about 10 feet from the target.

“Now you’re cheating,” he said. “You’re up way too far.”

Drat. I hoped nobody would notice. Did I want to try 20 yards? Sure. The target seemed very far away now. Still, in good form, I did as I was told and gave the string an easy release.

No thwack this time. Just the clatter of arrow on floor, far short of the target. Oh, well. More practice will get me there. And I learned a funny thing about my archery predilection.

The photog for this shoot, showed me a two-photo sequence. First pic – bow out, elbow back in perfect alignment. Second pic – string released and a look of grim determination on my face. Someday, that target would come to fear me.

Well, what do you know? Maybe I do have the heart of a Katniss Everdeen, after all.







