

Left-Handed Cutlery

by Dennis Ellingsen



The Wayne Goddard Spyderco designs are classic knives that are left-hand friendly. Save for the serrated blades which have a tendency to be more right-hand friendly, the left handed can operate, carry and use this knife. The clips are easily converted to either side, while the obvious Spyderco hole makes opening an either or option for either hand. This knife was also offered in a hollow ground or a flat ground blade, so a 100% choice to the left-handed user.

Left-Handed in a Right-Handed Family

I am not left handed. I am very much right handed, with a keen awareness of left-handed people. My son Ray is left handed, and I have always believed that there were reasons for this which are beyond my comprehension. I did nothing to discourage Ray's left-handed tendency. As Ray grew older, his interest in wilderness survival and martial arts directed him to devices that could be easily used as left-handed tools. The advent of the thumb tab on folding knife blades was a real boon to Ray, as now he could easily open a knife in an unencumbered manner. That is, if he could find a model that had the thumb tab extended in either direction or a hole which could be used to open with either hand.

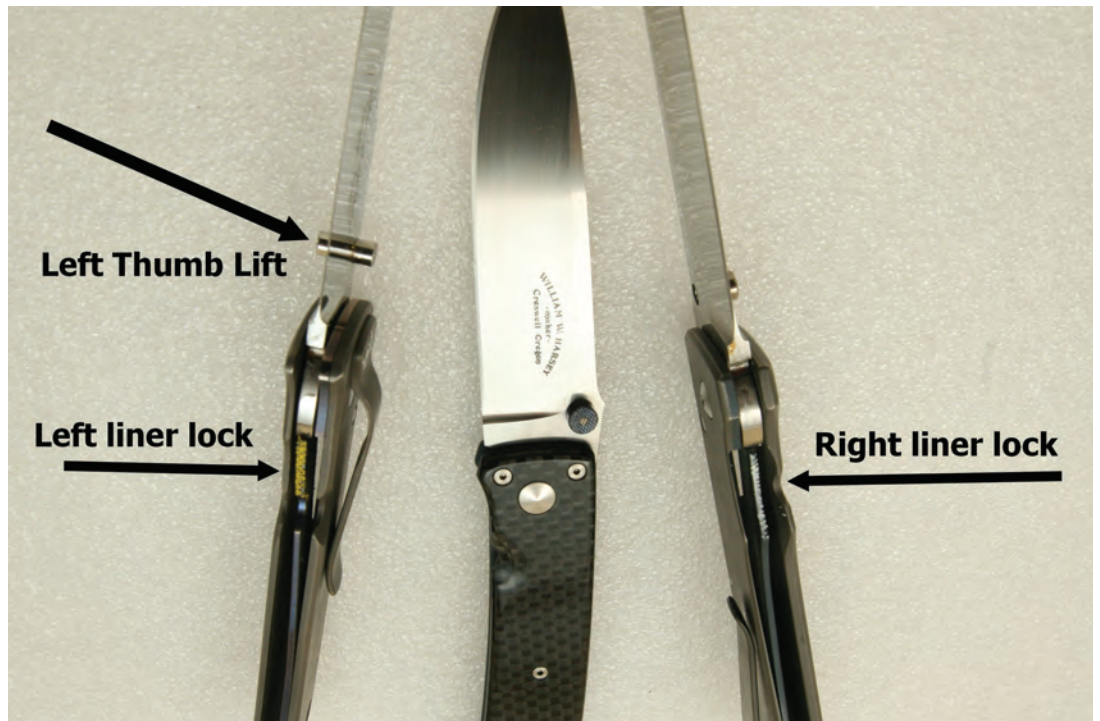
Years ago, I wanted Ray to have a special knife that would be ideal for a left-handed user. I went to one of my favorite knifemakers, Bill Harsey, and contracted a titanium handled folding fighting knife with a left-hand thumb knob to open the blade and a left-hand liner lock. "Not a problem," sez right handed Bill, "if I keep reminding myself that I am making a left-handed variety of this model."

Raising the Left Handed

It was difficult for me to heft a bat on my left shoulder when I was teaching Ray about baseball; and when it came to showing him how to tie a necktie, I was all thumbs and flying fingers. Firearms were not a major problem, as I shifted my interests to single-shot rifles which are easy for the right- or left-hand user. I even went one step further and specialized in single shot BSA Martinis, which are not partial to right- or left-handed shooters. (Safety buttons can be construed as right-handed devices, but the BSA Martini has no external safety.) When our interests turned to the collecting of knives, I felt that this would be an ambidextrous interest, which it was – up to a point.

Scissors

The most amazing revelation to me was the problem presented by the use of scissors. I was under the impression that the problem was the size of the finger openings



The custom made left hand pattern was made by Bill Harsey, and is pictured here next to a conventional right-hand knife. The thumb stud is accessible from either side of the blade but the liner lock is definitely a left hand model

in the handles of scissors. Although they are awkward when used with the left hand, that is not the major problem. The scissors used by a grade school youngster have equal size openings but refuse to cut in the hands of a left-hand user. The right-hand user exerts not only a downward pressure, but also a little bit of forward pressure of the thumb as well as a little backward pressure of the fingers. This pressure pushes the thumb blade against the finger blade to cut. However the left-hand user pushes away the finger blade which results in the bending of the paper between the slightly separated blades. To compensate, it is necessary for the left hand user to push with the fingers and pull with the thumb, which requires concentration and creates a challenge. Without this conscious effort, the results are bent and ragged edges of paper in addition to a very sore thumb.

Aside from scissors, there are many other

tools that present difficulties. A knife with a serrated blade can be one of those pocketknives that can also present problems. Popular and nice for right-hand users, but a real concern for the left handed when holding small items for cutting.

Serrated and Single Beveled Blades – Left Bevel

When I investigated the world of serrated blades, I became quickly confused. Serrated blades and single beveled blades have purpose in their design. Most pocketknives that have serrated blades have the bevel on the tang marked side of the blade (the left side with the blade edge down). One source suggested that the bevel was placed on this side so it could be photographed and marketed better. True, but not the sole reason.

A blade with the tang mark bevel (left side) tends to travel or veer to the right when a downward cutting stroke is made. Usually this slight travel from the straight isn't a problem for the right-handed user.



Here is a good one for you. Folding knives usually have serrations on the left side of the blade which tends to make the blade veer to the right, so why does the bread knife (as called) have serrations on the right side? Kitchen knives are classified as bread knives, I think to avoid confusion for the user. Years ago I read somewhere that these knives can be roast beef knives or ham knives. The serrations on the right separates the slice from the roast or ham thanks to the airfoil effect. In other words the slice falls to the right, clear of the cut object. Rather than confuse the issue, it is a serrated bread knife which cares little which way the bread falls.

But for the left-handed person this can be a hazard if they are holding a small item like fruit or a bagel. The knife held in the left hand can travel to the holding right hand and cause a mishap. If aware, accidents can be avoided by guiding and steering the serrated blade with a better determination. It is called blade control.

Serrated and Single Beveled Blades – Right Bevel

If one pays close attention to the bevel or serrations on larger knives, it is on the obverse tang side or on the right side as the blade is placed down. While it is reasonable to assume that this blade travels to the right, a large blade is not typically used for cutting small hand-held objects. These knives are for cutting food such as bread, cabbage, cheese, ham, lettuce, roast meat, etc. The purpose of the bevel on the right side now serves a different function; the sliced items are pushed away from the blade and from the item being cut. When the right hand is used, the slice of ham falls to the right; however when the left hand is used the slice of ham tends to stick to the blade and must be manually separated. Having trouble cutting bread? The answer could be as simple as getting a proper left-hand bread knife with the serrations on the right side of the blade, so it counteracts the natural twisting

motion of your hand. One side serrated and single beveled cutlery is typically designed for the right-handed world.

Ray was well aware of serrated pocket-knife blades. His outdoor survival teaching has shown him that the serrated pocket-knife can work to his advantage. Sharpening sticks in the woods is a common use for a knife, and in his left hand the blade travels downward sharpening a stick in a natural motion. It takes several more strokes to cut a sharpened point when held in the right hand, as the serrated blade travels upward and away from the point.

User Beware

As with any tool, correct and proper use of the tool can make it a useful device but improper use can make it a hazard. Making allowances for the serrated blade can assure safe and proper use of this tool.

Interviews with the Left Handed in Mind

In researching for information about articles I write, I enjoy the revelations gained by talking to just anybody whom I come across who may add details to my studies. A lady who was laying tile attributed her fear of knives to the fact that she was left handed. She spoke of the fingernails she has cut in her use of a knife, and also her recollections of the sores on her thumb that she



While writing this article I tried to wrap my mind around the serrated or single beveled knives that could apply to the left-handed user. The folding, serrated knives were clear; but the kitchen serrated had a bit of a problem. This article attempts to explain; but the bell doesn't ring until the apple hits one on the head. I was cutting a wedge of Swiss cheese in half with a knife with serrations on the right side (blade down) and realized that the knife acted as if it had a mind of its own and curved to the left. This would suggest this knife was a roast or ham slicer according to my studies. A left-hand conundrum.

experienced as a child using scissors. I fear that I may have polluted her thinking, as she had never consciously considered tools for the left hand. She had just assumed that the world was right handed and that was a fact with which she had to live.

Another person I interviewed happened to be the pilot of a ferry boat. We were on holiday leaving the San Juan Islands on our way to Canada. I always ask about knives,



Wenger, the maker of the original Swiss Army Knife, made several versions for the left-hand user. These ergonomic pocketknives were designed expressly for the left handed and feature a left-hand user thumb depression in the handle. The icon on the handle is a mark to broadcast that this is a left-hand knife. The road map to this Forester model includes a large knife blade (to be opened by the right hand while holding the knife in the left hand), a small knife, left-handed scissors, can opener, bottle opener, corkscrew (turns counter-clockwise so you don't need to turn the bottle), tweezers and a toothpick. Victorinox purchased Wenger in 2005 and the left-handed knives are not correctly in production.

and there was no disappointment here as every crew member carried a knife of one sort or another. Quality ones I might add. Barry was at the "wheel" when I asked if any in the crew were left handed. Barry said yea and out came his Spyderco knife. I asked if he was aware that his serrated Spyderco was a right-handed model. He was not aware; but when I explained how the blade could turn into his holding hand,

he was surprised. He had thought the reason he cut himself so often was because he was clumsy. Just like steering the ferry boat, he had now learned how to steer his carry knife.

Further conversations with a high school shop teacher revealed many obstacles that the left handed must overcome when using power tools. The biggest concern was the power button which keeps the tool running without holding onto the trigger. This button is designed with the right-handed user in mind. A dangerous cross over motion is required for the left handed. Another tool of concern is the circular power saw. Yet another obvious right-handed device is the switch used to turn on band saws, drill presses and table saws which is always located for the ease of use of the right-handed user. The teacher I talked to commented that the left-handed students tend to adapt to the right-handed world of tools and are actually more conscious of the tools operation. And who could imagine the dangerous threat that a chain saw represents?

It is Certainly a Right-Handed World

Now that you have an awareness of this right-handed world, dear elayne wanted you to think about the devices that you take for granted everyday. There are the baseball gloves, calculators, corkscrews, golf clubs, hair dryers, hand weeders, ladles, notebooks with spiral rings, the numerical keypad on computers, oven mitts, potato peelers, power lawn mowers, right-handed school desks, screws and the screwdriver, telephones, cell phones and the list goes on.

Left Handed History Lesson

History shows us that there are "left" ideas that go back to religious and cultural roots. The left side of the body is associated with evil, and the right side with luck and virtue. Satan sat on God's left and is often portrayed as left handed. The English word "left" comes from the Anglo Saxon "lyft" which means weak or broken; the right hand is used for shaking hands, saluting, making the sign of the cross and swearing on the Bible.

Approximately 90 percent of the world's human population are strongly right handed and approximately 90 percent are pre-



Scissors are the curse of the left-hand person. Most scissors are right-hand tools. The left-handed operator will be hurt or will bend the paper, and struggle to see what they are cutting. The right hand puts pressure on the cutting blade to force it to be cut. In the left hand, the scissors separate the blade. Bad situation. The solution is left-hand scissors, which are not that easy to find

dominantly right handed. Of the remaining 10 percent, some people use only their left hand; but there are others who are ambidextrous, left handed for some activities and right handed for others.

The left-handed baseball players (south-paws), as well as the participants of sports such as boxing, fencing, martial arts and tennis need to be respected. Most of their opponents are right handed which gives one of them the advantage. However in the game of polo and jai alai, the players are banned from playing left handed, since these sports have considered a left-handed ambush too dangerous.

To name but a few of left-handed fame: Lewis Carroll, Charlie Chapman, Ty Cobb, Leonardo da Vinci, Benjamin Franklin, John McEnroe, Martina Navratilova, Babe Ruth, General Schwarzkopf and Ted Williams. There have been eight presidents: George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Gerald



In the 1930s, Remington and Marble's made Official Boy Scout and Girl Scout sheath knives. The girls sheathes were a green color, and the boys were brown. While the Boy Scout knives were right-hand carry, the Official Girl Scout knives were left-hand carry. And thus is the mystery. I am certain that there must have been a few right-handed girls, so why are all the sheath knives for the girls left handed?

contenders for the presidency were all left handed: George Bush, Bill Clinton, and Ross Perot.

The U.S. military gives no latitude to the left-handed soldier. The M-1 and the M-16 rifle throw hot fired brass in the face of the left handed, and all pistol holsters are right handed. From the beginning of time, all swords are carried on the left side so the right hand can draw it.

Left-Handed Tools

Getting back to the world of "cut:" What about the corkscrew for the left handed? The solution for the left handed would be to turn the bottle and not the corkscrew. The Swiss Army knife is made in a left-handed version. The blades are geographically placed. The main blade, file and can opener blades are all oriented to the left hand. Of course the big issue here is the placement of the nail nick which is opposite to what we refer to as the tang side blade marking. There are precious few knifemakers who make knives for the left-handed customer. The real clever ones are the ones who place nail nicks on both sides of the blade. The best of all worlds. Another left-handed consideration is the company that makes the Fiddle Bow bread knife. This is a tool that is absolutely a right-hand device unless of course you order a left-hand model. For those who are interested in collecting cutlery with a theme, how about "Left-Handed Knives for People

in their Right Mind?"

The humor of the last statement may catch you unaware unless you know that the right side of the brain controls the left side of the body while the left side of the brain controls the right side of the body. Oh sigh.

My Favorite Knife

With consideration for the left-handed perfect knife, I would choose the Spyderco knife designed by Wayne Goddard. The patented hole in the blade makes opening easy for the right- or left-handed user. The blade lock is centered on the back which is accessible for either. The pocket clip can be removed or placed on either side of the knife making the carry multiple choice. Aside from these features, the knife design blends the typical hole hump unobtrusively which makes for a blended design.

A Left-Handed Mystery

And then there is the mystery that I have yet to figure out. The Official Girl Scout green carry sheath was designed to be worn on the left side. The Official Boy Scout brown color carry sheath was designed to be carried on the right side. The 1930s vintage knives were made by Remington and Marble's. Anybody who has a plausible answer for the 'why' of this will find me forever grateful. No, it isn't because all girls are left handed and the boys are right handed. □

Ford, James Garfield, Herbert Hoover, Barack Obama, Ronald Reagan and Harry Truman. But the real first-time-in-history fact came in 1992 when the three political