

# Remembering Good Practice

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Ken Easley – March 2019

I can remember some lines in great books and movies if they strike a chord with me. One such movie was **We Were Soldiers** with Mel Gibson and Sam Elliot. In one part of the movie Mel Gibson tells Sam Elliot “you may want to get yourself a rifle”. Sam Elliot answers “there will be plenty lying around on the ground if I need one”. I have always admired simplicity and directness.

My grandfather had that. He didn’t talk much but if he did it was straight to the fine point of the matter and in the fewest amount of words possible. I asked him one time while driving the truck to the barn with a load a hay bales, grandpa, if you started with nothing and you have all this land and money what is your secret to saving up all this money? He never moved his head looking straight forward in his low whispering voice and said, “Don't spend it”.

I wasn’t satisfied at the time with the short answer but in time grew to understand it's simple beauty and true value to my life. I have led a fairly conservative life but each time I stepped outside his sage advice I always think of him and his words that day. I don’t think it is a secret that I have invested heavily in top class pigeons. Winners of the Million Dollar Race, Portugal’s Algarve Golden Race, or Victoria Falls race in Zimbabwe. I have also picked up a handful of very special pigeons like Ruby, Blue Power, Figorena, Puggle, Sunce, Rene, Saad, Dino, Coco Chanel a daughter of the famous Black Power who dominated Germany and bred as well with his son Black Pearl being the Olympic Champion. I have backed off many times when bidding on top pigeons. I have a value of a bird in mind and when it goes beyond that value i’m done. It has nothing to do with not following through. Those are words of a slick salesman eager to gain control of your money. If the pigeon becomes mine it is because it never went beyond what I saw as the value of the pigeon.

My father wasn’t much for spending a lot of money especially on pigeons. My grandfather wouldn’t give you anything for a pigeon. He would get free pigeons and with work and time they became good. So where does that leave us? My thoughts on purchasing pigeons is in many ways very business-like. I want pigeons that will produce winners. That is the goal for everyone and as simple as it sounds it is far more difficult to achieve. I look for birds with many generations of winners in the pedigree. I also look at brothers and sisters that produce winners. My thinking is the more winners the better. My breeding stock pigeons don’t have to be race winners. The fact is most of the big winners are bred from unflown pigeons, but they better be concentrated with winners in the family. This is not always the case but it is common. A grandchild of a big winner is very likely to breed your winner in my experience. A brother or sister of a champion coming from a pair of pigeons with many winners in the pedigree is just as likely to breed a champion as the champion himself. I have thought on this for some time. It is my belief that the genetics from the same well of parental genetics between full siblings can be different. Who is to say which one is a better racer and which one is a better breeder? The basket.

I have a saying, "A racing pigeon is valued by its merits as a racer. A breeding pigeon is valued by its ability to produce top racing pigeons". Everything else is just speculation and discussion points. Sure we all want pigeons that race to the top and breed the same. Someone once said the worst lies we tell are the ones we tell ourselves. My best producer **ever** was never flown but his father produced. His mother produced. Their siblings produced on both sides of the family. The children produce. This has shown me over and over it is more about the blood. You have to go with the blood. If I am to be known for something let it be that I said "you have to go with the blood" What does that mean? For me it means I would rather try breeding an unflown pigeon from a family of winners than from a race proven pigeon that won prizes but has holes in his genetic background.

I have many times heard guys declare "I only breed proven racers and best to best". Then when they win a race and send out the pedigrees of the parents they are two new pigeons bred by other lofts and were never flown. I have to ask myself if you are only breeding best to best and never pay attention to pedigrees and only breed proven racers then what happened here with your new winners? I think we are all smart enough to figure out the answer. I don't think it is intentional. They talk about what they envision and see themselves doing but in reality they are lying to themselves. Maybe because it sounds good? They tell themselves what they admire and want to be. Good to have goals but you can get lost if you're not grounded in the facts.

Gerard Koopman has bred and raced many winners but he became a household name with the introduction of Golden Lady. Golden Lady was not raced but her father was the renowned champion Kannibaal. Perfect example of a non-flown pigeon from a top family making world class winners of the new owners. Gunther Prange of Germany flew Delbar's which also had one leg of old Janssen. He became a name bigger than life in Germany with the introduction of new blood to his loft. The Ringlose was responsible for many 1st prizes and national champions in Germany. This is no easy feat. The introduction of Kannibaal blood via Koopman also helped him. This tells us that no matter how great we see ourselves it is always the introduction of the right pigeon that makes it true.

Balance, rich feather, buoyancy, power, strength, endurance, smarts, good homing ability are many of the adjectives used to describe what we look for to bring our flock to the next level of success. We look at top champions that possess these attributes. We may not get them all in one place. It may be a combination that gets us to the big dance. A small endurance cock mated to a large speed hen or visa versa. In the end we all measure success the same way. A racing pigeon is measured by the prizes he wins. The breeding pigeon is measured by the prizes his offspring win. You cannot see what's in the heart of a racing pigeon except when you read his results. You also can't see what is in the genetic package of a stock pigeon. You can make educated guesses based on the pedigree. We try to merge these qualities into our imaginary greatest champion of all time.

In 2007 I wanted to win a one loft race. I had never entered a one loft race. I sent two pigeons. One was off of my first Klaas pigeon, a sister of my foundation cock Konbird. It won in 2008 with the one youngster from my

Konbird sister. Then my goal changed and I concentrated on building average speed champions. I saw that big races at the time like the world ace challenge were average speed races. They paid the big money for the average speed champion. I worked at this for some time acquiring speed champions and then crossing them on my own speed champions to eventually produce Mukiwa 1st Ace winner SAMDPR 2016. This type of racing has slowly taken a back seat to the final race winners. I saw the prestige and big money shift to the final race winners so I began to concentrate my efforts on the final distance. Some races are flatland and tailwinds. Some races are headwinds with mountain passes to navigate through. These are two different kinds of pigeons. There are races with 250 mile final races. Other races have 400 miles finals. One begins to try and sort out these different kinds of goals and it can become confusing. It is absolutely true that a top 25% placing pigeon on the 300 mile race may be the 1st prize champion at 350. If there is not a 350 at the race you send him to you will never know that. A guy says why would you want a pigeon that didn't win the 300 mile final race? Well, a good reason is the pigeon may be a 350 mile winner. He may have only placed 35th on the 300. It doesn't take away his ability to be a champion at 350 or even 400 miles. If a man makes the grave mistake of getting rid of all these 350/400 mile pigeons and keeping the 300 mile champions he may find himself in a gun fight with a knife. Many things to consider. In these times I bring myself back to center. Back to Grandpa's wisdom. Simple and straight to the point smarts. Measure twice, cut once. A good approach for my loft is having pigeons that score from 250 - 400 miles as young birds. I want to see that the best result are on the final race. This indicates that more distance is getting them into their wheelhouse.

Breeding pigeons is an art. However I have seen guys who know next to nothing about racing pigeons study hard, make purchases, breed youngsters and win big. This is a reminder to us all that winning can be simple. Overthinking causes mistakes. One could get lost in the minutia. Back to the measuring stick. What did they breed? Invest the time then test test test and reap the rewards.