By Jerry Ahern, Photos by Sharon Ahern

Recently, as this is written, Sharon and I attended a gathering to which we have the good fortune of being invited each year. It’s an old friend’s way of commemorating the life of her late husband, a truly remarkable individual. There is good food and conversation. There’s also plenty of opportunity for shooting well back from the house and, this year as previously, I brought a couple of handguns. Although many of the women, including the hostess, were gunny people, the women stayed inside, talking and attacking the desserts, while the shooters were all male, the youngest 12 years old and the oldest probably me. I turned 65 in June of 2011. One man brought a SIG Sauer P229 and I had my Seecamp on me, of course. All the rest of the handguns were revolvers.

The handguns I brought were at opposite ends of the concealment revolver spectrum. One was the soon-to-be-insanely-collectible North American Arms Magnum break-top “Ranger.” Because of the expense involved in making this very unique mini-revolver, the suggested retail would have had to be considerably higher than other NAA Minis, as I understand it; and so, lamentably, only 500 were made.

The other revolver I brought was a very gently used Smith & Wesson Model 66-2, with a 2-1/2” barrel. At one time the ultimate hideout cop gun, mine was made between 1982 and 1986. It was discontinued in 2005. I got this revolver in a trade with my old pal Steve Fishman, proprietor of Sidney’s Department Store (www.sidneys-deptstore.com) in Augusta, Georgia. It’s one terrific gun shop, if you’re in the neighborhood.

Another one of the shooters was a cop, closer to my age than the 12-year-old’s. The cop – a really nice guy, by the way – had some beautiful revolvers with him, revolvers that he carries and uses. He was wearing a modern, stainless S&W snubby in .45 ACP. It’s not a beautiful gun; but it’s distinctive. He also had one of the super light J-Frame .38 Special snubbies, this a pocket gun. Two of his revolvers were most interesting. One was a 4” heavy barrel K-Frame Smith & Wesson, stainless steel, with adjustable sights and factory service stocks – the old checked walnut kind, with the inset S&W escutcheon. The revolver had beautiful full coverage engraving, which may or may not have been factory. It was an identical duplicate to the revolver he had carried as a duty weapon, before his department had changed over to semi-autos. I accepted the offer to try it with some Sellier & Bellot .38 Specials. It was a fine revolver, indeed.

The other revolver my cop friend had was even more unique. He had acquired it years back from a friend who was a machinist. The revolver had started out as a Colt New Service in .45 Colt. The machinist – apparently very talented as a gun whittler – had cut the barrel back to 5” and rounded the base of the grip into a modified bird’s head shape. Indian stag grips, yellowed with the patina only age imparts, were perfectly fitted to the gun. The trigger guard was narrowed. Apparently, the original intent was possibly to cut the barrel shorter and open the front of the trigger guard, making a “Fitz Special.” John Henry Fitzgerald, a well-respected competitive marksman, author and combat shooting theorist, used two cut-down New Service Models with the fronts of the trigger guards removed and other modifications, including snubbed barrels and rounded butts. He would draw both weapons from his pockets and perform amazing feats of high-speed combat shooting. The machinist never carried out the full Fitz Special modification, if that was his intent. Instead, he only narrowed the trigger guard, allowing the weapon to fit in Smith & Wesson holsters.

The cop had an orange insert placed in the front sight and had the revolver re-blued. Although he still has the .45 Colt cylinder, he had a .45 ACP cylinder made, which was on the revolver when I saw it. He used half-moon clips, if memory serves. I never got the chance to try it; perhaps, sometime in the future, I will. The important thing is that this is still a working concealed weapon, not something hidden away in a gun collection.

I tried the two revolvers I’d brought, both of which were brand new to me, albeit the 66 was a used gun. I’d handled the break-top North American Arms Ranger quite a bit, familiarizing myself with operating the break-top mechanism, the ejector and positioning the cylinder so that the ham-