

Remember

By Barrett Tillman, Yamil R. Sued Photos

Once or twice in a lifetime we are permitted a glimpse of our future. But we seldom if ever realize it at the time. Certainly that was the case as a youngster when I was exposed to two particular publications.

One was a tome called *Cooper on Handguns*, published in 1974. I had no idea that four years later I would trek southward from Oregon, seeking an obscure place in northern Arizona, and the life-changing experience that was Gunsite.

The other was *Air Progress* magazine, containing innovative, off-the-wall articles by a self-confessed "broken down old crop duster" named Michael J. Dillon. Aside from flouting the conventional wisdom (and assorted bureaucrats), Mike's articles were illustrated by a top-notch photographer named Nyle B. Leatham. I looked forward to each article because this Dillon character appeared fearless, and his partner was always there to record the event. If a subject had never been covered, that was all the more reason to propose it to the air force – the U.S. or Confederate, it didn't matter.

Way back then, it never occurred to me that my future might lie in Arizona, but once I crossed paths with the Cooper-Dillon-Leatham triumvirate, I knew I had turned a corner.

Like many of us, I knew the world-champion-shooter son Robbie first, but eventually met Nyle and Carol. It didn't take long to realize that having a son with Rob's championship credentials didn't affect anyone's relationship with his parents. They would have been exactly the same sweet, caring people regardless of what their children did. But Nyle was not only a father to his family and his immediate circle; he was more of a father figure than any man I've ever known.

Though Nyle and I were acquainted for a decade or more previously, our friendship began as an association in 1996. We started by covering Cowboy Action Shooting events for *Guns* and *American Handgunner*, and over the next 11 years we collaborated (and occasionally conspired) on 20-plus articles and two books.

It was the beginning of one of the most treasured friendships of my life – and probably hundreds of people will tell you the same thing.

Sometimes if we didn't have an assignment, we'd conjure up one on our own. The phone would ring and there was Nyle's soft voice: "BT, let's do something." He reminded me of Martin Sheen's character in *Apocalypse Now*, impatiently awaiting the next mission.

But it wasn't all business. Several years ago Nyle asked if he could give me a copy of *The Book of Mormon*. It's a testament to his personality

