

# The Nug

by Chris Gergeni, NMLRA Managing Director

Can something truly ugly be pretty? About a decade ago, a gun dealer friend got a very unique pistol in trade and deliberately showed it off to my Dad. Of course, my Dad had to buy it. I think that any of us who saw it would feel the same, especially for the \$50 or so it cost. The thing is it was probably the ugliest gun, muzzleloading or not, that has ever been made. EVERYTHING was wrong about this pistol, from the hammer to the grip. It is clear from just looking at it, that no gunsmith has ever held, let alone considered making, a gun like this.

The back story is just as intriguing. There was a man in Memphis, Tennessee, who, whether from cost or legal reasons made this gun in the 1950s for personal defense. He got together the metal parts to create this muzzleloading pistol and welded them together. He crafted front and rear sights and finally, rigged up a trigger and hammer system that might work. I say might, because no one who has looked at it has been able to say exactly how the silly thing would work. You see, there is a hole under the hammer which might fit a #11 percussion cap and the hammer has a small extrusion that might cause the cap to detonate, the hammer doesn't cock it lifts and falls with springs (about six of them in a group). This pistol is so backward that Dad christened it the NUG (gun spelled backward).

So why bring all this up? That's simple. Most of us have or have had something in our collection that reaches us in the most inexplicable way. It speaks to something in us that only we can understand, but not ex-



plain. What a casual hobbyist or viewer sees as a rusty, scratched, dinged up, worthless object, we see as beautiful. We proudly display or show to our fellow collectors our treasure that is so ugly we had to have it. Maybe it is an old family heirloom. Maybe it is the history of the object. Maybe it is the beauty of the workmanship that is hidden under the years of use and handling. Maybe it is a NUG.

As I get to know the membership of the NMLRA, I see the same look of dedication and pride in so many of our member's eyes, like Dad and I have, when they tell me about their muzzleloaders and the quirky, unusual, and failed experiments that hold pride of place in their collections. It is a language beyond speaking that we all get. I see the pride, dedication, and, possibly even fanaticism (in a good way) in the eyes of members as I meet them. They are measuring me, as they do each other, seeing if I

speak the same language – if I get it. Believe me, I do.

I have grown up shooting. I received a reproduction cap and ball Pennsylvania longrifle for my 14th Christmas. I grew up doing living history work in Illinois including 1845 militia musters with Brown Bess and Charleville muskets. I hunt deer with a muzzleloader. I have a wife who tolerates some of the things I collect (most of the time!). I have an eight year old son who couldn't be more pleased with where I now work and the opportunities for learning and trying that he sees here. I was ecstatic when I was offered and accepted the job, and he was even more excited than I was!

I am honored to be entrusted with the responsibility of being the new NMLRA Managing Director. I am beginning to know and understand the long and distinguished history of the NMLRA and I hope I will be able to build on that history as we move into the future. **MB**

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