

JARRELL

# SHARP EDGE



Photos by Joyce May

David Bryson Sr. shapes a knife blade at his shop in Jarrell. He travels to gun and knife shows selling handcrafted knives under the name BarOne Eleven Custom Hunting Knives. Mr. Bryson uses O1 steel stock, horse shoeing rasp, Model A leaf springs and other high carbon steel to make his products.

# Retired agriculture teacher from Jarrell shapes metal into knives

BY JOYCE MAY

**D**avid Bryson Sr. would rather teach you to make a knife than sell you one.

It's not a profitable business model, but then Mr. Bryson is not looking to get rich with his handcrafted hunting knives.

Born and raised in far West Texas in the Lower Valley area of El Paso, Mr. Bryson learned the farrier trade, that is how to trim and shoe horses' hooves, from his dad and uncle.

"We had a forge. We heated our shoes and made our own tools. That is just the way it was. I learned a lot about tempering steel trial and error," he said. "I made spur bits, knives out of horseshoes. Just heat them up and pound them. Take a file and you just work it. Everything by hand. You just work it out."

Mr. Bryson worked for the meat-

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David Bryson Sr. has amassed a collection of his handcrafted hunting knives. He says he has to "fall out of love" with one before he can sell it.



Photos by Joyce May

David Bryson Sr. buffs a knife at his shop in Jarrell.

# Jarrell man shapes metal into knives

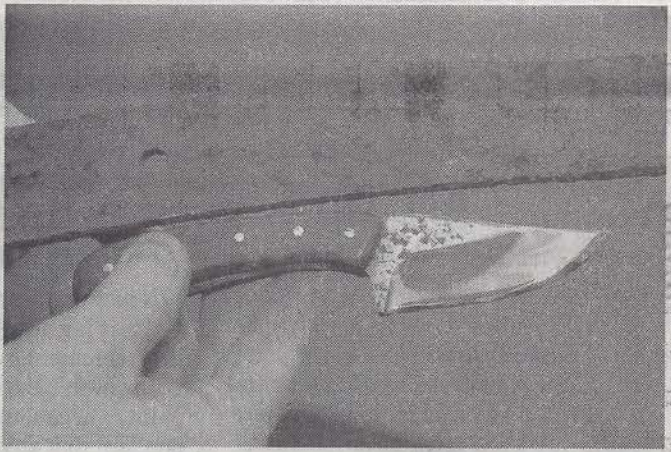
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packing plant Swift and Company in Abilene until he was drafted into the Army in 1969. Because he had experience in the industry, Uncle Sam sent him to cutting meat at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

The experience paid off later in his career when he co-wrote the meat science curriculum and facility standards guide for agriculture programs in Texas schools.

"I was very fluent in the inspection standards. I use to work right alongside those government graders," Mr. Bryson said.

After the military, Mr. Bryson went to work for a feed store company, advancing as far as he could without higher education.

"I went back to school and got a degree and became what I always wanted to be — an agriculture teacher."



A completed handcrafted hunting knife next to a Model A leaf spring similar to the one from which it was crafted. A leaf spring is part of a vehicle's suspension system.

Texas.

"He will talk himself out of a sale," she said. "He will say, 'Come on down. Come on down. I will show you how to make one.'"

Mr. Bryson spends his

pickup, and Mr. Bryson said everyone who worked on the project was allowed to make a knife out of one of the leaf springs, which is part of a vehicle's suspension system.

"It makes a good knife. A real good knife. It is a good carbon steel, which means it will temper out right and hold an edge longer," Mr. Bryson said.

If a particular knife has sentimental value, as does the one he crafted to demonstrate the process to his Jarrell ag class, he will price it high.

"I don't care if they buy it or not," he said.

He doesn't worry about what others might see as imperfections in the steel blades either:

"The rust in it, it adds character to it," he said.

He uses different material ranging from deer antlers to Arizona Ironwood and mesquite wood for his handles.

"I want it to be not only functional but I want it to be aesthetically pleasing. It is an expression of me. I try to put something in every one of them [that says], 'That is my knife.'"

He plans to turn his attention next to making scabbards for the knives in his ever-expanding collection.

Ms. Bryson said she enjoys watching her husband craft something from scratch.

"He is an honest person. He loves to share the trade. We need more people like that," she said. "We need the hands-on stuff and teachers like this are far and few between. It won't be long before these old timers are gone. Then who will teach the trades?"

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**Rusty Bryson**  
Wife

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Mr. Bryson taught agricultural science, commonly known as ag, for 36 years. He spent the first 17 teaching in the far West Texas town of Clint before moving to Hamlin and then to the far East Texas area of Omaha-Naples. He moved to Leander High School before spending his final six years at Jarrell High School.

Mr. Bryson has a Master of Education degree with mid-management certification from Sul Ross State University. The achievement qualified him for an administrative position, but he said he was never interested in climbing that career ladder.

"I didn't want to be a principal. I wanted to be an ag teacher," he said.

He is a teacher at heart, says his wife of almost 38 years, Rusty Bryson, who accompanies him to gun and knife shows throughout

retirement days tooling around his shop located behind the couple's Jarrell home. He may spend a week working on a single knife.

He has a philosophy about the knives he pours time, energy and imagination into crafting: "I have to fall out of love with them before I will sell it," he said.

Mr. Bryson believes in hands-on learning and passed on various skills from building livestock trailers to shaping metal to parliamentary procedure, and of course knife-making, to his students.

"The last six weeks of every year that I taught, the senior boys in ag class could make a knife," he said. "We learned the old way with a right angle grinder and a file, a torch or a forge, and sand paper."

One of his Jarrell classes restored a 1928 Model A