



*The Fox "F" Grade shotgun, owned by former president Teddy Roosevelt.
Photographed by Ralph Duke*

"Jason could never tolerate a bully, going back to high school," his sister said. "That's why he was drawn to the law. He always wanted to speak for those who couldn't speak for themselves."

Roselius found his role in representing the little man, the oppressed. He led and won numerous record-breaking state and national class-action lawsuits. He was the youngest attorney in the state of Oklahoma to win a class-action lawsuit.

His clients also included those in personal injury and wrongful death. At the time, Roselius won the largest single wrongful death settlement in Texas history.

It didn't take long for Roselius to establish a reputation and carve for himself a lucrative career even though he was content to keep a low profile.

"He was the motor behind the train of his law firm," said Jay, himself a Carson County judge in the Texas Panhandle for 16 years. "But he never wanted the notoriety. He didn't want his name out there."

A shotgun for the people

In 2010, when Roselius saw the catalog of the James D. Julia, Inc. firearms auction and saw the Teddy Roosevelt's prized shotgun was one of the items, he grabbed his dad and told them they were going on a trip to Maine.

Roselius had a collection of antique firearms, but nothing approaching a mix of famous owner and famous gun.

"He loved Teddy Roosevelt," said Reva. "He was absolutely one of his favorite men in history. He loved the lessons Roosevelt tried to portray to everybody."

Roosevelt described the shotgun to friends as the finest and most beautiful gun he'd seen. The gun features intricate scroll work, oak leaves and a gold inlaid hunting dog on each side of the frame.

An inscription on one of the barrels reads: "Made Expressly for Hon. Theodore Roosevelt." The other barrel reads: "By A.H. Fox Gun Company, Philadelphia USA."

In addition to taking the shotgun on an African safari, he took it on an ill-fated 1913 expedition to the Amazon that nearly killed him. He got malaria, and a superficial leg wound developed into a serious infection.

Roosevelt lost 50 pounds, became somewhat delusional and later told friends the trip may have taken 10 years off his life. Roosevelt, who was president from 1901 to 1909, died at age 60 in 1919.

"Out of everything Jason had – and he was not materialistic – but this was his most prized and emotional possession," Liz Hughes said. "And it was just because of who Roosevelt was and the history behind the man."

But Roselius bought it not so much for himself, but so he could share it with those who had that same love of history and firearms that he did.

For the last seven years, Roosevelt's shotgun has had a home at the Cody Firearms Museum at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyo. It has had a place alongside Roosevelt's Winchester Model 1895 Lever Action Sporting Rifle, one that Roosevelt called "big medicine for lions."

But in October, the shotgun made the trip 932 miles to the south from Cody to Canyon, Texas and West Texas A&M, Roselius' alma mater. On May 28th and going forward, it will be on display at the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum where it now resides.

When Mike Hughes, Roselius' brother-in-law, told Jack Miller the shotgun might be available for display, the president-elect of the Panhandle-Plains Historical Society board of trustees was ecstatic.

"That's all I needed to hear," he said. "It's iconic. It's one of a kind. It's Roosevelt's gun. Then the story of Jason and his life, and his wanting it at WT, it's just something that needed to be here."

For Carol Lovelady, the executive director of the PPHM, having the shotgun as an exhibit, she said, is incalculable.

"We are just extremely excited," she said. "PPHM has long been known for having the best gun collection in Texas, but with the arrival of Teddy Roosevelt's shotgun – considered a national treasure – the museum has become a destination for history buffs, gun collectors and Roosevelt scholars."

"Receiving the gun under any circumstances would be a coup, but knowing a graduate of WT purchased this shotgun with the intention of having it displayed at the museum makes its arrival more significant."

All of those with a personal stake know the Roosevelt shotgun finally coming to Roselius' home area is a fitting tribute.

"This is an extraordinary thing," Jay said. "This is his home and where he started to college, and he just thought it would help the museum. That's just the way he was."

The man who paid more than \$850,000 for the most expensive auctioned shotgun in U.S. history never touched it. He never laid a hand on it, and his family knows he was just fine with that.

For more information on how you can support the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, contact Buster Ratliff at bratliff@pphm.wtamu.edu or visit panhandleplains.org.

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Roosevelt Gun on Loan to PPHM

By Jon Mark Beilue

There was a time when he was a kid and his family had a summertime fireworks stand outside Panhandle, Texas, that Jason Roselius would be giving away assorted firecrackers and pop bottle rockets out the back of the stand to his friends.

In some ways he changed over the years, and in some ways, he didn't. Roselius was always looking for ways to help friends and others, but eventually he did learn the value of money and the price that went with it.

In 2010, by then a renowned attorney in Oklahoma, Jason sat with his father, Jay Roselius, at a James D. Julia firearms auction in Fairfield, Maine. An item for bid was a shotgun – and not just any shotgun either but one that was reputed to be the most historic American shotgun in existence.

"There was no doubt he was going to get it," Jay said.

It was a Fox "F" Grade shotgun, owned by former president Teddy Roosevelt. It was presented to Roosevelt by the president of the Fox Gun Company, and one that was used on his 1909 African safari, the most famous of all African safaris of American's most accomplished hunting president.

Jason's father said he didn't scratch his nose, and didn't so much as twitch as the auction soon dwindled to his son and one other determined bidder.

In the end, the gun that Roosevelt once said "there was no better ever made," was Roselius'. The cost was steep. Including the buyers premium, it went for \$862,500.

It was the most expensive shotgun ever sold at auction, and most expensive by a long way. The previous record was \$287,500 in 2007 for a shotgun made for the Czar of Russia.

"I thought it best that we get out of there," Jay said, "but he kept buying."

Jason, who graduated with degrees in history and political science in college, also purchased a number of prized Colt pistols and revolvers that only added to his collection because of his admiration for the engraving of Gustav Young.

But flags and other memorabilia struck a chord with Roselius. He even had a dental chair of one Doc Holliday.

"Just anything connected with history, he loved," said Reva, his mother.

But this purchase was different. Teddy Roosevelt's "F" Grade shotgun was his Holy Grail. A Japanese buyer offered Roselius \$1 million for it, but he politely turned him away.

This shotgun was really not Roselius' – at least that's the way he saw it. It was the people's. And he was determined



Jason Roselius

to see that it one day come to the Texas Panhandle, that place that was home.

Love for history and outdoors

Jason Roselius died much the way he lived – by putting himself second, by helping others. He once stopped his truck when driving between his country home in Guthrie, Okla., and Oklahoma City because a charity was promoting a sale that was a fundraiser.

Roselius was curious. When he got all the information he needed, and felt good about the charity, he wrote the group a check for \$5,000

and went on his way.

In January 2018, Roselius was talking on the phone with law partner Jack Mattingly, Jr., from his ranch home in Guthrie. Then Mattingly recalls that Roselius abruptly said, "Hey, I gotta go."

Law enforcement authorities believe that Roselius saw his two dogs struggling to get out of an adjacent icy pond. Further, authorities believe Roselius entered the cold water to rescue his dogs. Neither the dogs nor Jason survived. He was 48.

"It just feels like the stars are falling," Mattingly told Oklahoma City's KOCO. "He was one of the most loving people. He helped so many people."

His death devastated all who knew him. He and Amy, his second wife, had been married only five weeks. Theirs was a happy blended family of four children.

Amy was also from Panhandle, Texas, 28 miles northeast of Amarillo. Roselius was an overachieving football player, a bright student who went to state in ag competition and industrial arts.

"Jason latched on to history in high school," said Liz Hughes, his sister. "That was his passion."

So was the outdoors. Jay and his son hunted as much as they could. He developed an appreciation for wildlife and guns.

Roselius followed some scholarships to West Texas A&M, 45 miles away in Canyon. He threw himself into just about any organization that would have him. He followed his passion with a double major of history and political science.

"Jason always said that if you wanted to know about the future, just look at the past," Jay said.

Dr. Pete Peterson, a WTAMU history professor, encouraged Roselius to pursue a career in law. That resonated with him. Roselius would graduate magna cum laude with a 3.95 GPA in 1991. He graduated from the University of Oklahoma Law School four years later.