

JOE MANTEGNA

STAR OF STAGE AND SCREEN

AL HAGUE TALKS WITH THIS 'STAR' OF STAGE, SCREEN AND TELEVISION – AND PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANTLY, HUSBAND, FATHER, PATRIOT, PHILANTHROPIST AND CLAY TARGET SHOOTING ENTHUSIAST.

Joe Mantegna's range of work includes motion pictures, stage productions and television shows that has made him an icon of the American entertainment industry. He currently stars in the television show *Criminal Minds*, hosts the

annual Memorial Day Concert on PBS and a new show that started in June on the Outdoor Channel.

I recently had the opportunity to chat with him about many topics, ranging from his family roots, his abiding faith and love for his country and his passion for shooting sports. Joe's family roots are easily traced to Sicily, from where his Grandfather (on his father's side) emigrated so many years ago. The family settled in Oklahoma and this Grandfather found work in the coal mines while the family supplemented their lives

with a small 50 acre farm (which Joe still owns). When his Grandfather passed away, his paternal Grandmother moved the family to Chicago where Joe was born.

According to Joe, growing up in Chicago was far different than the stories he would hear from his Dad, who died from tuberculosis at the young age of 57. As a young man living an urban life on the shores of Lake Michigan, Joe somehow longed for the rural life and the great outdoors, even though the family lived in an apartment.

JOE MANTEGNA WITH MEMBERS OF USA SHOOTING.



■ How did you get started in shooting sports?

Growing up in Chicago, I never even held or fired a gun until I was 19 years old and that happened quite by accident. At that time, there was a skeet club on the lakeshore and I would often ride my bike passed the club and would stop to watch. I'd always thought that this pastime was strictly for farm or country folk, but I noticed the men at this club drove big fancy cars and dressed nice – and seemed to be having a lot of fun.

One day as I was leaning against the fence watching, when a gentlemen came over and asked if I'd like to have a go. I told him I didn't have a gun and had never even held a gun. He told me not to worry and invited me in. He took me to his car where he took out a spare gun and handed it to me. From the minute I pulled the trigger I was hooked. Up until then the only firearm I'd seen was several years earlier as a young kid when a policeman had shot a bad guy in the leg in the alley near our apartment! I can tell you, that left an impression!

My new found friend turned out to be the Club President and he was kind enough to guide me in the purchase of my first gun, a Remington. For years I'd go to the club and shoot skeet – and got a lot of help from the members. That was the beginning of my love affair with shooting.

■ Lets discuss the Second Amendment. Do you have concerns about threats to it and if so, what do you feel we can do about it?

I certainly believe in the Second Amendment as it provides for our right to bear arms. I think where the problem lies is in the approach to exercising it. Too many well intentioned folks are very rigid and

I believe more flexibility and understanding is necessary. Every State has different laws for the purchase, handling and ownership of firearms. That's a bit confusing. To me, education is a huge part of responsible gun ownership and we need to provide more education. After all, to get a drivers license we require significant knowledge of the rules of the road. Lets find a system that would require education as well as responsibility. We need to standardize our approach and make it effective, so good responsible people can enjoy their rights.

■ I know you have worked a lot in Italy making films and such. Have you had the chance to bird hunt or shoot clays in Italy?

"I certainly believe in the Second Amendment as it provides for our right to bear arms."



Yes, I have been to Italy a lot – not just for work, I also have family there and we go as often as we can. So far I've not done any shooting but I plan to. In fact, I hope to make a trip to the Brescia area and visit Beretta and other manufacturers there quite soon.

■ With your extensive background and experience in the entertainment arena, if you were granted one wish to portray any person in history, from any walk of life, who would it be?

That's a great question – and to be honest I sort of already have. When we made the movie, The Rat Pack, I was Dean Martin and there's no question he would be at the top of my list. However, perhaps one man I most admire in history would have to be Abe Lincoln. His oratory, his writing and his leadership at one of the worst times in our country's history certainly is a fascination to me. Not sure how the make up would work out, but what a challenge that would be!

■ What's your favorite place to shoot?

Pretty much anywhere that throws challenging and entertaining targets. I do shoot most often at Oaktree and I do like Triple B in Rosemead (CA).

■ Have you ever tried trapshooting?

Yes I have – I enjoyed it but the best I ever shot was 23/25. I need to learn more about it and have great admiration for the trap shooters that are so good at it.

■ What do you feel can be done to grow shooting sports in general and improve public perception?

On a personal level, I'd like to see

high profile people who enjoy shooting sports be more vocal about it. Many have larger concerns about political correctness and I understand that. However, if we could speak out more and offer more education to the public, then perhaps that would benefit the sport.

We'll always have those that oppose hunting and anything to do with shotguns – the only cure is their education. It would be nice if people could have an open mind and learn both sides and then make a decision based on facts. Too many people just follow the 'naysayers' to fit in.

■ It's well documented that you are dedicated to several charities such as those benefiting autism. Is that close to your heart for a personal reason?

Yes. My eldest daughter, Mia, was born autistic and my wife Arlene and I support those charities that do their best to raise awareness. It's a tough illness and it is quite often mis-understood – so again, education is what's needed.

■ Have you ever taken any shooting lessons?

Yes I did, years ago, but I have been fortunate to shoot with some very good shooters. I shot a lot with Robert Stack and more recently I have shot often with Kim Rhode, the Olympian, and by watching her you can learn a lot. I certainly could use more instruction but my time is limited so most of my shooting is only when I'm able to attend the charity events that I get invited too.

■ Tell me about bird hunting. Have you had much experience and if so do you enjoy it?

Several years back I was asked to do an American Sportsman Show

and it was to be a pheasant hunt. At the time, I didn't even have a hunting license so I had to get one quick! I did the show and I enjoyed it quite a lot, but again, the opportunity for hunting just isn't there for me. I think I'm better breaking clays anyway!

■ **What is your favorite gun?**
I'm Italian – so I've always owned a Beretta. I have two O/Us – and have for years. I have other guns that I have either been given or awarded, but I shoot Beretta for clays, pretty much exclusively.

■ **Do you like to shoot for fun or do you like to compete?**
Mostly fun – but at most events I am very competitive. Even so, I'd say I'm very much a recreational shooter.

■ **Is there anyone else in your family that enjoys shooting sports?**
Yes – my youngest daughter Gia. She is starting to make her way in the entertainment world and likes to shoot – and is doing well. I've given her a Charles Daly and she enjoys the sport. It's fun for me to see her doing well.

■ **When you're shooting sporting clays, what are the toughest targets for you?**
Truthfully, any target that is going away like a trap shot. I'm much more comfortable swinging the gun on crossers and such, which I assume comes from my early skeet days.

■ **I'm certain most everyone in the country has seen you hosting the National Memorial Day Concert on PBS. Clearly this has a very special meaning to you. Would you share some of your thoughts on this special day?**

The National Memorial Day Concert is the most important thing I do all year. It represents so much of what's good about this country. It's a time to be thankful for our liberties. It's a time to acknowledge and salute the men and women in the military. It's also time to remember those who have given the ultimate sacrifice so that we may have the freedoms we enjoy every day.

It's also the toughest thing I do because it's so emotional – not that I am complaining, as I'm honored to be a part of this day. The heart breaking stories of our wounded warriors are stories that need to be told – so that more people will appreciate these brave men and women. We simply can't do enough to thank them for their service and sacrifice. I'm grateful to play a small part in that effort. I also support the efforts of the Wounded Warrior Project and would encourage everyone to get involved. It's also important to remember it's an opportunity to celebrate all that makes America great.

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JOE MANTEGNA (RIGHT) IS PRESENTED A SHOTGUN PRIZE AT A CHARITY EVENT.

■ **I understand you have a new show coming soon to the Outdoor Channel. Can you give us a glimpse as to what it will be about?**

Yes – the name of the show will be 'Gun Stories'. The focus will be on the history of different guns, how they are manufactured, where and other information. We also plan to interview people associated with firearms and their history.

■ **It's my understanding that by the time this issue hits the mailboxes of our readers, you will have your 'star' in Hollywood on the Walk of Fame. This is certainly a huge honor in the entertainment business. How does it feel?**

There are a lot of emotions involved. I've been thinking about it for a while now, since they told me I had been selected. I'd have to say that this is validation for me that I do belong in the business. I have accomplished what I dreamed of for so many years. And I'm so proud to be part of the

history of this city and this industry.

The selection process is not just for movies or stage work, but also a recognition of the work you have done for others – and that's special to me. When they make the notification that you've been selected, they do their best to give you some choices as to where the star will be located. I asked to be next to my boyhood idol Errol Flynn – and it was granted. On the other side is the great Debbie Reynolds.

I've been in theatre since high school and I've been so blessed to live my dream – so I guess another word would be satisfying, as well as a sense of accomplishment, but additionally I feel honored.

One of the many reasons I am so involved with supporting the military is back in the sixties, as a young man, I tried to join the US Marine Corp and my less than 20-20 eyesight prevented me from passing the physical to fly planes. I re-entered the draft, was somehow given a high number and missed out on a military life. I've always felt someone took my place, and if circumstances had been a bit different, my life would not have led me to this point. Grateful is probably the biggest word I would use to express my feelings about this honor.

Personal Thanks

I want to thank Joe Mantegna for taking the time to share not only his love of shooting sports but also his love of country and his fellow Americans. It's nice to see someone famous be outspoken about his beliefs without concern for politics. Joe is a plain speaking man, easy to talk with and his sincerity is very genuine. It just goes to show, you can meet the nicest people at the range. ■