



ANYTHING LEFT-HANDED

by Lucy Gordan

In Latin sinister means unlucky, inauspicious, and left so there's a sinister side to many of the individuals who approach a certain London store. They walk on the left down Regent Street (towards Piccadilly), turn sharply to the left up Brewer Street in Soho, and left again into a tiny, cramped shop at no. 57 called Anything Left-Handed Ltd, one of the few shops in the world where the customer is seldom right.

I discovered Anything Left-Handed Ltd. or "ALH" for short (tel. 011-44-207-437-3910) in 1976, a year after my first of two left-handed daughters was born. During my interview with chef Heinz Beck for *Epicurean Traveler*, I noticed that he too was left-handed and remembered that ALH's product line, 200 items to help sinistral people in their everyday lives, included a wide variety of kitchenware: corkscrews, a whole tribe of left-handed cutters, peelers, can-openers, knives, ladles, and other kitchen supplies. Other best-sellers for outside the kitchen are left-handed golf clubs, fountain pens, pencil sharpeners, computer peripherals, rulers reading from right to left, and even greeting cards and address books opening from left to right. The newest products, just launched, are a left-handed camera and three-dimensional games for left-handed children.

This unique shop was the brainchild in 1968 of William Gruby, an elfin, bespectacled English advertizing executive who enjoyed sporting Sherlock Holmes-type cloaks in honor of the left-handed "detective." One evening he and his wife Claudia discovered that four of their dinner guests were left-handed; inevitably, the many woes of being a "lefty," "southpaw," "mollydooker," or "assar" dominated the evening's conversation.

His curiosity aroused, the right-handed Gruby began researching the left-hander's highly discriminated world, and discovered that, although lefties





accounted for at least 15% of the population, most manufacturers believed all people were right-handers. Thus, when he tried to commission manufacturers to make anything his customers asked for, most firms met these requests with a wall of resistance. So he ended up personally manufacturing what industry wouldn't.

Fifteen years ago the company changed hands. Present owners Keith and Lauren Milsom are both left-handed, as are all the staff. "Our business," they like to say, "is doubly rewarding, because, like Gruby, we don't just sell products, but provide an advice service. Many people spend ages in our shops (Clacton on Sea, Worcester, and Edinburgh, as well as Brewer Street), discussing their experiences and trying out various gadgets.

Especially after joining our Left-Hander's Club, founded in 1990 along with our quarterly newsletter, 'The Left-Hander,' they leave feeling a kindred spirit."

In 1992 the Club launched International Left-Handers Day, celebrated annually on August 13, (in London at the Covent Garden Plaza) and the newsletter now counts 12,000 subscribers worldwide. Moreover, in 2002 technical guru Dennis Zekic revamped the website launched by the Milsoms in 2000. Compared to a sales average of one or two a day before the revamp, the site now totals more than thirty orders a day, predominantly international.

The website has opened other avenues. "We get requests from people all over the world," Keith Milsom told me, "asking if they can sell our left-handed goods in their own country. They want to set up a business like ours. This year we've opened a franchise in Ankara, Turkey, and are negotiating with several distributors in Australia."

For anyone interested in possibly starting a left-handed business, the Milsoms have put together what they call "Shop-in-the Box," they say "gives you all you need to test a small left-handed business in your area — our manual on 'How to run a successful left-handed shop,' a selection of our best-selling products, signs and display materials, even carrier bags!"

Otherwise, for a free full color catalog, send a self-addressed envelope to Anything Left-Handed, 57 Brewer Street, London W 1F 9UL. All products are available by mail order or from the credit card hotline: 011-44-208-770-3722. Website: www.anythingleft-handed.co.uk.

