

ARMED & Female

BY MASSAD AYOUB



I didn't come up with the term "Armed and Female." Paxton Quigley did. She's a neat lady. I know her, trained her, taught with her, and have the privilege of recommending her book to people, because it's an absolute manifesto for women who take control of their surroundings. In fact, I borrowed the title just to get your attention.

Which, now that I have it, shall be directed to the concept of women and defensive firearms. I remember one of my first female students. She was in her sixties, an accomplished academician and author with strong roots in what was then called "women's liberation." She had considered the gun to be a hideous side effect of testosterone poisoning. Then, she was assaulted by armed criminals and nearly died. "It occurred to me," she told me later, "that I had neglected one element of my empowerment."

She bought a .38 Special. She came and took our training. We got her into a better .38 Special and showed her how to use it. That one phase of missing empowerment was now complete.

End of story.

Yes, dammit, it is that simple. I am an unlikely feminist, but a feminist nonetheless. I have knowingly risked my career more than once to testify for women, in a world where I was a firearms instructor dependent on cops coming to me for training and I was testifying against police departments that wrongfully fired female officers for not "qualifying" with their department's male-oriented guns, holsters, and shooting techniques. When I testified against the FBI in 1980 for the women in the class action suit of Christine Hansen, et. al. V. Federal Bureau of Investigation, I was told it would be the kiss of death to my career. So be it. The women were right and the Bureau was wrong, and I couldn't have looked my then three-year-old first-born daughter in the face had I not gone there and spoke the truth.

I testified. The court listened. The court found in favor of the women, and the Bureau was ordered to "revise and update its obsolete and sexist firearms training." The Bureau's sweeping revisions followed in 1981, bringing them solidly into the mid-1960s, but by the Year 2000 they were back at the cutting edge for the first time in half a century. Some of the old heads still hate me for it. Tough ____ (you supply the word).

For more than a century, the handgun has been called in American lore “the equalizer.” There is truth here. The sad part of the truth is that a gun makes an emotional dwarf like Sirhan Sirhan equal to the destruction of a giant like Robert Kennedy. The happy part of the truth is that a handgun makes a petite and gentle female equal to the destructive power of an enraged adult male, or a gang of them.



Justine Ayoob, 13, and proud author after winning national champion parent/child team title. Justine used a Springfield .45 automatic with full power ammo.

Remember back a quarter century to the murder of Kitty Genovese in New York, stabbed to death before the eyes of at least 38 witnesses who did nothing. Their statements afterwards made “I didn’t want to get involved” a catch-phrase for the downside of American values. Remember the incident called “the wilding” in Central Park much more recently, a brilliant Manhattan woman gang-raped and beaten into profound brain damage by a gang of “youths” armed only with their physical strength. Remember these, and tell me again that women have no need for guns.

Isolation factor

When we return to values of the past, we must remember the priorities of those who lived that life and made it work. If we escape the modern lifestyle for the “backwoods home,” we need to remember how those before us made that lifestyle work. Oh, yeah: grow your own food. Oh, yeah: can’t be dependent on constantly-plowed roads and constantly-running electricity. Oh, yeah: can’t be dependent on instantly-responding emergency services. Services like firefighters...paramedics...and police.

If you needed fire extinguishers and battery-powered smoke alarms in the city, you really need them in the hinterlands. If you needed emergency medical skills in the city, you need them far more when ETA (estimated time of arrival) of EMTs or paramedics is measured on the minute hand or maybe even the hour hand instead of on the second hand.

And, if you need cops—armed men and women prepared to use force to protect you against the most violent armed criminals that roam abroad in society—well, sad to say, the same need for self-sufficiency is stark. Welcome, not just to American society, but to the Planet Earth.

Face the reality. Perhaps the meek will inherit the earth, but not until those of us who ain’t meek are done with it.

It is not a choice of being predator or prey. A lot of people miss that, including one otherwise intelligent reporter who went through my school recently. If you become a wolf to ward off the other wolves, you have defeated your own purpose. You have, as my generation learned to say, destroyed the village in order to save it.

No. The ideal is to be the sheepdog. You did not come with intent to harm. You came with intent to protect. If the wolf approaches your flock, you will bark to warn him off. If he comes closer, you will threaten with your more aggressive presence. And then, if he is stupid enough to attack, you will do what instinct tells you to do to a predator who is trying to tear your lamb’s throat out.

You will interdict the predator. And you will do what you must to stop him from harming that lamb, even if you must tear his throat out.

And in the end, if you were not born to be the protector like the sheepdog, it will suffice if you are a mother sheep with a .38 Special. Because, when you think about it, if mother sheep had guns to protect their lambs, they wouldn't need sheepdogs at all.

Attributes

Most firearms, and most shooting techniques, were developed by males, for males. Females, particularly petite specimens with proportional size hands, have to work harder to find pistols and revolvers that fit their hands. Some male-oriented shooting techniques won't work well; conversely, some techniques work better for women than for men.

Let's look at gun size first. In a rifle or shotgun, the most important dimension is called "pull length," the measurement from the butt of the gun to where the finger touches the trigger. A good rule of thumb is that the long gun fits you if you can have your finger on the trigger and the butt reaches just to the inside edge of your crooked elbow. With a handgun, perfect fit is achieved if the web of the hand is high on the grip-frame, the barrel is in line with the forearm, and your finger can properly reach the trigger.



Cat Ayoob, then 19, after winning a national championship with her Beretta 9mm and Black Hills ammo. (Photo courtesy Guns Annual.)

If a woman is smaller statured, she may need a custom or cut-down stock. Many rifle and shotgun makers offer versions with a "youth stock" geared for people in the lower five feet of height range with proportional arms. In handguns, some that work spectacularly well with smaller hands are the GI (1911 style) .45 automatic with short trigger, the Browning Hi-Power 9mm, The Kahr series pistols, the Heckler and Koch P7, and the J-frame Smith & Wesson revolver.

Now, let's look at techniques. The average woman's fingers will be shorter by about a digit's length than the average man's. She will have less upper body mass and strength than her brother. Thus, some shooting techniques may work better for her than for him, or vice versa. For example, most men operate a semiautomatic pistol by holding the frame in their dominant hand, and reaching across their chest with the free hand and grabbing the slide to "rack" it back. This is an upper body strength intensive technique, pitting arm against arm, and a lot of smaller or older women can't do it well with many pistols. They'll have better luck with the "slingshot" technique, in which the support hand firmly grabs the slide and pulls back while the gun-hand is pushing forward. This can be combined with a turn of the hips that puts the entire body weight into the movement,

making it happen almost effortlessly.

The trendy Weaver Stance is not ideal for most women. Centering on an isometric push of the gun hand against the pull of the support hand, it puts a heavy value on upper body muscle tone. If a woman is not especially athletic, she will often be better served with the Isosceles stance, in which both arms lock straight out ahead of the body. The Isosceles is a skeletal support intensive technique, and works irrespective of size or bulk.

Most women also adapt to shooting behind cover better than men. This is because, even if the height is the same, they have a lower center of gravity than their brothers. A she has about 30 degrees more pelvic flexibility than a he, and is generally more limber. "Position rifle" shooting matches that involve such postures as sitting and prone are routinely won overall by woman shooters. Women are noted for better fine motor skills, which adapt directly to manipulating a trigger. Shooting has been described as "10% physical, 90% mental," and any high school teacher can tell you that females tend to have better concentration than males.

Management of crisis? Hysteria and "getting the vapors" are strictly cultural predispositioning things. There's reason to believe that women may actually be cooler under stress than men, if they are prepared and conditioned for emergencies. Tests we did with telemetry at Lethal Force Institute during high stress crisis roleplays showed that females did not elevate their vital signs in pressure situations as rapidly as men, and their increased vital signs plateaued sooner.

Anyone who says "women can't shoot" hasn't seen skilled female gunners in action. Kim Rhode will smoke most any male on a trap or skeet range. I've seen Gila Hayes win the open state championship, not just that for females, from the men in a combat shoot with a .45 automatic. Bowling pin matches in Barb Budnar's area declined in male attendance by about 50% after she started shooting there; that's how many couldn't take being beaten by a woman. It's a rare police revolver shooter of the male gender who can keep pace with national champion Dorcia Meador, and a rare male bullseye shooter with a hand as steady on target as Ruby Fox's.

Furthermore, the almost unanimous consensus of firearms instructors is that females learn the gun faster than males. Quite apart from the dexterity and concentration factors, they are free of "testosterone poisoning." They don't instinctively balk at taking instructions from a male in a male-oriented discipline as if being a student was some sort of tribal subjugation. It clears the path for a faster learning curve.



Proud dad Pat Higgins coaches daughter Laura, 11, with CZ 75 9mm pistol.

"She won't dare shoot"

Some men fear that women will be too faint-hearted to pull the trigger of a self-defense weapon. Faint hearts come in both genders. It's in the mind, not in the chromosomes. One offender climbing through a window looked at the gun in one of my female student's hands and said, "You ain't got the balls to shoot me, Bitch." He woke up in the hospital with his bullet-shattered arm amputated. Another rapist told his eight-months pregnant victim, "Bitch, I'm gonna f--- that baby right out of you!" As he bent to remove his pants, she smashed him in the head with a table lamp, picked up his dropped gun, and emptied it into him.

With equivalent training, the female may indeed be deadlier than the male. One good laboratory for this is law enforcement, where use of force training is identical between the genders. I've noticed over the years that policewomen are less hesitant than men to use appropriate force. A male officer may be reluctant to reach for his baton in a fistfight or for his gun when the opponent draws a knife, thinking that the manly thing to do is handle things with his bare hands. Females labor under no such delusions, and will be quicker to employ the appropriate "force option," by and large.

Suggested research

Check out a new organization called MothersArms. It's made up primarily of moms who use guns as one of their options to keep their children protected. Their website is at <http://www.mothersarms.org>. You also want to take a look at Women and Guns magazine, found on the better-stocked newsstands.

Paxton Quigley's book *Armed and Female* is the best intellectual treatment of the armed woman's decision. Once an active member of Handgun Control Inc., Paxton assessed her position and took control of her life after a close friend was savagely raped. She's now an advocate of armed women, and a firearms instructor who specializes in all-women's classes. The aforementioned Gila Hayes is one of our premier female firearms instructors of either gender, and her book *Effective Defense: the Woman, the Gun, and the Plan* is must reading. *Armed and Female* is \$5.99 and *Effective Defense* is \$13.95 from Police Bookshelf, P.O. Box 122, Concord, NH 03302. Shipping is \$4.90, which covers both books if ordered together.

Owning a firearm and keeping it for self-defense is an intensely personal decision. That said, it has given me a measure of comfort as a husband to know that my wife is licensed to carry a gun. It has made me feel better as a father to know that my oldest daughter is licensed to carry, and the younger is adept with any of the firearms I keep around for security. Elder brat was national champion woman at the National Tactical Invitationals of 1996, and in 1998, younger brat and I won national parent/child team honors at the National Junior Handgun Championships.

There has been a lot of misinformation about women and "the equalizer." The bottom line is, against violent, lethal assault, the firearm is simply the most logical and effective line of defense. When most women carry guns, most rapists will masturbate alone in the dark.