

ARMED AND SCARED

Corey Van't Haaff aims to pack a Glock

FAT, FEMALE AND FORTYISH sums me up as an ideal candidate for gall-bladder problems or a “before” poster child at Jenny Craig, but there’s one mould I definitely don’t fit: gun owner. And yet, this is what I’m about to become.

Given the proliferation of drive-by shootings, targeted hits and the very real possibility of mistaken identity, I’m scared to death of what might happen should trouble come knocking at my door. I live alone in a little house in the middle of Metro Vancouver’s sprawling suburbia, and don’t feel that my white picket fence provides much protection.

So I enroll in the mandatory course you must take—and pass—to get a restricted firearms license, and then start shopping for my very own Glock. I don’t have to travel far. A lovely little gun shop had just opened several blocks away in an ironic location: about halfway between the family-friendly Burke Mountain shooting range, where police train, and the Pickton farm.

As I roll my Sebring into a parking space in front of the heavily barred windows, I wonder if I’m being caught on camera. For a brief moment I imagine walking into a situation where thugs are purchasing semi-automatics, taking careful note of any witnesses to the transaction. I remind myself to keep my eyes down and be ready to roll for cover.

But I needn’t worry. The store is empty except for two knowledgeable staffers—a man and a woman. They allow me to compare, side-by-side, the Glock I have my heart set on, a Sig and a Beretta. I am dressed all in black, still wearing my Gucci knock-off sunglasses, promoting the charade that this is just another typical day. I pray that they didn’t see me almost hyperventilating in the car.

As I pick up the Sig and slide back the action, it catches my finger and tears my skin. *Such an amateur*, I think. I put the gun down and say, “I’m bleeding.” The woman offers a first-aid kit and I bandage myself up, embarrassed that I can’t even smoothly load the gun because of my total lack of upper-body strength.

The clerks are patient with me as I enquire about gun storage. What I need is a trigger lock, as well as a lockable case, to store in a “not easily accessible location” in my home. I want a pretty case, I say, something shiny yet tough, like a cross between a Tiffany tennis bracelet and a Harley Davidson. The woman shows me something with a nice handle and lots of chrome.

Back home, pondering my pending purchases, I invite my cleaning lady to have a cup of coffee with me. I tell her that I may soon install a locking drawer in my bedroom, that the drawer will contain a gun, and that she is to totally ignore it when she cleans. This doesn’t go over very well. She is not all that comfortable with the idea of cleaning around a gun, and it takes me several minutes to assure her that the vibration from the vacuum won’t cause an accidental discharge.

A few weeks after my sidearm window-shopping spree, the owners of the local gun store are arrested after the RCMP seizes several high-powered weapons and more than 1,500 rounds of armour-piercing bullets, which are “unauthorized,” according to news reports. I now wonder if I would be able to distinguish the good guys from the bad if I ever have to load my gun and take aim.

In any case, I’m not alone in wanting to join the ranks of armed British Columbians. In 2008, there were 880,124 registered guns in the province. Around 82,000 of these were restricted weapons like the one I will buy—a snazzy little 9 mm that matches my new Fossil handbag—and 29,000 were classified as prohibited.

There’s something to be said for leveling the playing field. It isn’t that I think people *should* carry guns. Rather, people *do* carry guns, and many are people I would rather



not encounter, armed or not. So the question is: Does my owning a gun make me less likely to be a victim? As I lie alone in bed each night, I’m thinking maybe it does.

On a Friday night, my friend Bernadette comes over for our weekly dinner and movie: two gals eating thin-crust pizza and watching *The Kite Runner* or *Fugitive Pieces* or *Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*. “I’m getting a gun,” I say casually. She looks at me.

“I don’t want you taking it out, showing it to me, and making *Charlie’s Angels* gun poses. My luck, it’ll go off accidentally,” she says. “Are you really going to get one? When would you use it?”

My mind wanders for a moment. I hear the theme song from *The Sopranos* playing in my head and imagine myself after a bad day at work. There’s a knock at the door. I answer, a pistol-packing mama with a gun in one hand and my toy poodle Talula, decked out in a Suzy Quatro-inspired pink-and-black leather jacket, in the other. It’s a natural-gas salesman, extolling the virtues of switching from Terasen to a new provider. I nod in the direction of the gun and say, “My little friend here thinks you should get off my property, and fast.” He turns and runs.

“I’m really getting one, and no, I won’t show it to you,” I tell Bernadette, knowing she’ll never understand my decision and knowing, with a husband at her side, that she’ll never need to.

Her question, though, is valid—when would I use it? The few times I have gone to target practice, I’ve had a blast. Holding a firearm gives me the illusion of having much more power than, say, wielding a platinum MasterCard—which you’ll need if you’re going to take up shooting. It ain’t cheap. A basic Glock will set you back around \$800, including the extra magazine, and ammunition is a recurring expense. Then there’s eyewear, ear protection, carrying case, and you haven’t even paid your club dues yet.

It turns out I can shoot pretty good, especially for a girl who takes three tries when pointing the remote at the DVD player to get the damn thing to play. I also practice on a computer-animated program that helps me to aim properly. But could I line up the sights with the bridge of the nose of some beastly bastard busting through my door, take a deep breath, and pull the trigger?

I don’t honestly know. But what I do know is that, should he come through my door in the middle of the night with who knows what on his mind, I want the decision to defend myself with deadly force to be all mine. **V**