

My First Gun

By Serena Wood

Buying your first gun is like having your first kiss; it is a moment that will never be forgotten. No matter how many other guns we buy in our lifetime, nothing will replace the memory of the first time we plunk down our hard-earned cash and walk out of the store with the gun we've been dreaming about.

When I bought my first gun I knew next to nothing about firearms. Most of my friends and family members weren't "gun people" so I'd had very little exposure to guns. I had never even fired a handgun, but for some inexplicable reason I'd been wanting one since I was a teenager. I'd gone shooting with friends and fired .22 LR and .223 caliber rifles, but that was the extent of my experience. As my 21st birthday drew closer, I became more and more excited at the prospect of owning a handgun. Part of it was the desire to be able to protect myself, but mostly I just wanted to learn how to shoot because it seemed fun. I was a bit nervous because I hadn't been raised in a pro-gun environment and a bit of that was sticking with me, but that was a minor obstacle, which I intended to quickly overcome.

As the day that I could legally purchase a handgun drew nearer I began to prepare. About two weeks before my birthday I found a small gun store just outside of town and stopped by to see what they had. To be honest, I had no idea what I was looking for, although it seemed prudent to start with a small caliber so that I had something easy to learn on that wouldn't intimidate me. I had no idea what brands I should consider or avoid, or what features might be best for a novice. The gun store employee was very knowledgeable and helpful; I told him that I had no idea what to get but I wanted something in a small caliber. He showed me a few revolvers, which didn't appeal to me much at the time, then showed me a few girly looking guns that would fit in the palm of my hand.

I realized I wanted something larger and he pointed me towards the used Ruger 22/45 target pistols on consignment. *Now, this is more like it!* I thought. A semi-automatic, built more for accuracy than concealment, that took cheap and easy-to-find .22 LR ammunition, sounded like a good first gun for me. The model I chose featured a stainless finish and a 5-1/2 inch bull barrel. All the controls were easy to operate, and I could easily reach the safety and the magazine release while holding the gun. Being right-handed helped here because both of those are on the left side of the gun.

The next step was to complete my homework before I could actually buy the gun. The gun store employee informed me that I would need a Handgun Safety Certificate issued by an authorized dealer or

instructor, and then I'd have to go through the 10-day waiting period before I could bring my new-to-me gun home. I searched online for someone who could issue the HSC and found a range nearby. A few days later I took a (very simple) safety test whose questions seemed to center around keeping guns away from children and not pointing a loaded gun at a person you didn't intend to shoot. A little basic, I thought, but no big deal. I walked out, business-card-sized certificate in hand. At that point I just had to wait four days until my birthday.

Because it took place on a Sunday that year and the gun store was closed, I had to wait until the following day – oh, the agony! I walked in, showed the employee my HSC, filled out the paperwork, and paid for the gun. A week and a half later I returned, demonstrated that I knew how to safely load and unload the gun and apply the safety, and walked out a gun owner.

I picked up some cheap practice ammo and headed out to a nearby range with a friend.

Although I'd love to talk about how I picked up the gun and shot a perfect group the first time, I have to admit that's not how it happened. At that point I was feeling a bit apprehensive and asked my friend to shoot

first. After watching him fire 10 rounds through my gun, I decided it was my turn. I loaded 10 more rounds into the magazine, released the bolt, took a firm grip, pointed towards the target, clicked off the safety, aimed, and squeezed the trigger. I didn't hit the center of the target, but I hit close enough that I was satisfied with it for the time being.

Being a bit large for a .22 LR pistol at 9-1/2 inches in total length and relatively heavy at 35 ounces (unloaded) made it very easy and comfortable to shoot with very little recoil. This allowed me to learn to shoot with something that wasn't intimidating the way a .40 or .45 might be to a novice shooter. It was, in my opinion, the perfect introduction to shooting; easy to handle, cheap to shoot, and accurate.

I found the gun to be quite reliable overall with very few misfeeds. I shot whatever cheap ammunition I could find and had significant problems only with the CCI Stingers the gun-store owner gave me when I purchased the gun. As many as one of every five rounds jammed and the bullet lube was caked on so thick it actually filled the hollow-points, and built up inside the gun to the point that it made cleaning more difficult, so I switched back to the cheap rounds I could pick up at local sporting goods stores.

Since that day I've fired quite a few other guns and picked up a Springfield Armory XD-9 as my primary defense gun, but I still have my 22/45. I don't shoot it as much as I used to, but I always think about it fondly. It was, and always will be, my first gun.

