

Defensive Strategies



**By Lyn Bates,
Contributing Editor**

Linda Schultz is a 47-year-old woman who has lived with her boyfriend, Joe Russo, for several years in an upscale condo community in Palm City, Florida. They operate a pizza restaurant in a different, not so nice neighborhood. The restaurant is a few doors down from a gun store. It never would have occurred to Linda to get a gun, but Joe was more security conscious. The gun store owner introduced them to firearms, and they purchased a .38 Taurus revolver with a laser sight and a .380 Kel-Tec semi-auto. They went to a shooting range with a friend who had a .40 Smith & Wesson, and tried all three guns. Linda could not comfortably pull the trigger of the little Kel-Tec. She much preferred the easier-to-shoot Smith & Wesson semi-auto, so Joe traded guns with his friend, sold the Taurus, and they were left with the .40 S&W as their defense gun.

A couple of years passed. Joe would sometimes (legally) take the gun with him to the restaurant, but sometimes left it at home with

Lessons in Reality: “Just Pick It Up And Shoot”

Linda. When the gun was at home, it was always on one of the night tables in their bedroom, loaded, round in the chamber, and safety off. He would say to Linda as he was leaving, “The gun is on the nightstand. If you need it, it is ready and loaded, just pick it up and shoot.” Hundreds of times, she heard that refrain, “Just pick it up and shoot.” It became so familiar that she barely paid attention any more.

Linda and Joe experienced a robbery in the spring of 2009, and that made her hypervigilant. About a week later, when Linda was home alone, she heard a strange sound downstairs. She grabbed the gun, and ran through the house, heart pounding, terrified, looking for a burglar. She found nothing and no one.

Less than a week later, on Thursday morning, April 16, 2009, Joe left for work about 8:30, leaving the gun behind. About 15 minutes later, Linda heard another sound downstairs. Remembering her prior fruitless panic, she told herself that the sound meant nothing, remained calm, got dressed, and started downstairs, not even thinking of the gun back in her bedroom.

Linda’s condo has steps with a landing between the floors, and a balcony from the top of the stairs that overlooked the lower floor. She looked over the balcony, and saw a bearded man, dressed in jeans and hooded sweatshirt pulled over his head, using both hands to try to pry open the sliding glass door from her porch to the house. A shotgun

was resting between his legs.

Linda froze for an instant, realizing that this situation was bad. Her first conscious thought was, “He’s another burglar. He thinks nobody is home. If he sees that someone is here, he will go away,” so she continued down the stairs. She wanted to surprise him, and make him flee. She never thought of getting the gun. If she had thought of it, it would not have occurred to her that she could shoot through glass.

She got down the stairs, and he looked up and saw her. “What do you want?” she asked. She waved him off, but he didn’t seem startled, and he didn’t make any motion to leave. “Now what do I do?” she thought, and suddenly remembered the gun. She turned to run upstairs. He picked up his shotgun.

Linda made it to the third step before he fired through the glass door toward her. She knew she had been hit, but wasn’t sure whether it was with glass or buckshot. (Later analysis showed that if she had been on a lower step, his shot would probably have hit her in the head; if she had been a step or two higher, she might have been hit in the heart. Either could have been much more serious than her neck wound.)

By now, it was clear that he wasn’t intending to rob an unoccupied house. Linda, however, still thought that he was intent on robbery, and that he would try to force her to show him where money or valuables were in the house. She wanted to

stop him, and needed to get to her gun, fast, but as she continued to race up the steps, she tripped and fell on her face, fracturing her cheek bone. He fired again, just as she was falling, and the blast of buckshot passed over her, missing her entirely. (Again, later analysis showed that if she had not fallen accidentally at that instant, she probably would have been killed.)

She was hurt, winded, and somewhat disoriented, but she now knew that his plan wasn't to rob her. He hadn't shot just to get inside the house. He had shot deliberately at her. He was trying to kill her. She had no idea who he was, or why he was doing this, but now all of her attention was concentrated on getting her hands on that Smith & Wesson. She forced herself to scramble up the rest of the stairs, and to duck and race to the bedroom. Of course, the gun was on the night table that was on the far side of the bed, so she had to race around the bed to reach it. As she picked it up, she could tell that he was in the bedroom doorway, just 10-12 feet away, with his shotgun starting to point at her again. No time to aim, or even turn to around. She swung her gun behind her and fired blindly at him, and missed.

Instinctively, she ducked beside the bed, taking cover. She didn't know that a few inches of mattress won't stop a shotgun blast. Apparently her attacker didn't know that either, because when he couldn't see her any more, he didn't fire at her. Instead, he made the mistake of walking around the end of the bed, to find her sitting on the floor, with that .40 caliber muzzle pointed right at him.

Linda hadn't hesitated to fire her first shot, and she didn't hesitate now. She fired again, virtually point blank. "Oh, my God," he exclaimed, and gestured somewhere toward his leg. She fired again. This

time he doubled over a little bit, and said another, "Oh, my God". She fired a third time, and heard another "Oh, my God." She knew she had hit him three times, but she saw no blood, and he didn't fall down, nor did he drop his gun. "Not like in the movies," she thought, "Why don't you just run away? You know I'm going to keep shooting you if you don't. Go! Leave! Get out!" He finally turned, left the bedroom with his shotgun, and started downstairs.

"He's gone! He's out of here!" Linda thought joyfully, and started out of the bedroom to call 911. But she found him lying face up on the landing, his long gun nearby. She still had her gun, and it pointed itself directly at him. Her finger was on the trigger again. He made a brief motion toward his gun, realized the futility of that course of

action, and said, "No, don't shoot. I'm down."

At this point, most of you readers are probably thinking, if that was me, I would have kept him there until the police arrived. But this didn't happen to you, it happened to Linda, and from the beginning the thing she wanted most was to get this man out of her house. So she started screaming at him "Leave, go, get out of here!" He made it down the rest of the stairs. Linda picked up his shotgun and a portable phone, and followed him, feeling her own blood dripping down her neck and over her shoulder, but not feeling any pain. She made him walk to her front door, and outside, where, as

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it turned out, he had left his parked car. He got in his car, and started to drive away.

One of Linda's neighbors happened to be leaving their home at that moment, and Linda was able to yell, "He shot me! He robbed me! Follow him! Follow him!" she ordered, and the neighbor did. That neighbor was able to call the police with a description of his car and a partial license plate.

Meanwhile, Linda was finally able to stop running and call 911 herself. Other neighbors came out to help, and tried to staunch the blood. The first police officer on the scene made sure that she was going to be OK, got a brief description of what happened, and took off in his cruiser to chase the man. EMTs arrived quickly, and Linda was taken to a trauma center where she stayed for only one day after they took four buckshot pellets out of her neck. Just a surface wound, the doctors said.

What about the man who attacked her, and received three very serious bullet wounds for his trouble? Did he get away? No, his mother helped to turn him in. He had been driving his mother's car, and when he returned it to her, there was blood on the seat. She realized he was wounded, but he refused medical attention. She drove him to the Suburban Lodge, a hotel where he had a room, dropped him off, and then she went to the police and informed them of her son's condition and his location. She was afraid he was going to die. She was almost right.

When police arrived at the Suburban Lodge, they found Christopher Reber, 23, in the shower, naked, with a belt wrapped

around his neck, apparently trying to commit suicide. He refused numerous commands to get out of the bathroom. After he was forcibly taken out and the belt removed, he attempted to grab an officer's firearm, and again refused multiple commands to lay prone with his hands behind his back. Tasers were deployed three different times before he was eventually subdued and transported to a hospital where he stayed for a month.

Now the story gets even more bizarre. When Reber was still in intensive care, near death from his wounds, he told police detectives that he had been hired to kill Linda and Joe, by a former business partner of Joe's. This seemed to be a true deathbed confession, but when he began to recover, he changed his story, saying that he only intended to rob Linda and Joe.

Now the story gets even more bizarre. Reber had worked at Linda and Joe's pizza restaurant, for about five months, at least two years before this incident. He left their employ to pursue a career as a drug dealer. Although they fired him, his leaving was uneventful, and he appeared to harbor no grudge. So why did he show up, two years later, to break in to their home and shoot Linda? Was it to kill her for hire, or was the hiring a drug-induced fantasy? Was it to rob her, because he knew she ran a cash business and would have money on hand? Nobody can be certain.

In the trunk of the car he was driving police found bolt cutters, a pry-bar, gloves, and a gun case. His hotel room contained a blue-hooded sweatshirt with bloodstains and a receipt for the shotgun, purchased just three weeks before the incident. The shotgun was cut to an illegal length of 12.24 inches. The police don't seem able to make a conspiracy case for murder-for-

hire, since Reber retracted his story, but they are charging him with Armed Burglary of an Occupied Residence, Possession of a Short-Barreled Shotgun, and Attempted Murder. As of this writing, the case has not come to trial.

Because of the hood he was wearing, Linda never recognized him during the attack. She was flabbergasted when she was told his identity. Although he had been only a few feet away at the foot of her bed, and although she fired three rounds slowly, hearing his verbal reaction between each shot, she had never looked directly at his face. Her peripheral vision picked up only his beard. The inattentive blindness (what we used to call tunnel vision) she experienced during the attack focused her attention only on his hands (holding the gun) and his body (where she need to shoot).

I asked her how she is doing now, months after the shooting. "I am better than I was before the situation, because I am not naive any more," was her definite reply. "I used to be too trusting. Now I feel stronger and more mentally aware."

At the restaurant afterwards, many, many women came to Linda with words like, "You're my hero," or "I couldn't have done what you did."

To Linda, the reason she was able to do what she did was that Joe had conditioned her thinking, so that "Just pick it up and shoot" came to her when she needed it. "Mental conditioning is crucial. Think it through in advance, what would you do? Visualize it. Think about it. Be mentally prepared. That mental preparedness will propel your body into doing something."

And as we know, if you have physical training, that, too, will also kick in when you need it.

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