

Making a Difference



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How do we know that we are safe? More importantly, how do we know that we are at risk? As we learned in the children's story *The City Mouse and the Country Mouse*, different environments have different dangers and different advantages. Children accept the world in which they find themselves and learn to cope with whatever they find. They assume that everything and everyone is like what they see around them.

While we are most comfortable in the kind of place where we were raised, humans are extremely adaptable and adjust to diverse situations. Familiarity breeds not contempt but, rather, security. We know the things we must avoid and the things that we can ignore. We know what is safe and what is not.

One of the most important aspects of self-defense is being alert. We must remain constantly aware of our surroundings. If a situation makes us uneasy, we should leave the area. We learn to be self-reliant.

Evelyn Freeman was all these things. She knew how to take care

Taking Responsibility: Evelyn Freeman of Massachusetts

of herself, she paid attention to what was going on around her, and she paid attention to what others were saying.

Although she hadn't noticed anything changing in her immediate vicinity, the news was full of foreboding. There was a sense of grow-

gun, they should tell an adult. Evelyn did not have children, but there were plenty in the neighborhood. She has lots of nieces and nephews who visited often. 'I am the adult,' she mused. 'What do I do with the gun?'

Aware of possible dangers, Evelyn



Evelyn Freeman competing at a USPSA match in Harvard, MA.

ing violence in the city. It seemed almost nightly there were reports of robberies and "...home break-ins and kids finding guns in the gutter. Listening to the newscast would have you think it was time to put bars on the windows."

Her parents lived with her at the time, and there were numerous discussions about home safety. Evelyn's father was very ill, her boyfriend worked at night, and it seemed that defending her family and home would be up to her.

As she pondered this responsibility, she watched a program advising children that if they found a

determined to find out what to do with the gun. She enrolled in a 40-hour basic gun safety course at the local gun club. Many of the instructors competed on Sunday morning in PPC (Practical Pistol Competition) matches. After she bought her first gun, some of these highly supportive men invited her to join them.

Evelyn was surprised to find that not only did she enjoy shooting, but also she did it well. The woman who had never been good at sports, left the range each week satisfied with her performance, relaxed, and refreshed. Thorough concentration

as is needed to aim and slowly pull the trigger without anticipating the firing is a form of meditation. All attention is focused on the now.

After she had been attending the matches regularly, Joe Booker asked if she would like "...to try shooting a match that was a little different; moving around more." She jumped at the chance. So several of the Sunday competitors went to another gun club to shoot outdoors. Evelyn loved it.

The group began attending local USPSA (United States Practical Shooting Association) meets at clubs all over New England. It became a social event with the lunch stop an integral part. They would discuss the stages, how they had done, the shooters they had seen, the shooters who had not attended. She got to know people from all over the northeast: people who liked guns.

"I was to learn that I enjoyed shooting at steel plates, bowling pins, paper; static, swinging or bouncing: send it downrange and I'll give it a shot!"

Driven to improve, she took several self-defense training courses through AWARE (Arming Women Against Rape and Endangerment). Her instructors included W&G's Lyn Bates. AWARE strongly supports the concept of empowering oneself. Self-defense is "...the priority of the individual..." the knowledge that a person can rely on herself not someone else. She can make herself not afraid. She can develop the ability to defend herself. With training, the necessary confidence and knowledge increases.

Evelyn decided to volunteer at the USPSA annual charity match for AWARE in Albany. She chose not to compete because she was traveling alone and leery of bringing a firearm into New York.

However, she had barely arrived when her decision was assailed. Everyone encouraged her to compete.



Evelyn Freeman (left) with handgunning great Kay Clark Miculek.

The only person she recognized, a man she had met at another match earlier in the month, offered her his gun, ammunition and holster. Another she did not know at all offered a belt. Just as when she first went to her gun club in Boston, she was struck by the good will, support and generosity of people who barely knew her.

She volunteered and competed in the event for several years after the location changed to the Green Mountain Practical Shooter in Morrisville, Vermont. Her family accompanied her, turning it into an annual vacation. When the club decided to stop hosting it, everyone was disappointed, though understanding that such large events require months of planning and much volunteer labor.

Evelyn had continued to expand both her group of shooting friends and the radius of her operation. At a local gun show, she met Lynne Roberts, Massachusetts State Coordinator for Second Amendment Sisters. Immediately, she joined Lynne's monthly practice sessions.

As an experienced shooter, Evelyn began assisting with the training and coaching of the beginners. She became an NRA/MA State Certified Handgun Instructor, then a Range Officer. In addition to Lynne's practices and Introducing Women to Shoot programs, and her annual pilgrimage to AWARE, she

traveled to Maine multiple times to assist me with my Introduction to Shooting for Women.

Seeking new experiences with guns, she and Donna Majors discovered Babes with Bullets. The program was run by "...an outrageous woman by the name of Deb..." Ferns who "... firmly believed that pink was a primary color and every gun should have a touch of it." They had such a marvelous time that they have returned several times, bringing the "third horseman" of their entourage, Jackie Scott.

Evelyn did not set out to change the world. She took her initial gun safety course so she would be comfortable knowing how to handle a firearm "...to protect the children when the guns were flooding the gutters. I was always kind of shy, not good at small talk...and if you told me when I bought my first gun that one day I would be standing in front of the class teaching people how to shoot, I would not have believed it."

Her life is richer, now. She has found an activity she relishes. More important than the skills and attributes she has developed, she is happy for the enduring friendships she has made with people all across the country and the world.

Today, Evelyn is safe. Her family is safe. Her neighborhood is safe. There has not been a home invasion or burglary. No child in her area has found a gun "lying in the gutter" or elsewhere

Yet, it is immaterial that nothing evil has happened. The important thing was Evelyn's response to a possible threat. She evaluated her situation, determined what was needed, and acted to protect herself and her loved ones.

In the process she has helped not only herself, but also numerous other women to take personal responsibility.