

Making a Difference



**By Genie Jennings,
Contributing Editor**

Acres of Guns: Impressions of the 2011 NRA Convention

We considered attending the NRA Convention this year because it was going to be held in Pittsburgh, which is a day's drive, albeit a long day, from home. Once we decided to get on the road we added a fishing trip to the Everglades and touring and family visits throughout Florida. However, regardless of how things eventually turn out, it is good to have logical reasons to begin.

We had reserved a room outside the city, but drove in as soon as we arrived. We wanted to scope things out: locate the building, figure out where to park and how to get to where we wanted to be in the morning. I had registered for the Grassroots Training Seminar that began early on Friday morning. After six years of grassroots activity, I thought it was time to find out what I was supposed to be doing. Stuck in commuter traffic the next morning we were happy we knew exactly where we should be going when we crossed the bridge.

(One of 446, as the city sits in the confluence of three rivers. There are a couple tunnels, too.)

After the seminar we crossed to the Convention Center and found ourselves immersed in the "acres of guns." Without doing the math, I will accept that calculation. It certainly looked like fields full of exhibitors. There was every kind of gun you could think of, and several whose conception was hard to imagine. There were knives, and ammunition and accessories. There were antiques and a display of workable miniature guns. There were people selling hunting trips and people selling hearing aids. There were high-fashion concealing pocketbooks made from what appeared to be genuine exotic animal skins, some of which I was under the impression were illegal to market. (I am sure I must be mistaken.)

It was quite overwhelming. There was so much, I had no clue where to start. There were two gargantuan floors of vendors with some others scattered around the seminar floor. And so many people! The aisles were crammed with lookers and buyers. I took the easy out and just followed my husband, Stan, as he gleefully took in everything.

Expectations have a tremendous influence on reactions to situations. This was my first NRA Conven-

tion. Since 2001 we have attended the Gun Rights Policy Conference. I thought we were going to a larger version of GRPC. It was nothing like it at all, except for the focus on guns. I was used to learning a lot about a variety of subjects; of meeting lots of people who shared my interests; of socializing; of seeing a lot of familiar faces. Most of these attendees were focused on the merchandise.

Then we went to Methods of Concealed Carry, and everything clicked into place. Tom Marx was fantastic. Far from being a repetition of what we had heard before, as we had feared, this was superb.

There might be something that Marx does not know about carrying concealed, but if there is, he will be sure to learn about it as soon as the lack comes to his attention. He collects all kinds of gun paraphernalia, and had several banquet tables covered with changing displays. His holsters alone covered the entire space at one point.

He showed us things that worked and things that would be very difficult to use. He showed us things that are no longer legal, including a "pocket holster" that looks like a billfold. The gun goes in the front, and the back looks like a smooth leather wallet. I will admit I relished the idea of someone having an attacker demand his wallet, and

the “victim” reaching inside his pocket and bringing out what would look like a billfold until he took away control of the situation. (Sigh.) Such is not to be. The billfold holster has been classified as “other firearm,” and requires special licensing to possess it.

It is important to decide why you want to carry a concealed firearm, and how you intend to use it. That seems extremely basic, and, yet, until the questions were posed, I had not truly considered the implications. Do you want the gun on your person, or in something you hold? Where on or off your person you hold the gun is essential.

I had thought holsters were not a big deal. They are a big deal. Many holsters do not fit most women at all, because of the waist to hip size relationship.

I had thought I wanted the largest gun I could carry. However, if it is not comfortable, you will not carry it. If you do not always carry,

you will not necessarily have it when you need it. If you feel you need to carry, you need to carry. All the time! Tom convinced me I want a smaller gun. One that I can conceal on my body. My copious notes are full of makes and models that would be appropriate for me.

Marx was spellbinding. He gave us two water (in or out as needed) breaks. The vast majority of us returned. The seminar started at 2 pm. Just before 6:30 a security guard came in to tell him that we were supposed to have ended at 6 and would have to be out of the room by 6:30 so the cleaning folks could do their job. “Okay,” said Marx. Then he checked his watch and was startled to see that meant, “Now.” We would have stayed for hours longer. He is a true guru.

Saturday was a thoroughly different day! Now, we knew our way around the buildings. Now, I had a mission. No longer was I befuddled by too much choice. Now I had specific guns to seek out and try. That was the beauty of “acres of guns.” One could walk around from display to display, comparing.

Each one needed to be picked up and held. I find that many things do not feel good in my hand, or hit parts of it when I pick up or fire the gun. I found it very easy to reject some. I would slip my hand on to pick it up, a finger would jam against something, and I would not even complete the movement. Some did not balance nicely in my hand; some I did not like the feel of the handles. It was frustrating to the engineer accompanying me, who wanted to know everything about every gun, and weigh different factors, but I was determined that my first criterion is feel.

If I have to do anything other than pick up the gun, then in a crisis situation I might not be able to

use it. Even if I have practiced getting my middle finger or my thumb out of the way, I do not trust that in a panicky situation I would remember the necessary movements. Besides, they would be additional movements that would take precious seconds.

I rejected for the same reason all the guns with handles so short that my fingers slipped off as I increased force. I could practice and get used to squeezing the handle in a particular way that retained the grip, but what would I do under pressure? Even though the magazines that would provide a little more length had been removed, you could get a good indication if having it in would suffice. Manufacturers are obviously aware of that problem. One brand has a little pinky holder. It felt great!

We were so comfortable with the logistics by Sunday that I went to one seminar while Stan went to a different one in a different building, with the plan to meet and enjoy Ted Nugent, together. (We are not complete country bumpkins, but there were thousands of people at the event, and finding one man out of the masses could be difficult, especially for a short woman.)

Which brings me to what I consider one of the best parts of the NRA Convention. Whenever I went to the restrooms, there was a line coming out of the Men’s Room. I, on the other hand, was able to walk not only inside the Ladies’ Room, but also right into a stall. I always commented on the situation to any other women who were there at the time. We loved it! Much as I am striving to increase the number of women involved in gun ownership and usage, there are occasional advantages to being in a very decided minority.

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