

# *Making a Difference*

## Where Are the Women On the Front Lines?



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There is nothing like a feeling of inadequacy to spark deep thought. I was thrilled at the opportunity to speak at the 2011 Gun Rights Policy Conference (GRPC) in Chicago, but daunted by the title of the panel: Where Are the Women on the Front Lines? My discomfort was due to the fact that my presence would give the impression that I was one of those women, which I am not. Rather than being on the front lines, I stay safely in a foxhole, surrounded by like-minded people. In fact, I am not only behind the lines; I am hiding in a bunker far from enemy fire.

My guilt has been assuaged by the self-assessment. While I am rarely involved in the actual face-to-face combat as I was as the National Spokeswoman for Second Amendment Sisters, I do serve a few purposes in the movement. Foremost is this column, through which I work as a recruiter. In addition to promoting and thanking the women who are putting themselves in the cross-

hairs of the anti-gun people, there is also the hope that the stories I bring you will encourage you to get more involved in supporting your rights as gunowners and users. We women are different from men. There is such a deep-seated tendency that it might be genetic for men to put themselves into physical harm, while women refrain from doing so. For thousands of years this behavioral difference has been beneficial to the preservation of the species. Men needed to fight for food, with predators and for territory; while women were responsible for nurturing the young, the sick or wounded and the elderly. To accomplish their function, men had to be willing to risk physical injury and death while women had to avoid both.

The difference in training our young was indelibly brought home to me when I was a softball coach. We were watching a Babe Ruth League game, when one of the boys was hit by a ground ball. He collapsed to the ground, holding his lower leg and writhing in pain. A coach led him to the sidelines and another player took his place. The game proceeded while the injured player "walked it off" in front of the dugout. A similar event had taken place earlier in the day at a girls' softball game. Players and coaches had converged on the injured player. Everyone else stood still, waiting. To cheers of relief the girl was helped from the field, and comforted by her parents. Both teams left the field for a talk with their respective coaches, then in a very subdued

fashion resumed play.

It isn't that we do not allow girls to be hurt. Modern sports have rigorous training and injuries occur. Women no longer are expected to "glow." They sweat. But, we treat their injuries differently than we do boys'.

So, to a large extent women are conditioned, possibly by genetics, certainly through training, to avoid conflict, to keep themselves safe. And, yet there is one time when the natural reaction is just the opposite. That is when they or those in their care are threatened. Then that "momma bear" instinct overrides everything else.

And that is what we see with those women who are on the front lines. Scare a woman, put her in harm's way, forbid her access to a tool she has always assumed was hers to use, and, worst of all, hurt or destroy someone she loves, and you will have not only a formidable opponent, you will have an enemy for life.

Women differ from men in another essential way. We are more emotional. We are less likely to be aroused by mere ideas than men might be, but once awakened, we do not forgive and we do not forget. Madame Defarge lives within many of us, knitting the coats of arms of our enemies. Men fight, draw up treaties, and aid their former enemies. Women are not so inclined.

This emotional makeup and the desire to keep our families

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safe have been used for decades to bring women into the ranks of the anti-gun movement. Women have been made afraid of instruments that could save them from those who would do them harm. (David Kopel has answered the question 'What would the world be like without guns?' He says we have already seen it...the Middle Ages and before, when everything was ruled by the strongest men, and weak men; women and children had no rights.) It has been a long, concerted battle for the minds of the women of America.

Hollywood has created a great deal of our national mythology, our collective memory. Occasionally, propaganda is produced which is easy to recognize and, therefore, relatively harmless. Some messages are so subtle and so prevalent that they are simply absorbed into our mutual belief system.

The Western taught us much about duty and honor. It taught us about self-reliance. It taught us the difference between right and wrong. It taught us that we need heroes.

No movie had a greater influence on me than "Shane." I have remembered it vividly for decades.

In this film, three types of people exist on the prairie: townspeople, settlers, and cattlemen. Because the settlers fence in and build on the land, they interfere with the production of free-ranging cattle. To protect their way of life the cattlemen attempt to remove the problem by terrorizing the settlers.

The settlers are repeatedly attacked. They are beaten and their offending homes and gardens destroyed. It is too dangerous for individual settlers to go to town alone. Even in groups they are subjected to humiliation. Although

they are sympathetic to the settlers, the townspeople, who make their livings by selling things to both of the other groups, maintain neutrality. The settlers endure the treatment, constantly encouraged by their women to act in ways that will not inflame the ruffians.

And, then, Shane arrives.

He takes a job with one of the settlers, and changes everyone's life. He is soft spoken and deferential. He is a hard worker. He neither seeks nor runs from trouble. When gunmen are hired to eliminate the settlers, Shane stands up to and defeats them. Most importantly, his example encourages the others to fight for their own rights and dignity.

And, then, Shane rides away.

The last line of the movie is one of the greatest of all time. "Shane!" cries the young boy, running across the field. "Come back, Shane!" But the hero rides away.

One of the few details that escaped my young memory was Shane's final line. It screamed at me when I saw the movie for the second time a few years ago.

"Tell your mother there are no more guns in the valley."

I was thunderstruck. My favorite movie was about gun control! As a 7-year-old, I had understood that the mother did not approve of guns or fighting. She wanted everyone to be safe. Since the bad men had guns, it would make sense that getting rid of guns might be one way of being safe. Just as refusing to fight might stop others from fighting.

However, then as now, such was not the case. The bad men were only eliminated when a good man had a gun. Bullies and terrorists do not stop bothering people who act meek and try not to offend. Bullies and terrorists understand power.

Shane left the valley and took

his gun with him. Was there peace in the Valley?

Quite possibly. The most important thing that Shane did was wake up the men of the area to the need to stand up for themselves. Good men are required to defeat evil ones. Often, those good men must be armed. Sometimes, those good men can be women.

So, where are the women on the front lines? Several of them were in Chicago! They were plaintiffs in cases at a variety of levels including the Supreme Court, fighting against laws and regulations that infringe upon that right of the citizen to keep and bear arms. Some like my good friend, Valinda Rowe, the 2012 Grassroots Activist of the Year, are "street-fighters," organizing and leading activists in efforts to pass good and defeat bad legislation. Some are involved in instructing men, women and children in the safe use of firearms, as well as, in some cases such as the Appleseed Project, the Constitutional background of firearms.

The fact is that the "front lines" are everywhere. They are definitely in the courts; they are in the legislatures of our states and Washington, DC. They are in our towns and cities. They are at every gun club and every gun show. The front lines are in the grocery stores and the schools, wherever gun owners can spend a minute or two, discussing or even mentioning that they are gunowners.

Women will determine the future of our right to keep and bear arms. Women constitute the majority of voters. They are raising the future generation. Women gun (and knife!) owners and users can make the practice appear as normal as it is. Perhaps I was wrong. I am on the front line in this battle. So are you.