

10 **THANK GOD I HAD A GUN:** *True Accounts of Self-Defense*

Reviewed by Lee Arten

Chris Bird, author of *Thank God I Had A Gun*, has an interesting history. He's been a journalist three decades and a handgunner for four. He's British by birth and served as a member of the Royal Military Police in the 1960s. He's lived in Canada and Australia, but now lives in Texas. Bird is a director of the Texas Concealed Handgun Association and a carry instructor certified in Texas.

I'd heard Bird interviewed on Tom Gresham's radio show, "Gun Talk," but not seen any of his books till I noticed *Thank God I Had A Gun* for sale in **The Blue Press**. Late in December 2007, I received a copy of the book to review.

Immediately, I took note of the names of the people who had endorsed the book: Ron Paul, Massad Ayoob, Marion P. Hammer, Gila Hays, Tom Givens, John Farnum and others. Texas State Representative Suzanna Gratia Hupp – a survivor of the 1991 Luby's cafeteria massacre in Killeen, Texas – wrote the forward.

For obvious reasons, I was impressed by the caliber of the people praising Bird's book.

The book, itself, went on to impress. The writing was clear and the black and white photographs illustrating the 307-page book were generally good. (A few were somewhat dark.) Bird wrote about 14 self-defense incidents. Some were familiar, some I'd never heard of before.

Chapter two of the book, entitled "Learning Curve: Ray Messick," was new to me. It made an impression because Mr. Messick was on the scene of two armed robberies before deciding to get serious about self-defense. That decision paid off when Messick thwarted an attempted carjacking with his legally carried semiautomatic pistol. No shots were fired in the incident; just displaying the pistol changed the attackers' minds.

Shots were fired during the incident described in Chapter 14, "Gun-Totin' Granny: Susan Gaylord Buxton." The incident occurred in Arlington, Texas. I knew something about this one since Buxton was interviewed on TV, and by Sean Hannity on radio after she defended herself and her granddaughter from a man who broke into her house. I'd heard Hannity's interview with Buxton on the radio.

The intruder was running from the police and had hidden in a closet in her house. When discovered, he tried to take Buxton's gun, a light-weight five-shot Smith & Wesson revolver. Finally, after being shot through the thigh, the intruder left

the house and collapsed in the yard. Buxton fired another shot into the ground when he tried to get up again. The 911 call is printed in the book. Buxton was obviously more angry than frightened during the incident.

Both the Messick and Buxton incidents ended well. Two other incidents in the book had different outcomes. Chapter 11 tells the story of Robert Lawrence of Tempe, Arizona. He was attacked on the road by two men who threw things on his car and a cup of soda in his face. Despite that, they managed to convince police that Lawrence was the aggressor, claiming he'd menaced them with a gun. That lie led to Lawrence's interrogation in the hot sun, heat exhaustion, hospitalization, and high legal bills. In the end, Lawrence was not prosecuted, but neither were his attackers.

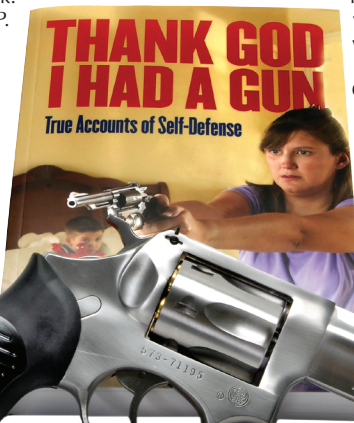
The incident described in Chapter 7, "The Risks We Take: Mark Wilson," also got a good deal of coverage in the media when it happened. Mark Wilson lived in Tyler, Texas. On February 24, 2005 he saw a man use a rifle to attack his ex-wife and son outside the courthouse in Tyler. Wilson grabbed a .45 ACP Colt Officer's Model and intervened. Wilson was a good shot and knocked the attacker down

with several shots. As Wilson turned away, the attacker, who was wearing body armor, got up and shot Wilson in the head, killing him.

The attacker then left the scene. He was killed a short time later by a Tyler SWAT team member armed with a rifle. Although Wilson died while attempting to stop the attack, he is credited with keeping the attacker from killing more people at the courthouse. He is regarded as a hero in Tyler and a plaque honoring him was placed in the town.

Thank God I Had A Gun provides food for thought for those who have carry permits, and gun owners in general. Bird not only reviews self-defense incidents, but in sections entitled "The Aftermath" and "Reflections" discusses what can happen afterward, as cases move through the legal system. He points out when defenders had adverse reactions to having to defend themselves, and that not all defenders experienced this.

I've read other books on self-defense and have several in my library. *Thank God I Had A Gun* is a good addition. It would also be a good starting point for someone just beginning to do research in the self-defense field.



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