

# A Girl and Her Gun (XO-9) 65

By **Serena Wood**

My 21st birthday was a highly anticipated milestone, not because I was going to be able to buy alcohol, but because I was going to be able to buy my first handgun. I didn't have a particularly gun-friendly upbringing – in fact, my only childhood experience with them was very negative, my mother was afraid of them, and I grew up in California – but I'd wanted a handgun since I was a teenager. I knew absolutely nothing about guns and had never fired a pistol before, so I chose a used .22 LR Ruger 22/45 to learn on. I spent hours plinking at the local range and becoming familiar with the feel, smell, and sound of guns. Shooting turned out to be a great way to relieve stress and became one of my favorite hobbies.

Eventually, after an attempted break-in at my apartment, I decided to step up to something better suited to self-defense. I asked my "gun friends" for advice on manufacturer, caliber, size, fit, and anything else that seemed important. Everybody had different advice and recommended what worked for them, not what might work best for me.

Some of the most helpful advice came from Duane Thomas, who not only offered his opinion of different models, but also helped me figure out which guns would fit me well.

At 5'7" I'm not terribly small for a woman, but I did have to exclude many of the larger pistols. Although the gun would be primarily for home defense and range use, I wanted something that I could carry concealed eventually; however I wasn't interested in "pocket pistols." I finally narrowed the field to the Browning Hi-Power MK III and Springfield XD-9. Unfortunately, my local range didn't have them available as rental guns, so I had to choose one without firing it first. I picked the Springfield XD-9 with a four-inch barrel and Trijicon's night sights, and instantly fell in love. It fit my hand well, aimed very naturally, and felt nicely balanced.

I ended up moving to Georgia and quickly took advantage of the more relaxed gun laws there. I applied for a Georgia Firearms License as soon as I was officially a resident and chose to stick with my XD-9 as a carry gun. I was comfortable with it, and although it would be harder to conceal than many of the smaller pistols, I liked its 16 + 1 capacity. I researched various methods of concealed carry and chose a fanny pack because it seemed to be the only way I could survive the Southern heat – extra layers of clothing to hide a holster were not going to work for me. With time I probably would have found other methods, but it worked for me then. My fanny pack was inexpensive – about \$40 at a gun show – and could be set up for either a right- or left-hand draw while allowing adjustments to the angle of the holster inside. It also had room for a spare magazine,

although the doublestack for the XD-9 was a tight fit.

The concealed carry permit application process was simple and painless. I expected a bit of resistance from the employees at the Probate Court (that must've been a bit of California in me showing itself) but they didn't even blink when I told them why I was there. While being fingerprinted for my GFL, the officer asked if I had my carry gun and method of carry picked out, encouraged me to be completely familiar with all the firearms in my home, and gave me advice on home-defense guns. What a change from California, where it seems that uttering the "g" word in public will instantly earn you nervous looks from civilians and very close scrutiny from any LEO within earshot!

Twenty-three days after I applied for my GFL it arrived in the mail. I happily strapped on my fanny pack, secured my XD-9 inside (I'd already spent a fair bit of time perfecting the angle of the holster) and went out for pizza. During my first few days of carry I felt it must be glaringly obvious to everyone around me that I was carrying a gun, but I never got any weird looks. Either nobody noticed it, or nobody



Serena and her XD

cared. Pretty soon I stopped noticing the gun and fanny pack were there; they became as much a part of daily wear as my contact lenses and went with me everywhere (except to the Post Office and anywhere else firearms were restricted, of course). After only a few weeks, I began to feel naked if I wasn't carrying.

Eventually, I returned to California, and the hardest part of that was having to give up my ability to carry – at least for the time being. I chose to drive back cross-country and carefully picked a route that allowed me to carry the entire way. I researched gun laws and found that every state along the way had reciprocity with Georgia except New Mexico, but open carry was legal there in most places, as was concealed carry within your vehicle.

As a young female driving by herself across the country, I had enough to worry about – the last thing I needed was to feel helpless. When you feel like a victim, you look like a victim, and predators typically choose easy victims. Instead I was able to travel confidently, knowing that if I ran into trouble I'd least have a fighting chance. When I reached California and could no longer carry concealed, I felt as though I'd been stripped of my ability to protect myself.

I intend to go through the required course and apply for a California CCW permit, but it's not going to be as quick and easy as it was in Georgia. Instead of having a right to defend myself, I now have to prove I have a reason to need a gun. Apparently, some people are more worthy of staying alive and safe than others. Good job, California! For now the Springfield stays at home, but at least when I'm at home I feel safer knowing I have it nearby if I ever need it.