

Finding Your Reason

By: Kathy Jackson

“It’ll just get taken away from you and used against you.”

This annoying and offensive sentence, with its unspoken accusations of female inferiority and lack of resolve, is nevertheless based upon an important foundational truth. If you carry a gun and are not prepared to use it if necessary, you are indeed at risk for a gun grab or worse.

A lot of concealed carry folks swim in a sea of euphemisms; I just did it myself. “Use it if necessary” avoids the blunter, but more honest, “to kill another human being.” If speaking bluntly about the purpose of our concealed weapons doesn’t come easily to most of us, how much easier would the deed itself be? Socially, psychologically, and emotionally, few people are able to consider unwaveringly the full implications of carrying a deadly weapon for self-defense.

“A very large percentage of people who carry a concealed handgun do not carry it as a weapon. They carry it as a good luck charm. They think of it as a magic talisman that wards off evil, or as a rabbit’s foot,” says firearms instructor Tom Givens. But the mere presence of the gun is no magic bullet. Without the mental willingness to use the gun in the final extreme, its usefulness is strictly limited.

So how do you come to the place where you are willing to risk killing someone who is trying to kill you? Face it. This isn’t the sort of thing that most people think about. It’s not socially acceptable to talk about killing people. If there is a social stigma against carrying a gun, there’s a much greater stigma against using one, even to save your life.

Many women who carry a gun do so because they had some sort of an unpleasant incident, an encounter which created in them an awareness of vulnerability and a determination not to let it happen again. This isn’t universal by any means. But it is a common first step.

But plenty of people encounter violence every day, and they don’t decide to fight back the next time. They don’t decide to go armed. So the journey to determined self-defense usually takes in a few other stops along the way.

One bedrock question is simply this: What are you willing to fight for? What is so important to you that you would be willing to do whatever it takes to defend it? Is there anything?

A lot of people say no to this question, straight up. “Nothing is worth the risk of talking another human’s life,” they say. But a little probing might give a different answer.

“I wouldn’t fight back to save my own life,” a friend of mine once confessed, “but if someone tried to touch my of my babies, well...!” This isn’t an uncommon sentiment, and a lot of women who are otherwise passively unwilling to fight admit that they would kill to protect their offspring. Some become willing to for their own lives the day they realize that their kids would be harmed by growing up without a mother.

Nor is this dynamic unique to those who have children. One woman of my acquaintance first became willing to use a gun simply because she heard a news story wherein an intruder killed the family dogs before attacking the female homeowner. My friend hadn't previously been willing to fight on her own behalf, but realized she would fight to protect her beloved pets.

Self-defense guru, Tony Blauer, takes this common trait and runs with it in his tapes and seminars. Blauer suggests that his students make a list of things they would lose if they did not fight back, things which are already present in their lives, which are personal to each student, and about which the student is passionate. With these powerful personal symbols, students give themselves permission to fight back.

Religious people often face more daunting hurdles on their road to fighting back. From the sacredness of all life in some devotional traditions to the staunch pacifism of others, from "Thou shalt not kill" in Judaism to "Turn the other cheek in Christendom, and from the ahimsa of Hinduism to the dharma of Buddhism, most religions contain at least some elements that could be at odds with lethal self-defense. Overcoming the qualms caused by these teachings can take time, diligent study, and much soul searching.

Some religious difficulties are simply the result of misunderstandings. While most Christians and Jews have heard, "Thou shalt not kill." For example, only a relative few know that the Hebrew word often translated as "kill" would more properly be translated "murder" by most scholars. Many similar questions can be cleared up by discussion with a more knowledgeable friend, or with a religious leader. Sometimes, the answers will be surprising. When a little girl asked the Dalai Lama a question about school violence, for instance, the Dalai Lama told her, "It would be reasonable to shoot back with your own gun" in some situations.

Occasionally, a deeply spiritual person will sense a conflict between trusting God on one hand, and defending her own life on the other. Can she really trust God to protect her, she wonders, if she takes steps to protect herself? Further thought might show that trusting God to protect her doesn't have to be at odds with defending herself, not any more than preparing her own meals is at odds with trusting Him to provide her daily bread. After all, God created human beings as tool-users with creative minds, in a universe governed by cause and effect in a world where actions have consequences.

Does even a murderer or a child molester or a rapist deserve to be killed for his actions? Such a question can haunt the ethical person. But perhaps a more perceptive question would be, "Who decided that this conflict was worth a human life?" When an assailant raises a deadly weapon toward an innocent person, the assailant has already made the most important choice of the day: The only decision left to be made is whether the person who dies will be an innocent citizen, or one of society's predators.

In the final analysis, each person's journey on the road to self-defense is intensely personal. The decision that her own life is worth defending, even at the cost of killing an attacker, cuts right to the heart of each woman's most deeply held moral, ethical, and religious beliefs.

Ultimately, anyone who carries a deadly weapon must decide for herself where her own boundary lines lie. She must decide for herself what it will take for her to say to an assailant: "Not me. Not mine. Not today." **Otherwise, her gun could get taken away and used against her.**