



» Selecting the correct sidearm is one of the most personal decisions a woman or man can make. Here, USCCA instructor Heather Borland, right, helps Dana Lazich, middle, assess various pistols and revolvers at The Range of Richfield in Richfield, Wisconsin.

» REALTOR DANA LAZICH LAID AWAKE ALL NIGHT worried that she'd picked the wrong career. She tossed and turned, mentally replaying the latest news report of another realtor brutally murdered during a home showing. Dana had two choices to resolve this concern: She could quit her job and begin to research a new occupation, or she could take the time to learn about concealed carry and self-defense.

PEACE OF MIND

EXPLORING HER RIGHT TO CARRY
BY KRISTEN MONROE



» When an individual is new to shooting, quality of instruction is extremely important. A highly skilled instructor can bring a total novice up to a very impressive level of performance in a relatively short period of time, but lesser-trained instructors run the risk of frustrating students and turning them off for good.

The decision to carry would not only allow her to feel comfortable with the job she loved but also provide her with the means to protect her entire family. After all, her family is more important than her career. I was not surprised when she called to tell me she wanted to work toward obtaining a concealed carry permit.

I have known Dana since middle school. We have been great friends for more than 20 years, and she has never been one to be taken advantage of. Dana has always given off a certain vibe of confidence, which I suspect has helped her avoid becoming a victim. She typically rules the show with an alpha-female attitude and firm-but-kind demeanor. As such, it made perfect sense when she decided to learn about guns and protection.

Normally fearless, Dana had contemplated buying a gun on several occasions, but every time she walked into a gun shop, she'd turn around and walk back out. Picking out a gun alone and inexperienced can be scary without knowing the right questions to ask and where to start, and some gun shop employees certainly don't go out of their way to help in the matter.

Dana's latest visit to the gun shop was

different; I took her to The Range of Richfield in Richfield, Wisconsin. Not only do they have a wide selection of guns, but they also have a state-of-the-art range that allows customers to shoot before they buy. Above all, they have the friendly, knowledgeable staff that can be so important to getting a new shooter off on the right foot.

SELECTING A GUN

After making the decision to protect herself, picking out the right gun was Dana's next step; after all, it doesn't make a lot of sense to just run out and buy any old gun and then take a class. The simple fact that a gun is on sale doesn't automatically make it the right choice. In fact, you should make every effort to test-fire any gun before buying it.

Range officer Jason Babiasz greeted us with a warm smile and a welcoming attitude, which helped put Dana at ease and made the job of picking out a gun fun rather than intimidating. He introduced her to 10 different options, ranging in chamberings from .380 ACP to .45 ACP.

Dana carefully picked up and felt the

weight of each gun.

After getting to know each grip size, shape, angle and material, Babiasz put away the guns that she'd decided were obviously too big for concealed carry, leaving her six guns to test-fire. All would make great concealed carry guns, but only one of them would perform the best for Dana that day during live-fire tests.

USCCA Instructor Heather Borland joined us at the range complex to offer Dana basic pistol shooting fundamentals.

"It's similar to trying on shoes," Borland said. "It might look like the perfect shoe, but until you try it on and walk in it, you really don't know how it will feel."

We explored grip extensions and accessories. Borland changed the grip on her own personal gun with a slip-on rubber sleeve, which made it easier for Dana to hold versus the smaller, harder plastic factory configuration.

"You can make alterations to specific guns to make them work even better for you," Borland explained. "Different grips, grip sleeves, magazine extensions, you name it."

There are pros and cons to every CCW

gun, and there is more to learn about besides the physical matching of gun to hand. Some might sacrifice the power of a larger cartridge in order to carry a gun that is smaller and more comfortable. Others might prefer the swing-out simplicity of a revolver over the magazine-fed semi-automatic.

Talking about how pistols function and the technical features of each gun made Dana even more comfortable, and simply knowing how these things worked seemed to lift a huge weight off her shoulders. I could tell from the way she was handling the guns that her confidence was increasing by the minute.

Earlier that day as we drove to the range, Dana told me she really wanted a smaller gun so it would be easier to carry and hide. I warned her about smaller guns often being harder to shoot, especially for new or recoil-sensitive shooters; it wasn't the first time she had heard that, and she seemed a little disappointed to hear the news again.

I gave her a range safety pamphlet to look over one more time before our arrival.

"Here," I said. "The real test will be trying them. If you always follow these rules, accidents won't happen."

BASIC INSTRUCTION

Education helps to alleviate fear, and Borland's easygoing and knowledge base made it easier for Dana to learn. Sure, I know a few things from the classes I have taken and I've read a few books, but I'm no instructor. The dynamics of relationships can interfere with the learning process, which is another reason why it's usually a net positive to have an instructor or experienced range officer rather than a spouse or family member assist a new shooter. I once heard a lady at the range say to her husband, "You're telling me how to hold a gun, not teaching me."

Borland explained sight alignment to Dana using pictures from the *Concealed Carry and Home Defense Fundamentals* book. "Equal spacing on the left and right of the front sight" is easier to understand using a diagram, and Dana quickly understood how misaligning sight as little as 1/16 of an inch can translate into more than 12 inches of error at 50 feet.

It's important to let new shooters ask questions, and this environment definitely supported that dynamic. We talked freely in our small group, and Dana was able to ask questions at any time. With Borland and



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Babiasz working together, Dana had the attention she needed to learn quickly and efficiently. Though there were many more details that could have been discussed had we enjoyed the luxury of more time, Dana had the basics down and was ready to shoot.

THE RANGE

Babiasz went over the safety rules once more before we put on our personal protection equipment and headed to the 12-lane indoor range. As we entered, I noticed that it didn't smell like any indoor range I'd ever set

foot in; in fact, it didn't smell like anything at all. "Our facility has a special air ventilation system with HEPA filtration," Babiasz said. "It provides air turnover every 60 seconds to eliminate airborne lead exposure."

"What luck to have a range of this caliber within a short drive from our homes in southeastern Wisconsin," I thought.

Dana had the perfect environment for her first shooting lesson.

Borland taught Dana the isosceles stance and gave her a brief lesson on trigger control: The finger must be pressed straight to



the rear, making sure the muzzle alignment is not shifted. She practiced dry firing first, then moved on to live rounds. Dana squeezed the trigger smoothly without jerking the gun; a look of satisfaction beamed from her face, and for good reason.

Shooting six different guns at 18 feet, it didn't take long before her groupings started to improve. I can only imagine what she will accomplish after taking additional classes and further developing her skills.

Each range lane was equipped with a touch-screen Mancom target retrieval sys-

» There have never been as many training options available to the public as there are today. Interested new shooters can contact the USCCA through www.uscca.com or by calling 877-677-1919 to find an instructor in their area.

tem. This allowed Babiasz to remotely adjust targets to the desired distance from the firing line — in this case, 75 feet. He ran it back this far to demonstrate how difficult a tight grouping is to accomplish at such a distance. Dana managed to tag the target a few times but quickly realized the challenge presented by that kind of distance.

Babiasz then set the target on an automatic timer at a closer distance, which allowed the target to turn broadside to and then away from the shooter. This gave Dana an opportunity for a lesson on point-shooting, at which she excelled.

DEBRIEF

I'm not sure whose smile was bigger on the way home.

"That was amazing," Dana said.

It feels good to shoot, but it feels even better seeing the light turn on for others.

As it turns out, the smallest gun, a SIG P238 chambered in .380 ACP, performed the best for her, proving yet again that test-firing a gun before you decide to buy is very important. In the end, Dana prioritized comfort and control over brute force — a good move in her case, as the gun too uncomfortable to carry every day gets left at home. (She also hinted that a 9mm Beretta 92 might be the next gun on her shopping list as a home defense arm.)

Oh, and Dana's informed me that she hasn't had any trouble sleeping since our day together at The Range of Richfield.



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