

## APPENDIX 1 AMERICA'S ENDLESS ROMANCE WITH GUNS *The Guardian*, 20 February 2011

**Guns are seductive and addictive. It doesn't take a card-carrying NRA member to know that giving them up will never be easy**



Actor and then NRA president Charlton Heston holding up a musket as he delighted the 5,000-strong audience at the National Rifle Association's 129th annual meeting, in Charlotte, NC, in 2000, by saying that gun control campaigners could have his gun only when they pry it "from my cold, dead hands". Photograph: Ric Feld/AP Photo

*I won't be wronged. I won't be insulted. I won't be laid a-hand on. I don't do these things to other people, and I require the same from them.*

*John Wayne in The Shootist*

Although very rusty, I'm range-qualified on the M-1 rifle, .30-calibre carbine, recoil-less rocket-propelled anti-tank weapon (bazooka), .30- and .50-calibre machine guns, M-2 flamethrower, Thompson "Tommy" submachinegun (beloved of Dillinger-era movies), and the Browning M1911 automatic – which the Utah legislature is voting to elevate into a state symbol, along with the Rocky Mountain elk.

For a brief time, as a young union functionary/bodyguard, I also "carried", because my boss demanded it and also due to peer pressure from union reps I travelled with who were lapsed Mafiosi. Although I've been shot at, and witnessed gangbangers die of bullet wounds on a city street, I've never quite lost my American infantile fascination with the mystique of guns, their shape, heft, calibres and the strange, sick thrill of jacking one. This despite the Arizona assassin's bullet that crashed through Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords' brain, and knowing he killed six people including a nine-year-old child.

Guns are so seductive.

Because of all the movies and TV, I also have a false expertise in thinking that I know how to

swarm a meth lab full of armed felons by crashing through, two-handed pointing my SIG Sauer, swivel right, left, right! "Police! Show me your hands! Clear!"

The other night, when I lay in bed with flu and had nothing better to do than feverishly watch television, of my available 40 or so channels (not counting Spanish-language), well over half consisted of shows favouring guns of various types: Bang, bang! Blood pumping like wine. They ranged from Turner Classics to reality shows like Cops, 48 Hours, America's Most Wanted, Hot Pursuit Sniper: Inside the Crosshairs, etc.

From knowing some of the writers and directors, I'm almost certain that most are liberal Democrats. (Confession: in at least two of the movie projects I've been involved with, guns play a part.) So, it's not just those "crazy, racist, Arizona rednecks" out there in Tucson or wherever, but also we creative types, each in our own way, who contribute to the "national conversation" about guns.

Presently, I don't own a gun and won't have one in the house, partly because I have a young curious son. Statistics conflict. Criminologist Gary Kleck insists householders who use a gun for self-defence are *less* likely to be harmed in a home invasion; dissenting sociologists – and common sense – argue that having a gun in the house means you are *more* likely to get killed, either by accident or in domestic violence.

Even so, the idle thought of shopping for a weapon never quite leaves me. My dad kept a gun until my mother made him get rid of it – for which he never forgave her. Dad and I, but not Mom, were both huge fans of John Ford westerns; indeed, he died of a heart attack watching a rerun of My Darling Clementine, with its shootout-at-the-OK-Corral climax.

By law in Israel, IDF soldiers must keep their automatic weapons at home, and the same applies to Swiss army conscripts. Yet both Israel and Switzerland have very low murder rates. In the US, where an estimated 200m weapons are lying around, the murder rate is 20 times that of some other so-called developed nations. So, it seems that, at least in some cultures, there's little correlation between owning a gun and using it to kill a fellow citizen. Subversive thought: maybe the all-powerful gun-crazy National Rifle Association may have it right, after all: people, not guns, kill people.

I grew up playing cowboy-and-Indians, pretending to shoot a Colt single-action six-shooter. Then, Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry came along with his Smith & Wesson .44 Magnum ("the most powerful handgun in the world ... Do you feel lucky, punk?"). Pow! Pow! Pow! Now, kids my son's age use 30-shot AK47 assault rifles to assassinate enemy "militants" on all-too-real Xbox games.

Last year, in a number of "cluster killings", there was a 37% uptick in the murder of police officers (160 in 2010 v 117 in 2009). Yet, the 4m-member NRA remains angrily hostile to America's police chiefs who – almost unanimously – want to restore the now-lapsed ban on killer assault weapons that do so much damage to their own cops. Despite the Tucson massacre (and inevitably, more to come), gun control is politically off the table – partly because voters are indifferent or ambivalent, and because Obama's Democrats, spooked by the myth that Al Gore lost in 2000 because of his alleged anti-gun stance, are terrified of the NRA's political clout. Few office holders dare stand up to it, even though many of its candidates lost in the last presidential election.

Our psychic need for weaponry can't be blamed entirely on the gun lobby, or our supposedly violent frontier history, or occasional home invasions, which, though real, are a statistically insignificant threat. The mantra of "self-defence is the only option against attack" strikes a chord not only among us macho males, but also with women who are the target of (often sexualised) magazine ads for gun ownership touted as a prophylactic against the threat of

sexual assault.

I live in Los Angeles whose civic memory includes the 1992 Rodney King riots, when the police abandoned us to the looters. Gun sales rocketed, and the under-siege Korean American community armed itself to defend their businesses and lives. For some reason, the wild-hearted mobs stopped just short of an invisible drawbridge to my west LA district, but had they poured across La Cienega Boulevard, I'm not certain I wouldn't have emulated my Korean American neighbours.

Pragmatism sometimes overrules ethics.

Mikey Weinstein, an Air Force academy graduate and former Reagan White House lawyer, is under constant death threats – vandals routinely shoot out his windows – because he protests the pervasive Christian evangelical proselytising in the military. Whatever his private reservations, he keeps a 12-gauge shotgun in the house, and his daughter sleeps with a .357 revolver by her bed.

And I remember my late friend Jim Boggs, a scholarly radical African American autoworker in Detroit. On my last visit to his home in a tough neighbourhood, Jim insisted on walking me to a corner bus stop on the way back to my hotel. Just before leaving the house, he calmly reached behind a marble bust of Karl Marx on the mantelpiece to withdraw a fully loaded .38 Saturday Night Special. Holding the gun by his side, as we strolled down the street in broad daylight, he said, "Hey, I'm 100% for gun control. But I know this block. I'm no damn fool."

SOURCE:

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