

Courtney, the youngest Kemp daughter, proudly displays her Walther TPh in KYTAC holster custom made for her.



Teaching daughters about handgun safety and responsibility.

Girls

There are two great loves in my life, two passions, two joys, two reasons for living. The oldest is ten, the other is eight, and they are both girls, my girls, my two daughters, Samantha and Courtney. Of course, like every other father I would like them to share my interests, shooting being one of them. They have just recently taken an interest in guns and the resulting experience has, so far, been elating.

When we speak of children and guns the first thing that comes to mind are incidents such as Columbine. There are enough discussions, writings, and media attention in regards to misuse of firearms by underage adults (sorry, but in my mind the teenage perpetrators of these crimes are not children and the events are distorted when the

and

media portrays them as such). Suffice it to say that it is my belief that proper exposure at an early age could only help the situation. "Gun" has become a four letter word, an evil talisman to be avoided by children at all costs least it take possession of their souls and condemn them to a life of crime and terror. In the process society has created a nation of children who are uneducated about the true power of a gun and the responsibility that must come with that power.

The other topic that springs to mind among shooters and Second Amendment activists in regards to children and guns is that they are our salvation in the fight for liberty and the preservation of the shooting sports. Very true, but also not the subject of this writing. Sometimes, in looking at the big picture we miss the smaller and less obvious details that comprise that picture.

When training our children in the proper use of firearms we are spending time with them, sharing with them, teaching responsibility and restraint, bonding with them, building their self-esteem, leading by example, preparing them to wield power mercifully...the list is endless. Yes, we are giving them survival skills that we hope they will never have to use but, more importantly, we are giving them skills for living life. And let us not forget FUN! It's just plain fun for our children and us. There is great joy in this process



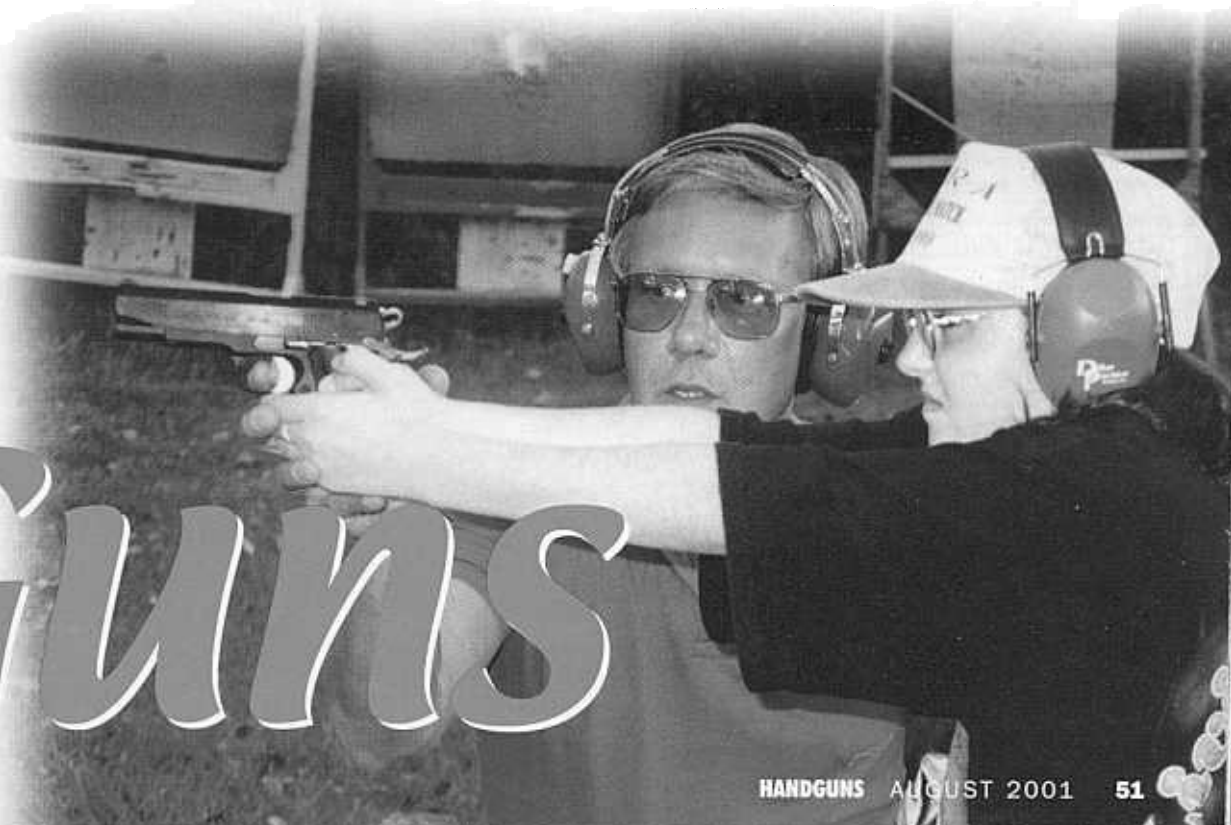
The Kemp sisters display their obvious shooting proficiency achieved after receiving proper instruction.

By Andy Kemp

back in the pool, dinner out that evening, Sunday the kids where back in the pool (they are both aquatic rodents) while Dad went back to the range. We all met later in the day for the prizes and awards ceremony. Combining other activities with shooting made it much more palatable for the kids and resolved the issue of attention span.

On Saturday morning while I shot the match the oldest, Samantha, followed along to take some video. Courtney stayed behind with Mom to avoid those nasty bugs that were nipping at her legs every time she went down to the range. They otherwise occupied

Author's eldest daughter, Samantha, displays grim determination as she learns about correct handgun grip and stance during a training session.



GUNS

themselves around the clubhouse. We all thought Sam would last for about two stages but she surprised us, sticking by my side for all eleven stages, taking photos, pasting targets, rooting for Dad, and endearing herself to my fellow shooters.

and just what is an "Ayoob" anyway? Sam was very eager to shoot. Her younger sister's interest was due in part to the "me too" affliction that befalls all younger siblings.

This curiosity is natural. It can

be a useful tool in guiding them down the correct path.

Providing them with the appropriate equipment is paramount. Like adults, the gun must fit them; it must be something they can manage, something that will be pleasant shooting, not hard on the hand. My biggest problem now was outfitting them. I gave Sam a Colt Officers model with a Ciener .22 conversion, which fit in my KYTAC holster quite nicely. The addition of slim grips made for a better fit in her small hand. Courtney was more difficult. The only gun I have that fits her little girl hand is a .22 Walther TPH, not the ideal gun to learn on, but it would have to suffice. Alas, there was no holster for it

"...my daughters have recently displayed interest in shooting..."

This was a strong sign that she was ready. Learn to read the signs.

At the end of the second day I gave them the opportunity to shoot. Loading one or two rounds at a time into a .22, they fired a total of maybe 25 rounds. Both were fearful and nervous. Fear is a good thing in proper doses; use it to your advantage. It is fear that prevents complacency. It is because of their fear that they listened attentively, and applied the instruction well enough to shoot small groups at about 4 yards. This was the first time they ever shot with the exception of two rounds each nearly a year earlier. The fact that they did well and their fears were alleviated to some degree (Sam later told me that she thought the gun would jump out of her hand) prompted the next shooting session.

Three weeks following the match I was due to teach an LFI Advanced Handgun Skills class with fellow LFI staffer, Bob Houzenga. Both kids wanted to come along, in part to shoot; in part for the swimming pool, and in part to find out what does Daddy do on those shooting weekends,

also be the root of many problems and accidents. Eliminating a certain degree of curiosity (discussed later) will make your children safer. The right amount of curiosity can

Eight-year-old Courtney receives instruction on her Walther TPH from noted firearm instructor, Massad Ayoob of LFI.



Girls

Samantha Kemp fires her Officer's model with a Ciener .22 conversion unit under the supervision of Massad Ayoob.

Girls

and this was a problem for the child. It was also a problem for me. I believe that the safest place for a gun is in a holster. Having the children use holsters would greatly reduce the safety concerns associated with walking back and forth to the firing line carrying a gun in the hand. I could teach one steadfast rule; "the gun never leaves the holster unless you are on the firing line and I tell you to draw the gun". They could understand and remember that.

The solution presented itself in the form of Dave

It is important to ensure children have handguns that fit their hands.

Courtney's small hand is able to comfortably handle the Walther TPH (top) while her older sister, Samantha, is able to handle the larger Colt with the .22 Conversion unit (bottom).



Elderton of KYTAC fame, who met us at the range the first day of class, took the little Walther home that night and delivered to Courtney the following morning a KYTAC Kydex holster, in blue, to fit the TPH. Of course, Samantha now wants her own holster, in red, to fit her Commander length .22 conversion, complete with matching red mag pouches and, "Oh yes, I'll need some more magazines Daddy." Dave is in the process of filling

Sam's order with modifications to accommodate the female shape she is quickly growing into.

The first day of the class Courtney was not anxious to shoot but Sam was zealous. During breaks she was able to launch a few rounds down range and at the end of the day she received some private instruction from Houzenga. The girls adore Bob and have seen him shoot. This was particularly special for Sam. She knows Bob holds numerous national, state, and regional titles. From my perspective it was another useful tool. It is important that they hear from someone else what you have been teaching them. This reinforces what you, as a parent, have already told them and adds credibility to what you will tell them in the future. Particularly if this reiteration is coming from someone who the child perceives to be an expert.

Sam did well enough the first day that she occasionally joined the rest of the class on the firing line on the second day. This was an advanced class and there were only a couple of exercises that Bob and I felt comfortable having her participate in, but it was enough for her to practice basics and ground herself in drawing from a holster. (I could just imagine the start of 5th grade class on Monday morning: "What

be able to include their friends.

When class was over on Sunday Bob spent more time with both girls, working on basics, drawing from the holster, and teaching safety. The girls were hooked. It was getting dark when I finally dragged them off the range.

Needles to say I was the proud father. Not just because they performed well but also because they were safe, attentive, and responsi-

safety violation by seeing to it that she and her sister always had adult supervision while they were carrying guns. As it happened, the only time Courtney touched her holstered gun while away from me and the range was to use the bathroom, and she first asked for my wife's assistance in how to do it safely.

Safety, along with the serious nature of a firearm, was taught to my kids as soon as they could form

"....society has created a nation of children who are uneducated about the true power of a gun..."

did you do this weekend, class?" "I practiced my draw stroke, teacher.") A short aside: Given today's environment I made it very clear to both girls that this is something private, not to be shared with the neighborhood kids. I explained why and they understood. In time and under my direction they may

ble all weekend while carrying guns on their hips. Not once did a gun come out of the holster unless given the command. Courtney surpassed my expectations. I feared that the gun in her new, blue holster was as much a novelty and fashion thing for her as anything else and I planned for a potential

sentences. I'm sure they didn't grasp much then but we kept at it, drilling on safety rules, and today they can't remember not knowing them. Even at age six Sam would ask which way the muzzle was pointing before picking up a boxed gun. At early ages Sam and Courtney were helping me clean



Girls

Samantha demonstrates good form while moving from cover. Note her trigger finger is properly positioned along the frame away from the trigger.

Children must use all the necessary safety equipment even when shooting .22 handguns and must be closely supervised by a responsible adult instructor.



“The right amount of curiosity can be a useful tool in guiding them down the correct path.”

guns, a tip from Ayoob during an LFI-1 class. The girls always knew that they could see my guns under my supervision any time they liked. Occasionally they would ask me to show them how to stand or how to hold one and I always complied. This compliance, along with the cleaning, totally de-mystified guns for them. Guns were not a sweet, forbidden fruit to be sought after when Dad wasn't looking.

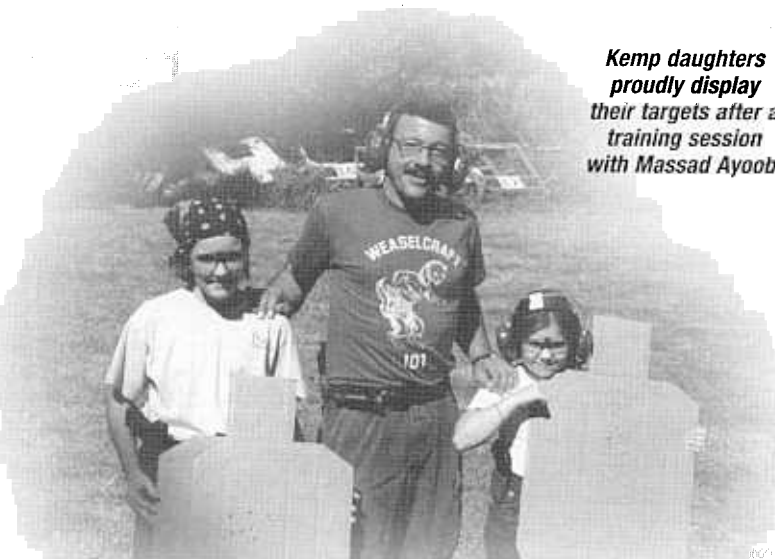
I can remember only one toy gun being in the house and it was used very little. Barbies and make-up were the big draw and I spent more time having my nails painted than playing the bad guy. Still, that one toy gun served to teach a few safety lessons now and then.

Assessing whether your kids are responsible enough to handle live fire is the most difficult task. Responsibility is not a function of age. While they can be completely irresponsible with matters of schoolwork or cleaning their rooms, children are capable of prioritizing just as

adults do, and can rise to the required level of responsibility if the subject is serious enough to warrant it. My feeling is that for most subjects, if a child shows interest and asks questions, they are probably ready for an introduction to said subject. I never pushed my girls into music, which I am very involved in. Sam decided on her own to take guitar lessons. Both have announced that they want to

one on their own. They are the ones among their peers who will respond appropriately should some uneducated child suddenly produce his/her father's gun for display to the rest of the boys and girls. Their education may one day empower them to save another child's life.

Now they are discovering the fun part of shooting. How far they go from here is moot. We have already produced memories that will not be forgotten, along with the pride and self-worth that will shape the rest of their young lives. A bond has been developed between father and daughters, and between two sisters, that will not be broken. A sense of family, accomplishment, and sharing came out of a weekend of shooting. This is a good thing. ■



Kemp daughters proudly display their targets after a training session with Massad Ayoob.

sing in the choir in church. But they have been exposed to music all their lives. It's been the same with shooting, I merely exposed them to it and let them make the first move.

At the very least I wanted my kids to know how to handle a gun safely should they ever come across

UPDATE: Since writing this article, Samantha, now eleven, has moved on to a Glock 19. She has taken LFI StressFire and recently competed in the IDPA Midwest Regionals. Courtney, now nine, has given up the tiny Walther and is using the Colt Officer with the .22 conversion.