

# Pistol Pain

Category: Guns

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | March 1, 2018

I grew up in a gun-free family and neighborhood. As a child of the 1950s and 1960s, I associated guns with the Westerns I saw at the movie theater or with the Lone Ranger, the hero of my favorite TV show.

Then guns intruded on my life—twice.

My 68-year-old paternal grandmother was working for her stepson in his grocery store in 1963. While minding the store alone one day, Grandma found herself facing a gunman. He not only demanded money but also pistol-whipped Grandma. For the first time in her life, Grandma was hospitalized, with wounds and a concussion.

When I saw Grandma with bandages around her head and noticed that she wasn't as mentally sharp as she'd always been deeply, I was deeply affected. I had nightmares. I was 16 but clung to Grandma as if I were a toddler. Grandma never returned to the store, and I spent the rest of her life (she died at age 90) watching over her for signs of distress. Her encounter with that gun added fear to what had always been a relationship rooted solely in love.

My mother devoted her career to a children's furniture store, where she worked every day but Thursdays. While she did a lot of the selling, she also spent time at the front desk, handling the register. One Thursday, two men entered the store, shot and killed Ma's friend and co-worker who was sitting at the front desk, and emptied the register of its cash. Any other day of the week, Ma would have been their victim.

My entire family suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (although the term didn't exist back then to describe our emotions) from that event. Ma, the strongest woman I have ever met—next to Grandma—lived the following weeks and months in a state of high anxiety, marked by sleepless nights, lost appetite, fears about being at the store, double-checking to make sure the doors of our house were locked.

Even decades ago, before all the mass shootings so common today, some people chose to hurt other people. These individuals, as in the cases that affected Grandma and Ma, often relied on guns to give them power over others.

Guns, instruments that brought pain to my family, haunt me. They threaten the health of all of us.

*Ronna Edelstein*

*Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*