

OSCAR'S SALON FEBRUARY 2014 GUEST WRITER

In Memoriam Andrew Suknaski July 30, 1942 – May 3, 2012

I had a gun once. It was a .22 something-or-other, the gift of the farmer, Pete Kereluk, who rented my land and didn't like the idea of my staying alone. My property was on a secondary road and you could easily see my shack as you drove by, but this very visibility is what might have given some of the "boys" riding around in their pick-up trucks some ideas, according to Pete. So he handed me the rifle in its already-opened cardboard box. It was surprisingly light, balanced tentatively on my hands, but then I saw it was made mainly of plastic, which, I admit, disappointed me. It felt like a toy (maybe it was for *girls*?) until I felt the whump of it recoil against my right shoulder as I took my very first shot, ever, from a firearm. I couldn't believe I had done it and I examined with some wariness the small box of elegant bullets, packed in tight rows, that could kill a deer and most certainly a squirrel. Could a .22 kill a man?

Email from deerhunter Harvey Spak: "Could you kill a man with it? For sure. For years the preferred assassination weapon of the Mossad was a .22 long rifle pistol with a silencer. At close range it was most efficient, quiet and left no mess."

Of course, I never intended to shoot anything except a tin can on a fence (a pastime I saw in Western movies) but Pete took his training responsibility seriously and insisted I practise first by shooting at the half-hinged door of the old barn across the little meadow from my shack. I thought this was a risible “target” – how could you miss it? As soon as Pete drove out of the yard, with a tip of the finger to the brim of his Co-op cap, I rummaged around in the shack for something that looked like a real target, something that had enough details or features on it so that I could measure how well I was doing from large to smaller target points. I don’t remember what the choices were but I do remember that I chose a large poster of the famous portrait of Karl Marx that many of us had up on our bedroom or study walls, along with Che Guevara and, in my case, Hanoi Jane (Fonda). It was rolled up in a corner.



I nailed it up on the side of the barn and shot away. I meant no disrespect.

Email from deer hunter Harvey Spak: "Your rifle was .22 caliber semi-automatic meaning it fired every time you squeezed the trigger. It had a magazine that you loaded with perhaps 10 .22 cal long rifle cartridges.

Once the mag was loaded, you inserted it into the receiver just ahead of the trigger guard till it snapped home. Then you cocked it, i.e. you drew back the bolt on the receiver just above the trigger guard and were ready to fire. When you were ready to shoot you clicked off the safety and fired."

One day my friends, the poet from Wood Mountain, Saskatchewan, Andy Suknaski, and deer hunter Spak rolled up for a visit. While Andy tamped his pipe and gazed out the little window that looked south to the old barn, he saw Karl, and kind of yelped. Later he wrote a poem, "Marx' Woman": she hands suknatskyj/her rifle/"try that tin can/on the barn windowsill/gun's ready/just flip it off *safte*/the red dot/should be showing'/PTZWWWAAAaaaaannnnnnng!/on the garden's edge/the sunflowers stand/motionless/like a firing squad/behind her.



Karl marx/winces/frowning at the hopeless/marksmanship/of sukhnatskyj

I kept the gun under my bed with the loaded cartridge in the drawer of the little bedside table. *How fast did I think I could load it?* One day a friend originally from Montreal paid me a visit. I showed him the .22, with the same satisfaction I showed him the red Olivetti portable typewriter primed for work on the little desk. My friend was unimpressed. He was from the big city, and savvy. “If you’re going to have a gun around, be prepared for it to be grabbed from you and used on *you*.” I had never thought of that. I took my .22 into the city and handed it over to the police. After that, I slept with an axe under the bed.

Email from deer hunter Spak: “I question the self- defence advice given you by your Montreal dude. If an attacker could wrestle away your rifle and use it against you, he would have less trouble taking away the axe. You'd have first advantage and a longer reach with the rifle than with a 2 ft axe. And if he got the axe away *Bozhe! Bozhe!*” Lord! Lord!