

"My First Reloading Experience"

My first brush with reloading was back in 1983 after my husband and I moved to Maryland. I call it a brush with reloading as my first experience came about a year later. But for this moment, I want to describe my 'brush'.

I worked in Washington, D.C. and traveled extensively, being on the road for two weeks a shot (no pun intended) and coming home for a weekend here and there. On one particular night I had just returned from a grueling trip and to say I was tired was an understatement. The taxi dropped me off at my door and it was minutes later when I finally found my husband, who was in the basement. He had set up his reloading bench and was preparing to reload. In all honesty, up to that point I didn't have a clue what reloading was. When in the Army I had qualified as Expert and Sharpshooter on various weapons but reloading never crossed my mind.

On his newly built reloading bench were two reloading books, a single base press, a handful of 45 ACP and 30-06 brass, two pounds of powder, a couple trays of primers, a powder trickler, and a marvelous little thing called a primer flip tray. My husband suddenly overwhelmed me with a verbose diatribe about the benefits of reloading, along with an even more overwhelming dissertation about all the components and how they all came together. Needless to say, in about 30 seconds I was mentally wiped out, but I could see how excited he was that I showed an interest in his main love. Up to that point we didn't have anything in common, so I decided that I'd try to make this new project something that we could share in. My first mistake.

I tried to pay attention while he trickled powder, turn by tedious little turn from the RCBS powder trickler. I guess I should add that the difference between my husband and I could have been compared to the tortoise and the hare—he being the tortoise and I being the hyperactive hare. I was always teased that I was the 1950's poster child for ADHD. I could feel my brain melting while watching the powder trickler as my husband cranked out one soporiferous flake after the other, and seeing that the powder scale didn't even budge. I broke. I asked if I could help. My second mistake.

He was absolutely delighted that I wanted to join him on this slow-motion march into hell, but I quickly snatched up the scale and trickler as he explained that he needed four point five grains of powder per round. He added also that since I moved the scale that it had to be zeroed again. Four point five? I confirmed, as I hurriedly zeroed the scale and set it to . . . what I thought was four point five. That little RCBS trickler was almost smoking as I cranked it to its max speed and rapidly filling the little scale dish. Then with another snap I plunged the little green powder funnel into the 45 ACP brass and dumped my perfectly weighed mound of black flakes inside. I tapped it to make it swallow all of it . . . then banged it on the workbench, then even tried packing it down with a little yellow scoop the size of half a thimble—but nothing worked. Four five was wayyyy too much powder and I immediately brought it to my husband's attention. After pulling him off the floor he scolded, "Good gawd, four point five, not forty-five!!!"

Incensed, I excused myself from his wrath and departed for where I rightfully belonged, which was upstairs and in bed. That was my brush with reloading and I never intended to get involved again.

And now for my first reloading experience. Moving forward about a year, we moved again, this time into our own home, which my husband promptly claimed the large room in the rear of our garage as his gun room. Our garage was heated so I opted to dabble in my own projects, like renovating and remodeling our home, which enabled me to stay out of the 'he den' and away from his toys.

All was going quite well until the worst of the worst happened. A day after helping a neighbor clear her backyard for a garden, I was heading into work when I noticed my skin looked like my alien heritage was coming through so I immediately went to the emergency room . . . spurred on by the fact that I was suddenly having trouble breathing. Long story short, not only had I been bitten by a spider, but I was seriously allergic to poison ivy/oak. Mind you, not just allergic to the plant, but to the airborne spores as well. In Maryland, that's not what anyone wants.

The doctor explained that I was going to have to be at home for a couple weeks. I was elated. I had been working my tail off and traveling (for about two years) and was in dire need of a vacation. My mind was racing over the quickly developing mental list of putter projects when he added, "but you have to follow these directions or I'll put you in the hospital!"

"No problemo, doc," I happily answered.

"While you're recovering, no sunshine. I mean none at all," he sternly advised.

I thought for a moment and quickly altered some of my plans to indoor work.

“While I’m on that, no sweating!”

No sweating in the humid Maryland summer? I wondered. Oh well, again I altered my plans to be sure to turn the air conditioning up while I’m puttering. I still smiled happily at the thought of a vacation.

“You need to wear these rubber gloves to set out a change of clothes for each week, because you can’t touch things. When you sweat you are as contagious as the poison ivy plant and will contaminate anything you touch, to include your husband. You need to set up a place where you can sit, where no one else will sit, and so on. No sleeping with your husband. No touching at all.”

I quickly rationalized that I could do as told, after all this was going to be my big break. I desperately needed time off to kick back, have a few cool ones, relax, visit friends, etc. I would just have to ensure that I’d stay in air conditioning and wouldn’t touch anyone or most anything. “It’s a done deal,” I happily exclaimed.

“AND . . . (I felt the shoe falling) . . . positively no booze. I mean no wine, beer, hard liquor, nothing!”

I nearly gulped in disbelief as he handed me a large bottle of pills. “These are powerful steroids which you’ll be on, probably most of the summer, that is if you expect to keep breathing.”

The news and orders just got worse from there. The drive home was horrible. All I could think was how my vacation had quickly turned into a prison nightmare. All the time off I needed, but I couldn’t do a thing I enjoyed. I couldn’t even be sick happily.

The first day I did as the doc ordered, getting things organized and all, and by the next morning I even woke up bored. Yep, the ADHD poster child was getting restless. The hare was antsy. I moped around inside the house trying to find things to do that didn’t contradict the doc’s orders but there was nothing. And I’m not the kind of person to sit and read books for days on end, let alone for longer than a few minutes. A sample of my normal time off can be read [Kalamari, a Private Affair](#) . If you read that you’ll understand why boring non-productivity isn’t in my vocabulary.

The third day found me idly entering the ‘he den.’ I glanced around at how it was filling up with more and more toys. You know the kind, guns, more powder, boxes of bullets, bags of brass, a horseshoe reloading bench, cabinets, stacks and piles of books and magazines, etc., etc., etc. I could hardly take it all in. It was then that I noticed a large cardboard box beneath one wing of the bench. It was the box our friend Bill had brought over a few months earlier. Bill had told us to use it if we wanted to. It was a

Dillon, he explained, but he didn't have time to use it, and since he was going through a divorce he needed a place to put it. Hum. . . .

I took the manual from the box, and the words "Progressive Reloading Machine" struck my interest immediately. An hour later I had the big blue Dillon mounted and ready to assemble. Now this is my kind of machine, I mused, as I assembled the parts, making sure I learned all the right terminology for each of them . . . caliber conversion kit, primer magazines, primer slides, shell platform, powder funnels, dies, tool heads, and even the powder charging bar, my favorite. On page 11 of the Dillon manual it says, "*AT LAST. If you've followed instructions, you are now ready to load.*" Wow. I could barely contain myself. I was raring to load 9mm, the only caliber conversion kit I found in my Dillon box. Yep, you read it right, *my* Dillon. That was back in 1985, and I still have it as of this writing (Sep 09).

The only thing not in the Dillon manual was the specifics, like how much powder, which primers, etc. That's when I trespassed into the 'he' side of the horseshoe to snatch a reloading 'how to' book, and it wasn't long before I had the right powder, the right primers, and all the brass and bullets Bill had dropped off with the Dillon, which was a lot. I got everything assembled on the Dillon, got the powder charge adjusted, and was again ready to go. Bullets to the left, brass to the right, primers in the tube, powder in the powder measure, and with one last parting glance at the reloading book, I caught myself staring at a warning about the 9mm's headspace. Headspace? *What the in the hell was headspace?*

Without thinking I called my husband at work. The poor guy knew I was going crazy at home, but when I asked, "What's headspace on a 9mm?" there was a long, almost deathly pause.

"Uh . . . uh . . . headspace? Where're you at?"

"I'm uh . . . I'm uh. . . . I was just wondering what headspace was." I knew he was suddenly worried about what I was into.

"It's a measurement taken on the . . . are you in the—"

I gulped. *What was I thinking to have dared to enter the 'he den'?* "Don't worry," I blurted, "I was just reading something about headspace. I'll see you when you get home. Bye, honey!" Slam! *Whew, that was a close one.* I grabbed a couple other books and started reading as fast as I could. After all, I was now committed and the 9mm was my new mission.

I learned a lot that afternoon, and after several hours of studying, and one hour of reloading, I had one thousand rounds of beautifully loaded 9mm safely packed into their little boxes of 50 each, all of which were neatly labeled and ready for Bill to pickup.

When my husband came home I half expected another chastisement about powder measurement, but it didn't happen. Instead, I was met with a weird sort of ambivalence and an attitude of *'we'll see about these loads when we go shooting'*. As mentioned at the first of this article, I was an Expert and Sharpshooter with various weapons when in the Army, but shooting with loads that I had made from scratch was the best feeling I had in a long time, after of course, I proved that they were dead accurate loads. I believe it was that first day at the range when I got my husband's respect.

A month later Bill dropped off more brass, powder, primers and bullets and couldn't wait for my next loading session. He said I made the most perfect, accurate loads he had ever fired. He even brought us his targets to show the remarkable pattern in them. Then, to my utter shock, as a gift, Bill cheerfully gave me the big blue Dillon and only asked that I load for him when he needed. Man-o-live, I was in heaven.

And if you were wondering, that infamous afternoon the 'he den' became the gun room, but we did of course arrange a he-side and a she-side of the horseshoe bench. The she-side rapidly grew as I added more caliber conversion kits, tool heads, extra Dillon parts, a chronograph, and my own guns, to include a very beloved Thompson Center with my favorite 357 Remington Maximum barrel, and the list goes on. I had finally met a piece of equipment that could keep up with my hyper-drive mind, the Dillon RL550B, which enabled me to get into the load development side of reloading, my true passion.

Don't settle for less and remember that time is too precious to waste, so don't waste it on any other press. You can load fast or slow on the Dillon, use it as a one stage single base press or up to a four-stage press, it's all up to you.

If you ask me about what makes a great shot, I would have to say a steady hand, a keen eye, work your brass (flash hole, primer pocket, trim length, and tumble), passion, and then partner up with the most remarkable reloading press you can imagine . . . the Dillon RL550B. And it says a lot about Dillon Precision Products that their warranty is the best in the industry.

And gentlemen, invite your wives and/or girlfriends into the world of reloading and shooting. I bet they will totally shock you.

Morgan Chai