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Women & Guns

Rhonda Ezell
on
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Chicago's Rhonda Ezell: Public victory, Personal battle

Chicago's Rhonda Ezell: Public victory, Personal battle

By Dave Workman,
Contributing Editor

Battling is nothing new for Chicago's Rhonda Ezell, a gallant lady with two missions in life: "Doing what I can do for the Second Amendment," and winning her very personal battle against a kidney ailment that has her waiting desperately for a transplant.

This 44-year-old Chicago native became the central figure in a gun rights victory that secured a preliminary injunction against Chicago's gun control ordinance. That ordinance banned shooting ranges inside the city limits, despite a requirement that citizens seeking a gun permit in the city must take a training course that includes shooting on a gun range.

Ezell, a life member of the Illinois State Rifle Association (ISRA) and an acknowledged victim of crime in her South Side neighborhood, took one look at Chicago's ordinance about two years ago and quickly concluded, "This is nonsense."

As coincidence often plays a big role in the making of history, Ezell had become acquainted with ISRA Executive Director Richard Pearson and David and Colleen Lawson, two of the plaintiffs in the celebrated case of *McDonald*

v. City of Chicago. That was the case resulting in the Supreme Court ruling that incorporated the Second Amendment to the states.

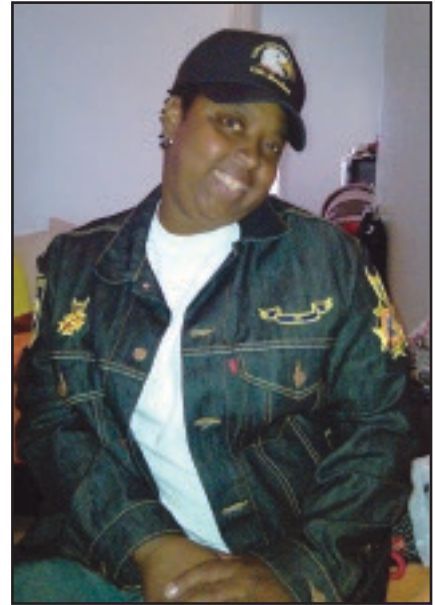
She recalls that when the city—in response to its Supreme Court loss—first passed its hastily-drafted gun ordinance, she had just gotten out of the hospital. She saw the requirements of the law, contacted ISRA for details and just happened to encounter Pearson and the Lawsons at police headquarters. She told them about all the hoops she had jumped through in order to obtain a permit to keep a handgun in her home.

"They decided my rights had been violated," she commented.

So, too, did the Second Amendment Foundation (SAF, which is the parent of *Women & Guns Magazine*), which had just won the high court's McDonald case, named for Chicago's Otis McDonald, a lead plaintiff in that historic action.

Indeed, according to an Appeals Court ruling handed down last year enjoining the city, agreed.

The case is known as *Ezell v. City of Chicago*, and it elevated Rhonda to the status of local celebrity in the gun rights movement, something she accepts with considerable modesty.



Rhonda Ezell is the lead plaintiff in a suit against a gun range ban in the city of Chicago.

The lawsuit was a joint effort by SAF, ISRA and Action Target, Inc., along with Ezell and two other Chicago residents, William Hesperen and Joseph Brown. Rejected by the lower court, it took a unanimous federal appeals court ruling to put the city in its place.

Said SAF Executive Vice President Alan Gottlieb at the time: "The court is making it clear that cities cannot adopt firearms ordinances that are so deliberately restrictive that they make it impossible for citizens to exercise their rights under the Second Amendment."

The 3-0 ruling, written by Judge Diane S. Sykes, observed, "It's hard to imagine anyone suggesting that Chicago may prohibit the exercise of a free-speech or religious-liberty right within its borders on the rationale that those rights may be freely enjoyed in the suburbs. That sort of argument should be no less unimaginable in the

Second Amendment context.”

In a concurring opinion, Judge Ilana Diamond Rovner noted, “... the city may not condition gun ownership for self-defense in the home on a prerequisite that the City renders impossible to fulfill within the city limits.”

How’s that for a legal slap upside the head? It brought a big smile to Rhonda Ezell’s face, one that she was wearing when she visited last year’s Gun Rights Policy Conference (GRPC) in Chicago. She was especially complimentary of the work done by attorneys Alan Gura of Virginia and David Sigale

Kidney Donor Program

Rhonda Ezell is not the only American in need of a kidney, and the Living Donor program at the University of Chicago Medical Center is dedicated to answering their needs.

Lives can be saved, and hopes can be fulfilled through such programs. As Rhonda noted during an interview with W&G, this is a battle that must be fought.

Kathy Davis is the nurse/coordinator of the Living Donor program at the university medical center. She can be contacted at (773) 834-2228, or via e-mail at: Kdavis@surgery.bsd.uchicago.edu.

of Chicago. Being with them at the GRPC event last September was a genuine treat, because it was a moment of celebration, and she got to rub elbows with a lot of people who had followed the case

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closely.

“I’ve actually owned a firearm for a while,” Ezell told W&G. “I was an average shooter, and I joined ISRA several years ago just so I could be familiar with the rules and regulations for owning a firearm. You want to do it legally, for the protection of your home and life.”

In that regard, Rhonda Ezell is reflective of the “every woman” not only in Chicago, but across the nation. Her home is her sanctuary, and after enduring an on-going battle with kidney failure, she is keenly aware of just how precious life is.

Very few people realized that while Ezell was fighting the good fight to secure their Second Amendment rights in the Windy City, she was fighting that personal health battle that, at one point, she nearly lost. Now she is determined to see her granddaughter, Marley Jordan Williams, graduate from college and have children of her own.

And just to prove how gutsy and determined Rhonda is, that granddaughter is but one year old. Translation: Rhonda Ezell plans to be around a while, a prospect that ought to cause shudders at City Hall, because she is not about to back down on her efforts to restore gun rights in Cook County.

Meanwhile, she is on the waiting list at the University of Chicago Medical Center for a kidney transplant. She is hoping for a donor to contact Kathy Davis, the Living Donor coordinator at the medical center.

In what might be called a textbook case of understatement, Ezell told W&G that, “I thought



Ezell with attorney Alan Gura of Virginia, who won the *McDonald v. Chicago* case in the Supreme Court, and is one of the principles in Ezell’s case.

the city was being a little harsh on Chicagoans with that ban in place.”

She noted that the city has a history of high crime rates and that includes homicides and assaults. While her South Side neighborhood is relatively quiet, Rhonda acknowledged that within a few blocks, it is not unusual to hear gunfire.

What reasonable, rational citizen in an environment like that would not wish to have a firearm for personal protection in the home? It’s a message that Rhonda has mastered over the past couple of years. She participated in the annual IGOLD rally and march at the state capitol in Springfield last year and plans to be there again for this year’s event.

She has also taken her cause to the airwaves, appearing in an interview with Fox News and doing a guest stint on the Cliff

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sight picture.

I haven't a lot of finger strength and have problems racking the slides of automatics, especially those with multiple recoil springs. I tend to stick to autos with only one recoil spring rather than putting myself in a situation where I am not sure if my fingers are going to do their part and be heroic. I can handle single recoil spring .45s and 9mm and smaller calibers. There are still some autos I have problems with, however; so, after trying them out to see what I can do with them, if my finger strength and the gun's slide can't come together and do what is expected of them, I don't carry that particular auto.

One of my favorite handguns is a Model 66 with a two and one-half-inch barrel. Mine was bought used as they are no longer manufactured by Smith & Wesson. It's equipped with Crimson Trace LaserGrips. I can hold it comfortably, reach what I need to reach on it and shoot it with ease. It's not the biggest or baddest gun in the bunch; but, it is reliable and shoots well. If I find .357 Magnum recoil too much, I have the option of a wide range of .38 Special loads to use. The Crimson Trace LaserGrips help me with practice shooting as I can point and aim and hit the target just where the laser beam lands. It's a confidence builder. The Model 66 will also fit in most purses and weighs only thirty-six ounces loaded.

The gun that you carry in your purse is a very individual choice and must be a gun which works

for you—not your boyfriend, husband, son or the man or woman who wrote the gun article you just read. The decision is important, because your life can depend on the choice that you

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Kelly talk show in Chicago.

With her kidney troubles, she admits that there are times when she is fatigued and it sometimes comes down to wondering “whether you will wake up and have a good day or a bad day.”

“It leaves me vulnerable,” she acknowledged. “There are limitations. You accept the fact that you are no longer the person you used to be. That's hard on anyone.”

It is not so hard, however, that Rhonda and her co-plaintiffs in the Chicago lawsuit, and attorneys Gura and Sigale, didn't quickly conclude that when the city adopted its original gun control ordinance, several things were haywire by design. Chief among those was the shooting range requirement coupled with a ban on gun ranges. But there are other problems with the city's procedures that leave Ezell rolling her eyes.

“What I think has been wrong with the law so far,” she observed, “is the fact that you have to pay a lot of money in fees, just to comply. The city also wants to redo all the background checks, even though you already go through a background check when you apply for a state Firearm Owners Identification (FOID) card.”

Duplication of effort and high costs, she is convinced, were thrown in by the city to discourage people like her from



Ezell at one of many Illinois State Rifle Association functions she attends. An ISRA member, Ezell is on the front lines of gunowners' battles in the state—the only one remaining in the US without a concealed carry statute.

exercising their recently-regained civil right to have a gun, especially a handgun.

She thinks the city is missing a huge opportunity to generate revenue and bring business to the city, because shooting ranges will bring plenty of traffic. She believes that if Illinois adopts a concealed carry permit system, it will be a boon.

“It is the last piece of the puzzle,” Rhonda explained. “That's going to make it (shooting range development) more marketable. People are going to want to go to a gun range and practice because they have to comply with the ordinance.”

If you build it, as the saying goes, people will come.

Her case might one day be remembered as a cornerstone element in making all of this happen. Rhonda looks at that philosophically.

“Being a part of that is such a big thing,” she admits. “When they see your face and hear your name, you are proud to be part of it and do something positive.”