

A MATTER OF SURVIVAL

People choose to own a handgun and carry one for many different reasons. Some folks simply want to exercise their Second Amendment rights, and that's just fine. Others want to feel a sense of empowerment. Many folks shoot competitively as a hobby or to get practice using their handgun in IDPA, IPSC and other matches. Some folks, like me, believe and feel strongly that owning firearms and carrying a gun just make plain sense in today's unpredictable and dangerous world. In addition, having the tools and the preparation to defend ourselves and our loved ones in the home is a big priority. Then there are people who have no experience with firearms and decide that purchasing a handgun and learning to use it safely constitute a survival necessity.

As an NRA Certified Firearms Instructor in several disciplines, I get to talk with and provide basic instruction to many folks in this latter category. I receive referrals from a number of local gun shops, through word of mouth, and through our website on the internet:

www.PersonalDefenseSolutions.net

Training folks to whom firearms are foreign and frightening can be hard work, but it is very rewarding. It is certainly not as "cool" or as "hip" as running fast paced defensive handgun training courses during which hundred to thousands of rounds are fired over the course of a two day weekend. Training "newbies" requires lots of patience, flexibility, and the willingness to go over the basics repeatedly, ad nauseam as necessary.

Handgun "newbies" often visit a gun shop with the idea of purchasing a handgun, and when faced with all of the choices and unfamiliar terminology, realize that they are not ready to make a purchase. An ethical, well intentioned, and experienced firearms salesperson often at this point will recommend that the customer hold off on making a purchase until he or she receives some basic individual instruction, or takes a basic handgun safety class. That is a good choice rather than selling a firearm that is not suited to the customer's needs.

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It is after this point that I often receive a call from the "newbie". Often, I receive calls from "newbies" who have physical challenges and emotional challenges (i.e., lots of anxiety) relative to learning to handle and operate a handgun for personal defense. Not a problem. I was in the same place once myself. I didn't grow up with firearms or hunting. I remember what it felt like. I also have ongoing physical challenges that interfere with the intensity with which I can train tactically. These physical challenges also influence what I choose to carry everyday.

If you are new to firearms, or new to carrying firearms, if you have physical limitations and/or emotional challenges that impact on your decision to own a handgun, or carry one concealed, it is important to realize that there are many choices available. You can overcome your anxiety and trepidation. Remember that knowledge is power, and this magazine and the USCCA are dedicated to giving you knowledge and empowering you so you can make the choices that are right for you.

I am repeatedly surprised at what people who are determined can accomplish. I am repeatedly gratified to share with my clients/students their joy when they succeed in learning to handle the right handgun for them. However, many of these folks need a kind and gentle hand to guide them to the point where they realize that they are not powerless and that they can handle a serious defensive handgun that had at first intimidated them. You do not have to begin with a .22! It is necessary however, that the instructor be flexible and patient in teaching the client/student the necessary fundamentals. A case example is in order. The client's name has been changed to protect her confidentiality.

LOUISE'S STORY:

Louise was referred to me by the owner of a local gun shop. She called requesting basic handgun instruction to help her acquire the knowledge and the comfort necessary for purchasing an appropriate defensive handgun. She had no prior gun ownership or shooting experience. She told me that she had severe back problems which limited how long she could stand on her feet. We made an appointment for an initial two hour lesson at the local gun club. My plan was to spend the first hour in the

classroom going over safety fundamentals and the basic operation and handling of a revolver and a semi-automatic pistol. Then, the second hour was to be devoted to her first experience of shooting on the range.

Louise appeared to be a quick learner. She listened attentively and absorbed my preliminary classroom instruction smoothly. With no prior experience, she seemed to pick up, conceptually at least, fundamentals as we went over them. These included: picking up a handgun safely, performing appropriate safety and status checks, acquiring a proper grip, assuming a proper stance or shooting platform, understanding how to obtain proper sight alignment and acquire a proper sight picture, and trigger press. However, her arthritis and loss of some strength and dexterity in her hands presented a challenge as far as operating the cylinder release latch, opening the cylinder, applying a smooth trigger press on a snubby revolver. These physical limitations also limited her ability to operate the slide of the Glock 17 training pistol we used. In each case, I had to work with Louise to devise ways to get around her limitations, and we were able to do so. Based on just the "dry" handling of the training guns in the classroom, Louise thought that the snubby revolver was going to be the gun for her. However, her opinions changed markedly during the second hour of her instruction on the range!

Louise found that the snubby revolver had far too much recoil for her comfort level, and she also had difficulty controlling the long and heavy revolver trigger pull even with light .38 special target loads. When we moved on to shooting the 9mm mid-sized Glock 19, Louise found the recoil and the trigger control to be much easier to master. Her flinch reaction (read SHOCK!) was much less with the Glock semi-automatic pistol as compared with the revolver.

Given her arthritic hands, she did however, have a problem at first racking the slide of the Glock. With some experimentation, we were able to design a viable method for her that she could perform safely. The same applied to teaching her how to operate the magazine release catch to eject magazines from the Glock pistol. We had to compensate to help her find a way such that she could do it safely and smoothly, and we accomplished that.

Obviously, we could only accomplish so much in one hour on the range. However, one hour was all she could tolerate, with breaks, given her back pain and her weakness in her arms and hands. Nevertheless, she was able to pick up the basics of grip, stance, sight alignment, sight picture and trigger control.

We scheduled a second one-hour range session for one week later which she cancelled due to illness. Several weeks later, Louise called to reschedule this lesson. She demonstrated less anxiety and more self confidence during this second shooting session. The guns' (Glock and snubby revolver) noise and recoil were less unnerving to her. During this second session, we also fired a sub-compact, 9mm Glock 26, as this was the gun she felt might be her best choice for both home defense and concealed carry. She handled it better than she handled the compact 9mm Glock 19 during her first shooting session!

At the time of this writing, Louise has not purchased her handgun yet, but she is leaning towards getting a Glock 26. What follows, is Louise's account thus far, in her own words, edited to protect her identity:

LOUISE'S ACCOUNT:

"I have thought about your request (to write up my experience) and I don't think I can write my story without mentioning the impact of my personal abuse. I do have my girls to think of and even though they are grown, I would not want to put my name out there (Author's note: her confidentiality was assured).

My name is Louise (not her real name) and I am 57 years old. I am disabled due to many years of being abused by my ex-husband which eventually lead to two spinal surgeries. While the surgeries did help somewhat, I am still unable to stand or sit for more than an hour without having excruciating pain.

During my years of abuse, which included having guns held to my head, I was scared to death of guns. I got the help I needed regarding the abuse but still had a fear of guns. I then found myself in the position of having to move from my house where I had been living, basically without fear, into an apartment. Now, some fear for my personal safety kicked in and I decided that I needed to purchase a gun for my personal protection.

I went and obtained a permit to carry, and without any knowledge of

guns, I went to a gun store. The shop owner could see I was nervous and asked if I had ever fired a gun. When I said I had not, he readily requested that I contact the person on the business card he gave me in order to become familiar and comfortable with guns before I make a purchase.

With many thanks to that gun shop owner, I called the person, who turned out to be Bruce Eimer. We spoke, and we set up a time to meet at a local gun range for my first class. I let Bruce know up front that I may not last two hours due to my disability (I also walk with a cane).

When we met for the first time, Bruce put me at ease and went over all the things I needed to know about revolvers and Glocks, since those are the two types of guns I was looking to purchase.

With hands shaking so much I could barely handle the guns, he was patient with me and went over all the Marksmanship Fundamentals, as well as the correct grip and stance. After leaving the classroom, and moving to the actual firing range section, my nerves kicked in, but I fired my first gun, a revolver. My heart went crazy, but I hung in there and with Bruce's help, I went on to firing the Glock a number of times before my back went out and it became too hard for me to carry on, even after firing sitting down.

But, even with just this first lesson behind me, I felt that I had accomplished my expectations of myself, as well as the class, and that was to learn about the guns, how they function, proper handling and stance and the actual 'kick-back' from firing.

With just that first class, and firing of the guns, I felt that I could have walked into a gun shop and purchased a gun if I needed to, since Bruce had taken great pains to make sure I understood everything I needed to learn and that he needed to teach me, even with my physical limitations.

With our second shooting session on the range, I was surprised that I had retained a lot of what Bruce had taught me. I found that the smaller Glock 26 seemed to be easier to fire than either the revolver or the bigger Glock. I actually almost like it. However, I choose not to purchase yet as I feel I still need more knowledge and confidence before I do so. But I know I will get there very soon with the proper training I am getting, and the self confidence I have in myself that I can do this. I can learn to protect myself!

After two sessions, that was a great feeling from a great teacher.

I am confident that I will master any lingering fears I may have of guns, and keep moving in the right direction and learn the proper use and handling of firearms. And for that I am immensely happy and proud of myself to face my fears and seek out a professional in this journey of proper handling of any weapons.

Anyone, no matter your age or physical limitations can and should learn to protect yourself, and with the proper weapons training, you can do it. I am living proof. I am very happy with what I have learned, and look forward to gaining greater knowledge of weapons.

So, don't think that since your body may limit you in some way or age is creeping up on you, that you can't become proficient in proper weapons use. Do it now and do it for yourself and your personal protection. Neither age nor physical impairment should stop you from seeking out a good trainer and learning all you can so that you can begin to feel as confident as I am beginning to feel. That's it, Bruce. I hope I have touched

on and put into words some of what you were looking for."

Stay safe and realize that you can do anything you set your mind to doing.

Bruce N. Eimer, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical and forensic psychologist, NRA Certified Firearms Instructor, Florida and Utah Concealed Firearms Instructor, and a Professional Writer in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As a co-owner of Personal Defense Solutions, LLC, Bruce offers individual shooting instruction and teaches concealed carry and handgun safety classes that prepare people to apply for the Florida Non-Resident Concealed Carry Permit which is honored by 28 states. For more information, he can be reached by phone at 215-938-7283 and by e-mail at:

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For a schedule of upcoming classes, you can log on to the PDS website:

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Bruce is also the co-author of the "Essential Guide to Handguns: Firearm Instruction for Personal Defense and Protection."

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