

Conceal Carry Class

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On Sunday October 28th I attended an NRA Approved Basic Handgun Course/Concealed Carry Course. My boss suggested it would be a good story. Why? Because I'd never fired a handgun before, silly! What better way to demonstrate such a course than by a newbie? The fact of the matter is that most of the people taking the course are already familiar with handguns and shooting in general and are taking the course in order to be able to carry a concealed handgun. So, what would it be like to take a course to learn something completely new? I was intrigued.

A little background might be in order. Other than shooting BB guns, literally decades ago, I have never fired a live and real handgun before. Don't get me wrong, I have no problem with guns, it's just that I've never had an interest in owning any before. I say 'before' because I'm a little interested now. More on this later. It's easy to settle into a nice state of complacency, but the result is a lack of interest in trying something new sometimes. Basically you can get into a rut and so I welcomed the opportunity to try something new and alien. And so begins the journey of a man who takes a conceal carry course just for the sheer adventure of it...

The course I was to take was to be taught by Gary Swartout, a friend of my boss's. Gary teaches the course as a side job as he is a plant manager of a box making company. About every month Gary teaches his class at the Pleasant Hill VFW. Gary is a personable man of 36 and is eminently qualified to teach a handgun course. Gary is an NRA Approved instructor, but what I find impressive is his background, which brings a

long association and experience with handguns and guns in general to his class. Gary was in the Marines as a Special OPS man and, later, attended the Police Academy to become a police officer. Gary didn't become a police officer as a long-time friend needed his help to start his company, and with the prospect of marriage and children coming, Gary's course was set outside of law enforcement, as he is still working and helping his friend ten-odd years later.

Gary brings a common sense and fundamental approach to his class as he has much experience with guns. This comforts me as I know Military and law enforcement have strict and proven methods of gun safety, which comforts me because, frankly, I was a little intimidated by the prospect of handling and using a gun. And, you know what? That's good because that's how accidents are prevented. Don't get me wrong, Gary never suggested that guns should be intimidating. What Gary instills is the need for safety with guns because they are dangerous when handled carelessly.

After taking the course, I kind of think it would be a good idea to make the course mandatory to all high school students; just so they aren't completely surprised and ignorant if or when they might come in contact with a gun. You might think this is unnecessary but I can tell you from personal experience that an unexpected encounter with a gun is a very real and possible experience. Enough for now of the proselytizing, here's how it went...

The morning I was to take the class started a little rough and it's completely my fault. I was under the impression that daylight savings went into effect the previous evening and, I won't slow this down by why I thought this, suffice it to say, I was under the impression that the time was to fall back an hour and, so, set my clock back the night

before. When Gary called at 6:20 a.m., I laughed and said he must've forgot to set his clock back. Boy, did he have egg on his face! As we killed an hour waiting for the correct time, Gary felt foolish about his faux faux as we drank coffee and chatted. Well, Gary wasn't the fool because it was I who had the time wrong. When we were leaving Gary received a call from one of his students stating, naturally, he was late. Oops! Apparently daylight savings is next week. Boy, did I have egg on my face! I am utterly chagrined, and I apologize to those who had to wait to start their class because of me. To Gary's credit, he did not become angry with me for screwing up his schedule, or at least he did not appear to be, which I must say, is a good quality for someone teaching a course on firearms.

But I digress. The class, which runs a scheduled 10 hours of book learning and two hours of practice time firing handguns, began with the aforementioned book learning. Gary began the class by asking everyone to open their guns in order to confirm that none were loaded and to put their ammunition at the front of the room away from their guns. After this we received several booklets pertaining to gun safety and concealed carry laws along with a test and a concealed carry application. It should be noted that this class is only the first step to obtaining a concealed carry permit. After successfully completing the course you would then have to file the concealed carry permit with the county police who would then conduct a background check on you. The fee to process the application is \$40 and you have six years to file from the time you completed the course.

The material covered included: defining the two types of handguns, a revolver and a semi-automatic; in case you don't know, the parts that comprise them, how they work and how to properly handle them. This also included how ammunition works,

which are called “rounds” once chambered in a gun. We were taught how to position ourselves, how to handle, aim and fire handguns. All of which was related to the most important point to be made in the class: SAFETY. The most useful point I can convey, if you ever do find yourself within close proximity to a gun, is to treat every gun as if it is loaded; even if you are sure it is not loaded. A lot of what Gary tried to convey to us was to develop and maintain core safety values whenever handling a gun, so that over time, these values are ingrained and become automatic. Another interesting point Gary made was the need to practice drawing and handling your gun under different scenarios. This way you’ll be better prepared in case you do find yourself in a hairy situation, as well as preventing your skills from becoming rusty or even slipping away.

Finally, after taking a written test, we went outside to commence with the practical application side of the course: shooting. Outside was clear and sunny with only a little bit of a breeze, though it was a bit chilly. I’m glad I dressed for the weather! Targets of human torsos with a 9” circle in the center of the chest on cardboard, were hung from sparse wooden frames that were placed 10 or so feet from a long bank of dirt and rubble. The banks purpose is to catch the fired rounds, preventing them from going too far away.

After practicing without ammo and under strict supervision we were told to load, aim and fire. Now, I have to come clean here. Honestly, I was a little trepidacious about firing a live gun. I feared the gun could fly out of my hand or hit me in the head, or even make me fall down when fired. I didn’t want to look like an idiot (stop right there!), nor did I want to get hurt. But, following strict instructions and applying everything that I

learned, it wasn't too bad. Not bad at all, actually! There is certainly a kick when the gun fires, but it wasn't anything I couldn't handle.

I did surprisingly well, putting all but 4 or 5 rounds out of approximately 75 into the 9" circle standing at a distance of 15 feet from the target. I attribute this to many years of martial arts training as: stances, stillness, focus, and breathing are major tenants of martial arts, all of which, I feel, contributed to my hitting the target as consistently as I did. Just to go off on a tangent here, but if you ever decide to take some form of martial arts that focuses on the internal as well as the external, you will never regret it as you, overtime, bring what you learn in class into your everyday life. And so, for the next several hours I had a blast (pun intended) shooting a handgun. We were split into two relay groups. While one group fired the other reloaded and, eagerly in my case, waited for our next time up. The day ended with a practical application test which demanded we demonstrate safe and proper handling and firing of our handguns which included being able to fire a certain amount of rounds into the target at a specified distance. All humbleness aside, I passed the course with flying colors! In all seriousness, I do feel, coming away from this experience, a little more well-rounded and a lot more knowledgeable.

In the end, will I apply for a concealed carry permit? Probably not, heck, I'd have to buy a gun first! That being said, I wouldn't mind owning a gun or two at some point, so who knows? In the meantime, I have purchased an air-soft pellet gun to tide me over and to help maintain the safe handling protocols I learned in Gary's course. I can definitely see me passing a significant amount of time target shooting in the future.