

The Gunsite Experience

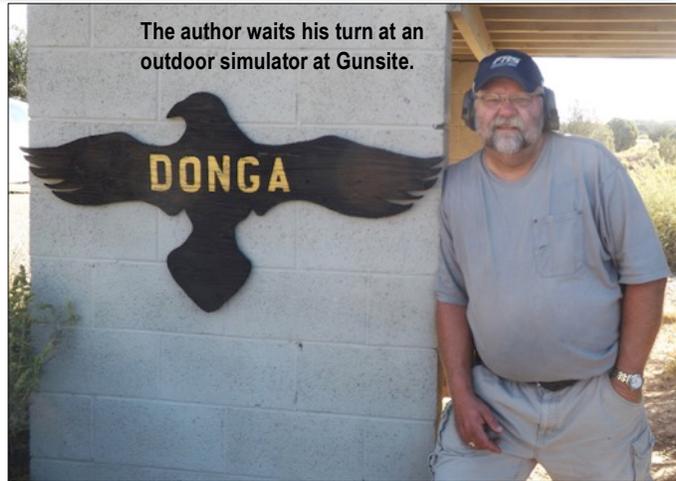
by Marty Hayes, J.D.

During the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Founding Father Benjamin Franklin commented, "We must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall hang separately," calling for the 13 colonies to join together and fight for independence. As I begin this article about recently attending Gunsite Academy and becoming a "family member," I am reminded of Dr. Franklin's message, and why becoming a Gunsite family member might just be more beneficial than simply taking a training class. You see, the training in small arms use one receives at Gunsite is but one of the takeaways when a person graduates from one of the courses offered.

I became an official Gunsite family member when I attended the Gunsite 250 defensive pistol class last year, and then this year I accompanied four of my fellow Firearms Academy of Seattle instructors back to the ranch to complete the Gunsite 350 intermediate pistol course, and attend the Gunsite Alumni Shoot. This article details what my staff and I learned and experienced during these two trips, while viewing my experiences through the mission of education and preparation embraced by the Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network.

Handgun Training

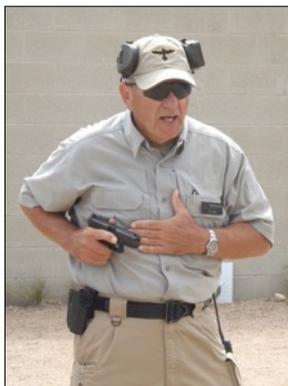
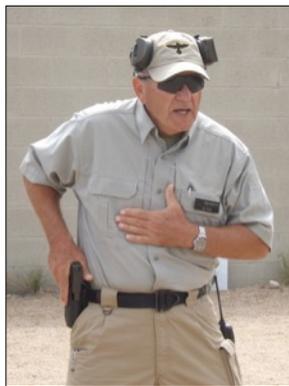
I have been a full-time trainer since 1988, first for two and a half years at an indoor gun range in the Seattle



area, after which I started my own school, The Firearms Academy of Seattle in 1990. Even before that, I was a police officer and law enforcement firearms instructor, and I was a competition shooter. In other words, I have more than a little experience with firearms and firearms training. Because I own and operate my own shooting range and school, why would I bother spending the (not inconsiderable) amount of money to travel for a week to two weeks at a time to do a bunch of stuff I already know how to do?

Well, first off, did I also mention above that I am over 60? That means that my physical skills are deteriorating as I age. So, in order to keep the skills I do have at their highest levels, I need to train...and train on the fundamentals. Spending a week practicing the draw stroke, speed and tactical reloads, malfunction clearing, weak- and strong-handed shooting, along with use of cover, kneeling and prone was just what this old body needed to re-gain the speed and accuracy that I had

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Rangemaster Jay Tuttle demonstrates the perfect draw stroke.

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sensed was waning. As an instructor, while I do demonstrations in front of class (as does the Gunsite instructional crew), I rarely get to push myself while teaching. Pushing yourself to perform at the highest level is what exposes weaknesses and allows you to improve. If all one ever does is shoot within their present abilities, they never get any better.

Defensive shooting skills have been taught and refined for the masses since around 1950 (in law enforcement circles) and really only since the mid 70s in the civilian sector. Looking at the history of the world, that certainly is not a long time, but the evolution of defensive handgunning has pretty much peaked. After all, one can only draw a handgun so fast, perform a reload so fast, and shoot a handgun only so accurately. Gunsite has been at the forefront of this evolution since Jeff Cooper founded the American Pistol Institute in 1976. The name was later changed to Gunsite, to reflect the expansion into teaching the use of shotguns and rifles.

Students attending Gunsite receive cutting edge instruction that actually has been around and tested for decades. These days, advances in the art of defensive handgunning are more heavily focused in the area of tactics, not physical shooting skills. Having said that, like many, I have differing opinions about some of the handgun shooting techniques taught, as in, for example, gripping the handgun. Gunsite teaches students to position their shooting thumb on top of the safety on a 1911 handgun in order to prevent the thumb safety from being inadvertently knocked on while shooting. For a number of reasons, that method does not work as well for me as my old-school revolver grip, where I grip the handgun as hard as I can and wrap my shooting hand thumb around and towards my middle finger, then lock it down with my non-shooting hand thumb.

Although the instructional staff kept on me throughout the week of my recent 350 class, I simply chose to

ignore that request and shoot the way I have conditioned myself to shoot for 30 years and through shooting hundreds of thousands of rounds. Of course, the other side of that argument is that if you paid all that money to come to school and then ignore the instructors' advice, you are foolish, or at least wasting your tuition. I would almost agree, except that last year when I attended Gunsite 250, I did train their way, shooting close to a thousand rounds (left handed) with my thumb on the safety.

I have also trained with other instructors—notably Chuck Taylor, one of Cooper's original instructors, who helped define the Gunsite doctrine—who also tried to get me to ride the safety, and I always return to the locked thumbs approach. In any case, I didn't go to Gunsite 350 to learn to shoot, but instead, to hone my own skills, under the coaching and range drills. This flexibility is representative of how Gunsite has changed for the better over past years; they are more tolerant of differing shooting styles. As long as the student is safe and shooting well, they will let him or her continue. Good for them.

I don't know anyone who is a perfect shooter, and everyone can improve their skills, so any good shooter, or even a great shooter, and especially any instructor can benefit by taking Gunsite's 250 or 350 classes. In both classes I used the opportunity to perfect the fundamentals we were working on. For each draw, each trigger pull and each reload, I tried to do

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Rangemaster John Hutchison demonstrates pivot and draw exercises. Recently, Gunsite updated their curriculum to include the defensive hand



it perfectly, and as a result, I came away a better shooter.

The Mental Game

Cooper defined the Combat Triad of defense shooting as composed of three elements: accuracy, gun handling and mindset. For the most part, accuracy and gun handling are drilled in square range training, but like the Triad, the Gunsite experience is not all about shooting drills. Between shooting exercises, the instructional staff presented mini-lectures, covering different aspects of the mental aspects of defensive handgunning. These lectures were well received and were needed, frankly, because of the physical nature of the classes. In my Gunsite 250 experience, it got pretty warm and if we had been required to spend the entire day out standing in the sun, this old guy would have had a problem with the heat. By being allowed to take water or Gatorade (supplied by Gunsite) and sit in the shade during breaks, the class wasn't unpleasant at all.

My Gunsite 250 and 350 experience adds up to a total of 10 days of training throughout which I found the staff always positive and encouraging, but also tough and demanding. Tough in that they didn't coddle students, and demanding about safety. As one who runs his own shooting school and who believes in gun control of the sort of which Clint Eastwood quipped, "If there is a gun around, I want to control it," I was comfortable in the classes and felt the safety protocols were excellent. After the first few hours of day one, we went to a hot range (students' guns stay loaded), and stayed hot thereafter.



A break in the shade includes a short lecture.

Gunsite is famous for its simulators. I will explain for those who are unfamiliar with the term "simulator." Like a jet fighter pilot training to survive a dog fight, or a commercial jet pilot training to survive a catastrophic failure of the airplane, the term simulator in the context of defensive handgunning is meant to place the student in a simulated life or death situation where the student works out the logistics and tactics of how to survive. The concept is not new, nor was invented at Gunsite. I have seen early black and white movies of OSS agents being trained in simulations, and, of course, there is the legendary "Hogan's Alley" of FBI fame. Read more about this interesting history at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hogan%27s_Alley_\(FBI\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hogan%27s_Alley_(FBI))

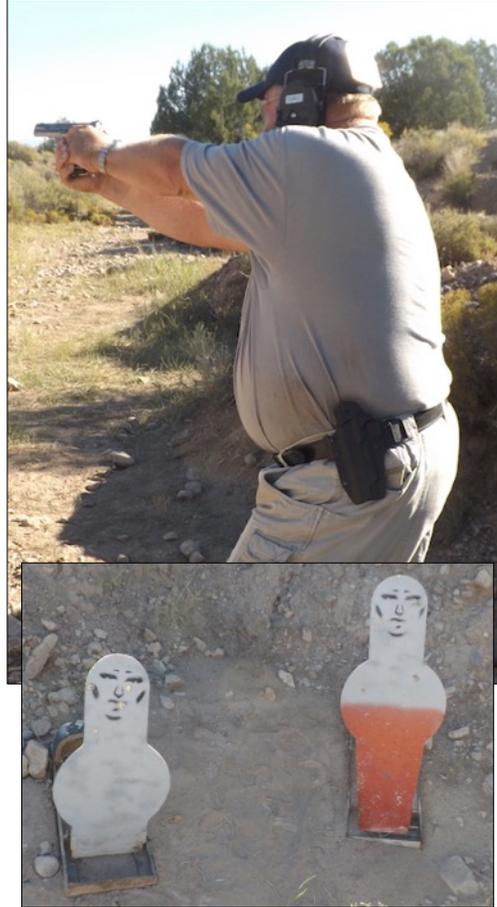
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Left: Author at the North Draw, working with Rangemaster Walt Wilkinson identifying and shooting long range targets. The conversation is going something like, "Is that a target?" Right: Gila Hayes negotiates one of the indoor simulators, under the watchful eye and coaching of Rangemaster John Hall. She has already neutralized the target (right) that is armed with the shotgun.

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Early in Gunsite's history, Col. Cooper built two house-clearing simulators, which he named the "Fun House" and the "Play House." Those original structures are now gone, replaced with state-of-the-art buildings by Action Target, one of the many renovations and improvements instituted by current Gunsite owner Buz Mills. In addition to the live fire building simulators, there are also outdoor simulators, including one named "The Donga." It replicates moving through an outdoor environment where you might have to search an area, remaining on the lookout for those who might want to kill you. In both Gunsite 250 and 350 the students were put through several exercises both in the shoot houses and the outdoor simulators, under the guidance and coaching of the Gunsite staff.



Top: Engaging targets in the Donga. I shot my 250 class weak handed, to maximize the learning during the weeklong course.
Inset: The enemy! The half-red targets are no-shoots.

I would also be remiss when talking about mindset, if I did not address "the shoot-off." One of Cooper's lasting legacies is the concept of using competition to hone one's skills and to expose one's flaws. During each weeklong class, the students run several competitive exercises, and on the last day, each student participates in a class shoot-off, to crown a class champion. In my first class, I made it into the finals, shooting off and losing 3-1 against law enforcement instructor David Newman. In the second class, the ammo gremlin hit me early on, causing a failure to fire malfunction, giving just enough of an edge to my own Firearms

Below: Rangemaster Bob Whaley points to Russ Berry, shoot-off winner in the 350 I attended, as runner up Kevin Margetta congratulates him.



Academy of Seattle Staff Instructor Tom Walls to knock me out of the running.

The Gunsite Staff

I am rarely humbled these days when it comes to firearms training and ancillary activities. But I can honestly say that taking the Gunsite 250 and 350 courses from the combined experience of the instructors at Gunsite is a humbling experience.

Each class has one instructor who is in charge and has the title of the Rangemaster. That instructor opens the class in the classroom the first morning, introduces the staff and gives the first morning briefing along with overseeing the staff of additional instructors. The instructor to student ratio is about one to four or one to five, which, if you have taken other commercial training, you know is excellent. Break the class into two relays, and you find a coach behind you and one other student to help you learn the techniques being taught, or in many cases, to help you break old bad habits. Very little goes on in a Gunsite class that isn't caught by one of the staff members.

Most Gunsite instructors are military veterans, and many completed a second career in law enforcement before joining the staff. Instruction from those with real-world experience is a noticeable deficit among many of the schools that have popped up and are now teaching defensive handgunning. Well, there is no lack of real-world experience among the instructional staff at Gunsite.

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The privilege of learning shooting techniques and survival tactics from instructors who have earned their bona fides in real world military or law enforcement is the frosting on the cake of the Gunsite experience, and I believe it goes a long way towards imparting the mindset necessary for the mostly civilian students to survive a life-threatening encounter.

Joining the Gunsite Family

Early on when Gunsite was formed in 1976, Col. Cooper started referring to people who had attended Gunsite as "family members." Now, I must admit that when I first heard about this from his writings, I found the concept a "little hokey." I don't know why I thought that, because at the time I had several years as a police officer under my belt and I understood the concept of the law enforcement family. It was only after I built and operated my own shooting school for a few years, that I realized that my wife and I both considered the students and staff of my own school family members, and thus I came to fully appreciate the concept of the Gunsite family, also called "Ravens."

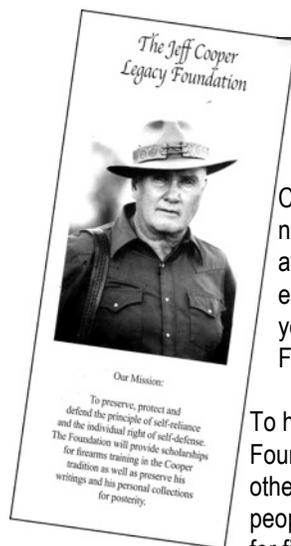
What is it like to be a "Raven?" I asked this question of several Network members and staff instructors of The Firearms Academy of Seattle who are "Ravens." They said—

"Being a Raven means sharing experiences with high quality people who are willing to work hard to hone skills and prepare for danger." –Gila Hayes

"It made me feel included in something I already was in. They were very welcoming and they understand me and didn't think I was a total freak. I also felt a sense of accomplishment in getting through both of those classes." –Diane Walls

"There is a sense of accomplishment with a known standard. Pretty much everybody knows that Gunsite means something. Having someone recognized in the industry evaluate my skill level was valuable, and the connection with like-minded people is a real comfortable feeling." –Tom Walls

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The Jeff Cooper Legacy Foundation

Can't afford a trip to Gunsite? A weeklong course of instruction costs \$1,650 in 2016, and while this is not beyond the means of many Network members, I also know that many of our members could not afford the cost of tuition, especially when coupled with the travel expenses. If the latter is the case, especially if you are a firearms instructor, teaching civilian, military or law enforcement personnel and you would like to make the trek to Gunsite, you owe it to yourself to check out The Jeff Cooper Legacy Foundation at <http://jeffcooperfoundation.org>.

To honor Col. Cooper, Janelle and her daughters Christy and Lindy, started The Jeff Cooper Legacy Foundation in 2008. The purpose of the Foundation is to provide scholarships for people who could not otherwise afford the trip to take a Gunsite Academy 250, and Lindy notes that while their focus is on people who are in positions to pass on what they learn at Gunsite to others, they also have "a soft spot for first responders who are in positions of responsibility for the safety of others, as well as themselves." In both of my recent courses, we had a Legacy Foundation student, and the tuition was not wasted on either one of them, as both ended up winning the Friday afternoon shoot-off.

After our experiences at Gunsite, we at the Network felt compelled to do something more than just talk about Gunsite. We have decided to donate a portion of the new membership dues to The Jeff Cooper Legacy Foundation whenever a Gunsite family member joins the Network. Last month we wrote our first check to the Foundation, when several new members told us they are part of the Gunsite family and learned about the Network there.

As word spreads, we anticipate making many more such donations and look forward to supporting this great Foundation for years to come. New members need only tell us that they learned about the Network at Gunsite and we'll make a donation to The Jeff Cooper Legacy Foundation.

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For me, personally, being a family member means that I have set aside my ego long enough to go to school and be a student again, and appreciate the legacy of Jeff Cooper and Gunsite Academy. It also gives me a sense of belonging and expands my network of "gun friends."

An additional highlight of both my 2015 and 2016 trips to Gunsite was being included in the after-class tour of Jeff Cooper's home, "The Sconce."

Although Col. Cooper has left us, passing away September 25, 2006, his widow Janelle Cooper still lives in the Sconce, and on Friday afternoon after the graduation exercises, she invited the class over to her home for a tour.

Visiting the Sconce is like entering a museum of defensive handgunning. Little else confirms the warm and inclusive feeling of being a Raven like touring the Sconce and sharing brownies and Arnold Palmers (a beverage consisting of iced tea and lemonade, made famous by the late golfer Arnold Palmer) with Mrs. Cooper and her daughters. The tour of the Sconce is not always part of the Gunsite experience, as at times Mrs. Cooper is not available to host. If you are invited, it is a bonus, and one that you will never forget.

"We must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall hang separately." --Benjamin Franklin



Above: Gila Hayes pays her respects to Mrs. Cooper. Below: The Sconce at sunset, viewed from the Gunsite campground.



You will recall that I opened this lengthy article with this quote, and I will now explain why. Gun owners share a common experience, and that experience is being part of a culture that a very vocal number of Americans would like to see go away. It is sobering when nearly half of the American population votes for a candidate who singled out gun owners out as her #1 enemy. Gun owners, especially those of us who carry regularly and depend on that ability to protect ourselves and our loved ones, must join together as a single, united, strong voice to thwart any politician or other social construct endeavoring to take away our right to keep and bear arms. The Gunsite family is one such voice, and I personally would like to see that voice grow louder and stronger.

Being a Gunsite family member is one thing that I will cherish throughout the remainder of my lifetime. I recommend Network members pursue training at Gunsite, too, if at all possible.

Gunsite Academy is located outside Paulden, AZ, about 100 miles north of Phoenix, and has a wide variety of courses to increase the student's skill with pistol, carbine, rifle and shotgun. Learn more at <http://www.gunsite.com/>.

[End of article. Please enjoy the next article.]



President's Message

by Marty Hayes, J.D.

I guess it would not be out of line to make a few political comments in this month's President's Message. If you find them offensive or unwarranted, please e-mail me personally at mhayes@armedcitizensnetwork.org.

I want to hear from you.

In the days since Donald Trump was elected President, we have seen many, many businesses and services telling Trump voters and supporters to go take a hike. Not me. I supported the Republican ticket for President and Vice-President, primarily due to the pro-gun stances taken, and the anti-gun stances taken by the Democrats. Having elected a pro-gun president doesn't mean we can turn our backs on half of the American people, many who also own guns but for many other reasons, typically vote for Democrats.

I tend to be a one-issue voter—that issue being guns and freedom—but I also recognize there are different priorities in other people's lives which might mean they are one-issue voters for the more liberal political platform. To them, I say, we can be friends, and I hope you stay in the Network, or if you are not yet members, I hope you join.

If ever there was a time to pull together to pass nationwide concealed carry, now is that time. The stars have aligned with pro-gun majorities in both legislative branches and the presidency. I expect a full-court press by the National Rifle Association. It would not hurt to drop a letter to your local representatives in congress (both the house and senate) to remind them it was gun owners who tipped this election back to the conservative side.

I am also expecting the return of affordable ammunition. Over the next three years, I recommend stocking up on enough ammunition to get you through for the rest of your life. Seriously.

With ammunition being more affordable, now is the time for armed citizens to take high round count firearms training courses. In my opinion, the greatest reason for becoming skilled with firearms is the peace of mind the skilled gun owner has, knowing that if violence threatens, you will likely be able to handle the encounter. Interestingly, that confidence seems to allow the criminal element to assess your abilities to handle yourself, and pass you by during the victim selection process.

I am anticipating an interesting SHOT Show (<http://www.shotshow.org>) this year, with a considerable downturn in the gun economy likely. Perhaps this year I might be able to comfortably walk the aisles, as opposed to having to fight through the crowds for four days. I must admit that after 26 years of attending SHOT, the bloom is off the rose. But, it is still interesting, and for me, the convention is a time to catch up with old friends in the industry.

SHOT Show also gives my creative sub-conscious a chance to work its' magic. Just being immersed in all things gun seems to result in new ideas popping into my head. Most of the time the ideas are considered, then never acted upon. But once in a while, an idea proves too good to discount.

Next month we will give the annual "State of the Network" message, but as a preview, just let me note that the Network has never been healthier financially, and stronger in numbers. You can look forward to a very positive report.



I am constantly amazed at the evolution of Internet technology. Last week I spent an evening talking over the Internet with Network Affiliated Instructor Jeff Bloovman, owner of Armed

Dynamics training company, as a guest on his *Practically Tactical* YouTube channel. We set up our computers and started a program going that allowed my image and words to be streamed all over the world to anyone tuning into the program.

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I don't know how it all worked, but it certainly was effective. We chatted for an hour and a half about the Network and other issues surrounding armed self-defense.

For those who are interested in listening to a very in-depth discussion about the Network, here is the link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUodTezBoDM>. The video is not riveting, but the audio can play in the background while you do other things. If you enjoy the program, please share it with your friends.

I want to close with a thank you to Michael Bane and The Outdoor Channel for having me as a guest legal commentator on the award winning *The Best Defense*

TV show for the last five years. This year, we each chose to go in a different direction, with *The Best Defense* taking on a new look, while I wanted to pursue alternate television options. Regardless of whether or not I am on the show, *The Best Defense* remains one of the best, if not the best program on cable TV for the armed citizen. I recommend you watch the show when you get the chance, as I know I will be doing, too.

When my next, new venture in broadcast media comes along, I will be sure to let you know!

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Please enjoy the next article.]*



Attorney Question of the Month

A few months back, one of our members called to chat about having an unintentional discharge of a firearm, which exited his house and possibly struck a neighbor's house. The neighbor was not aware of it and did not suffer any harm from the incident. The member wanted to know if he should call the police and self-report the incident. It was such a good question, subject to variables like political climate in one's specific location and other concerns, that we pushed the question out to our Affiliated Attorneys, publishing the first half of their responses last month, and wrapping it up in this edition. Here is what we asked—

If this person had been one of your clients, how would you have advised him, and why?

Shawn A. Kollie

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I have had this exact same factual scenario come up multiple times. With a negligent discharge of a firearm, the best success I have seen is when the client (who discharges the firearm) immediately contacts the neighbor and has a civil discussion about what had occurred. Most of the time the neighbor and client can resolve any issues (like replacing a board, or removing the round from the home, etc.) without law enforcement. This is the best-case scenario to avoid law enforcement contact if at all possible.

If the neighbor is not amicable to resolving everything without law enforcement involvement, immediately contacting an attorney to have them present if/when law enforcement is questioning is the next most important step. In this scenario the client will be investigated and law enforcement will make decisions about arresting the client or not, so having an attorney to be the middleman between them and the client will help limit any negative criminal exposure.

There is no perfect outcome with a negligent discharge of a firearm, but working hard to be outside the criminal justice system if at all possible, is the best thing to do.

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Very interesting question, which I see as much moral as legal. Legally, I would have to advise him not to create problems for himself. I would advise him to remove that gun from his home (leave it at work, safe deposit box, etc.) and do something nice for his neighbor to assuage his conscience. We have a duty to protect our clients legally.

Morally, if it were me, I would have a much harder time with that, but would probably approach the neighbor, show him the damage and offer to pay for repairs. If he then reports, so be it.

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The nightmare scenarios are:

- 1) Slow leak in gas line or nick in insulation causing fire;
- 2) Someone is injured / bleeding, and will expire if not promptly treated.

Both of those dictate due diligence. Turn on your voice recorder and talk to neighbor FIRST, if he's home. Be prepared to admit that from now on, you'll do your firearm stuff in the basement. Have him clear the joint, and be prepared to write a check.

Inform your insurer, or else it won't be covered. If no harm and you've got it on record, no need for cops.

This is MUCH harder if it goes off and you DO NOT KNOW who might be at the other house. In that event, let 'em know [about the] accidental discharge. Let 'em know where it hit. Don't answer anything more "until I've had a chance to talk to my insurer and neighbor and counsel." Then call counsel right then.

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Is this hard to do correctly? RIIIIIGHT!! That's why we try, in polite society, not to shoot the houses of others. At that point, it's damage control, with some possible downside if prompt action is not taken to mitigate possible harm.

BTW, for the cops, the party line is probably something like: "there's been an accident at [address]." Anything more is risky. They might be able to search or [make a] "protective sweep" [of] your house, in any event.

Gary True

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I would advise him not to contact the police. I would recommend that he examine the neighbor's house and, if it is damaged, contact the neighbor and offer to pay for the repairs. If there is no damage to the house and it is not possible to locate a bullet hole, nothing more will be necessary. If there is damage, or even a small hole, the neighbor will likely appreciate the client's honesty and perhaps not call the police.

If the neighbor calls the police, the client will be in the position of not having tried to hide the incident and will likely not be charged with a crime because it was an accident, although this may vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. If the client does nothing and the neighbor discovers a bullet hole, the neighbor may be incensed and insist that the police charge the client with a crime, which may affect the actions of the police.

A recent Illinois appellate case had similar facts, *People v. Olivieri* (Ill. App. 1st Dist., No. 1152137, Aug. 2016, 2016 WL 4127306). The defendant claimed his finger twitched and caused the discharge of the firearm, which resulted in a bullet going into the neighboring apartment. The appellate court held there was not a showing of recklessness as necessary to support the conviction for reckless discharge of a firearm.

If the client is charged, I would recommend hiring an expert in the area of sympathetic nervous system reaction (SNSR) as applicable to firearms, or other expert if a different theory is appropriate, such as the expert who testified for Mr. Olivieri and stated he "absolutely believe[d] this was an accidental discharge of a firearm and not a reckless act."

Mark Seiden

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Chapter 790.15 Florida Statutes prohibits KNOWINGLY discharging a firearm in a residential area with certain exceptions. It is a first-degree misdemeanor to do so. The State must prove intent under this statute. An unintended discharge lacks the element of intent, so without intent and absent any injury to another, an AD is not a crime. That said, if someone is killed as the result of an AD, however unintentionally, the shooter is liable to be prosecuted for manslaughter. Reckless conduct is the gravamen of a manslaughter charge, not specific intent to do harm.

My advice to a client who has an AD that strikes a neighbor's home would be to immediately report it to the police. The client could then avoid the serious charge of shooting into an occupied dwelling (which is a felony that requires specific intent) by reporting the AD. If there is no injury, there should be no problem. The biggest issue in such a situation would be the "cover-up." Should your neighbor discover a bullet hole in their home and call the police, it would not take Sherlock Holmes to figure out that the exit hole in your home lines up with the entry hole in your neighbors home and then the question would be "if it was an accident, why didn't you report it?"

Most ADs occur during loading and unloading. It is wise to purchase or build a bullet trap somewhere in your home into which you can point the muzzle when loading and unloading.

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Long and in-depth did we consider this question but it took less than the time it takes a lightning bolt to make ground-fall to unequivocally answer with a resounding NO!

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Many municipalities forbid the discharge of firearms. There is no distinction between intentional discharge and unintentional discharge. The Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution grants a right against self-incrimination, which is a great right to exercise in any event.

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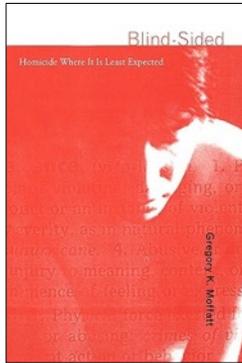
I would never recommend that anyone call the police in a situation where no one realizes something like this happened. You are just asking for trouble. It is not a crime to keep your mouth shut and that is often the best decision, by far.

If you report it, maybe the police don't charge you with a crime, but probably they do, and the lower you are on

the socioeconomic scale the more likely you are to be charged. And if you are one of those unfortunate many in Washington State who lost their right to possess firearms but didn't even know it, you will be charged with the crime of unlawful possession of a firearm.

You might also be charged with a variety of crimes in the firearms statutes, Chapter RCW 9.41, or reckless endangerment, or even drive-by shooting or something worse such as assault or attempted murder. You cannot be sure that you won't get charged with a higher crime than you think fits the facts; because you are not the only person who will be judging what the facts were. I would not do it; at least not before talking to my lawyer about it thoroughly.

A big "Thank you!" to all of the Network Affiliated Attorneys who responded to this question. Please return next month when we pose a new question to our Network Affiliated Attorneys.



Book Review

Blind-Sided: Homicide Where It Is Least Expected

by Gregory K. Moffatt
Hardcover, 264 pages
Published Sept., 2000 by
Praeger Publishers
ISBN 13: 9780275969295

The topic of this month's review is an older book I learned about while preparing last month's review of Andy Brown's book, *Warnings Unheeded*. It will prove useful in members' efforts to sharpen danger recognition skills. Surely, signs are present if victims know what to look for and don't deny budding problems.

Author Gregory Moffatt's introduction explains that in the late 1990s he began to study mass murderers, puzzled because, "People who knew them said the perpetrators seemed normal and they were shocked." As a mental health therapist and college professor, he had trouble believing "that an individual would, with absolutely no warning, commit homicide. My clinical experience with other forms of behavior suggested otherwise."

While all humans have the capacity to kill, most do not do so, Moffatt asks, what makes the difference? Pressures and not knowing how to cope with adversity are identified as common triggers, as seen when a terminated employee kills supervisors or coworkers, he answers. When trying to assess risk for violence, "consider the perpetrator's context and coping strategies," he advises, later adding that while some coping methods are far outside normal behavior and suggest considerable mental dysfunction, if they harmlessly relieve the individual's pressure, they do reduce the risk of violence.

He asserts that mental disorders are surprisingly common and the sufferers are more likely to harm themselves than others. Of the homicides he studied, however, fully half of the perpetrators had diagnosed mental disorders and he suspected similar undiagnosed mental illness in the others. Moffatt concludes his observations about links between mental illness and murder with cases in which schizophrenics stopped taking medication, and convinced of being wronged,

shot and killed strangers in public places. In one case, the killer's family had tried to have him involuntarily committed; in another, the female killer had been previously arrested and convicted of stalking, and in yet another, the subject had undergone 52 days of treatment at a mental hospital. Still, Moffatt stresses that while the mentally ill are represented amongst those who commit homicide, "The mental illness factor by itself, rarely causes people to kill."

He cites a case in CT, in which on the day his sick leave ran out, a lottery corporation employee returned early from several months of stress-related disability leave and shot and killed four supervisors he had earlier accused of misconduct. Coworkers ran into nearby woods for safety, and when law enforcement responded, the man killed himself. "Inability to get along with coworkers, his mental health struggles, his weak social skills, and his weak coping strategies all played a role," suggests Moffatt.

In CO, a Department of Transportation worker shot a superior during a disciplinary hearing, but convinced he was holding a gun beneath his jacket, she devised a strategy on the fly and escaped, though seriously wounded. He killed another woman present to act as his advocate. Interviews afterward revealed that many coworkers were frightened of him and Moffatt explains that he "provided many clues to his instability," adding up his threatening behavior, treatment for depression, grievances against other employees, and a history of not being able to get along with coworkers. The fault lies not in the job's stress, but in the murderer's inability to cope, otherwise, workplace violence would be rampant among air controllers, but it is not, Moffatt adds.

As in Moffatt's other case studies, those who murdered intimates gave advance warning signs: suicide attempts, criminal activity, mental health interventions, belittling and outright violence toward spouses and children. Job loss or financial difficulties may spur murderous revenge plans. He tells of an Atlanta, GA day trader who, already suspected of having killed his first wife and her mother, later killed his second wife, both of his children, and then killed nine and injured many more at securities and trading firms where he had worked. Family members came forward to relate that they "had known it would happen sooner or later" and "I've felt that this has been coming for a couple of years."

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Moffatt addresses homicide by children, explaining that there are children whose upbringing creates such dysfunction that they cannot feel love and destroy those who try "to give it to them as well as others they see receiving it." He writes that when entertainment shows violence as a strategy for dealing with disagreements, "these children may commit mass murder thinking it will be fun or exciting, or that it will elevate their status among their peers, without regard to the long-term consequences of their actions."

Like adult killers, children, too, "kill when they make impulsive decisions," without understanding the ramifications and the permanence of their actions, he explains, detailing warning signs of deteriorating coping skills, manifested through thefts, being expelled or suspended from school, family problems, verbal threats, killing pets and use of violent or pornographic entertainment. Of the popular theory that school shooters kill because they've been bullied, he counters, "People all over the country are ridiculed, but they choose a more appropriate means of coping with their frustrations."

This theme continues in a separate chapter in which he explores the warnings that foreshadowed the Columbine High School killings, of which there were many, recognized by a number of people in that CO community. In conclusion, Moffatt suggests, "It all boils down to two ruthless boys throwing a gigantic temper tantrum to get attention." I was concerned that an academic's treatment of violence might be slanted against private gun ownership, but several times Moffatt acknowledges the efficacy of firearms against a mass murder attempt, citing the intervention of Vice Principal Joel Myrick in Pearl, MS who had to first run to his car to get his .45 to stop the school shooter who killed two and injured seven. He adds, "I favor arming principals or other senior administrators in schools where police officers are not routinely stationed."

About two-thirds of the way through *Blind-Sided*, in Chapter 8, Moffatt lists what he considers variables that predict violent behavior. These are also found with slight variations, and in different order on his website at <http://gregmoffatt.com/law/violence.html>. The variables include—

- History of aggressive behavior
- Subjective fear of person by others
- Threats of intent to do harm
- Specific victim
- Social isolation

- Antisocial behavior
- Absence of support system
- Lack of or weak social skills
- Clear feeling of being wronged by target
- Severe situational stress
- Job instability
- Substance abuse
- Poor self-image
- Suicide attempts/ideation
- Fantasies of violence
- Presence of aggressive models
- Divorce/marital instability
- Loss of job
- Poverty
- Available weapon
- Male gender
- Age 23-45

Accurate predictions require considering the totality of the circumstances, not relying on a single variable, which alone may suggest another diagnosis. Accounting the many different ways the Columbine school shooters forecast their intentions, he writes, "The preponderance of the evidence, especially in the year prior to the shooting, without a doubt indicates two very troubled boys. Yet somehow, despite all this evidence, counselors, a principal, teachers, court officers, and at least one judge, friends, the parents of classmates, and the parents of the boys themselves did not recognize the extent of the explosive potential in these boys in the days, weeks and months prior to the attack."

This is the section for which I bought *Blind-Sided*. For example, discussing anti-social behavior, he warns about those who are "deliberately violating social rules and norms," like "sexual harassment, lewd conversation, inappropriate expressions of emotion in a given context, consistently inappropriate dress, invasion of personal space, and so forth. It may also include lying, cheating, stealing, vandalism, and other illegal activities."

He explains that for the merely socially awkward, supportive social groups—family, church, and recreational activities—help enforce social behavior. People from those venues should step in and guide the individual when stresses beyond his or her ability to cope threaten acceptable behavior before he or she, "has nothing to lose by shooting colleagues and self." Along the same lines, isolation and not accessing social

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support is another warning sign. Remember, one risk variable alone is rarely conclusive, "Those who become murderers are dysfunctional in more ways than one, including the adoption of unproductive behaviors," Moffatt stresses.

Moffatt discusses why family and associates fail to act on worrisome symptoms evident before their loved one commits murder. Moffatt explains, "I am not suggesting that the loved ones and acquaintances of those who take their own lives or take the lives of others are responsible...messages are much clearer in hindsight that they are in the midst of our busy lives. However, while being sensitive to these facts, I do not think we should ignore the possibility that sometimes we can see what is about to happen if we look for it," he urges. In cases he researched, he identified "points at which intervention was possible, but those who had the power to intervene either ignored the warning signs or did not know what to do about them."

Individuals, especially parents, need to "pay attention to warning signs," Moffatt continues, advising parents that teaching coping skills before your kids have to deal with "stress, disappointment, anger and other emotions is imperative in preventing violent behavior." This includes holding children accountable for their behavior, he stresses, reminding readers that school shooters have left communications behind blaming others.

In his closing chapter, Moffatt focuses on the victims, listing *Seven Mistakes That Can Cost People Their Lives*. In all of his studies he sought to identify "choices people made that preceded their deaths, their injuries, or the deaths and injuries of others," stressing that he only wanted to understand what happened and why. "There have been only a very few cases where I was forced to concede that little could have been done to prevent the actions of any angry killer."

Lives were lost, he continues, because those seeing the signs made mistakes, some of which can be categorized thus:

- Ignoring or failing to respond adequately to threats, both nonverbal and those given voice.
- Failing to help oneself: learn not to leave your fate in the hands of others, Moffatt writes, illustrating one murder when there was nothing to lose by trying to grab the killer's gun and

wrestle it from him. He concludes later, "I suggest that we take action to help ourselves where we can. In our culture, we often lay blame on others and rely on our friends, our parents, the government, or the police to protect us...Our determination to survive and our resourcefulness may be our best tools for survival."

- Failing to develop or implement a plan: "Once people are aware their lives are in jeopardy, they often have weeks, months, or even years to develop plans for saving themselves...potential victims can develop plans for hiding, escaping, or defending themselves," Moffatt urges.

Additional mistakes he identifies include attempting to defuse the situation alone and failing to call for help soon enough: Of one case, Moffatt comments, "If they had been trained to recognize the volatility of such situations, they would have known they should call police as the argument escalated. The police could have been on their way even before the first man was shot." Do not hesitate for fear of over-reacting, he advises.

Moffatt asks readers to "carry some of this book in mind," even while in unthreatening environments with minimal statistical likelihood of violence. He relates that before starting his study of unexpected homicides, he "almost never thought about becoming a victim of any crime," but now, he looks around before stopping his vehicle at a gas station, and now considers the possibility of workplace violence. "Some may argue that I am overreacting and blowing circumstances out of proportion. I do not agree... I do not live my life in fear, but I live my life controlling those circumstances that I can. My hope is that in reading this book you have become more aware of threats to your own and the lives of those you love," he concludes.

Although *Blind-Sided* is an older book, I think it may be one of the most important I've read this year. I believe Network members wanting to better identify, interrupt, avoid or escape dangers should find it just as valuable as I did.

[End of article.
Please enjoy the next article.]



News from Our Affiliates

Compiled by Josh Amos

A big hello to all of our affiliates! This is my last Networking column for 2016 and what a year it has been for all of us. I want to start out by saying that the Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network is growing bigger and stronger each week thanks to the support of our wonderful affiliates.

As many of you know, each team member at the Network is a shooter and the Network was created by shooters and for shooters. We are not an insurance reseller looking to grab a few bucks off of "gun people." When we decided to grow the Network, instead of putting out a cattle call for just anyone, we decided to keep our membership standards high and lead our growth efforts with our core values of responsibility, education, quality training, and engagement. This serves to make a better and stronger Network for all of us.

The Network appreciates the efforts our affiliates make in promoting the Network to the best of the armed citizenry. This is how the Network will progress in 2017 and beyond: with the best affiliates passing the best information on to the best of the armed citizenry.

We are happy to have a new trainer affiliated with the Network. If you are in the Albuquerque, NM area and want to learn new shooting skills or sharpen up some old shooting skills, give a call to Oscar Sanchez and his team at Quiet Professional Defense. This team has an extensive background and they are proud to share their experience and training with all of their students. In addition, they have a passion to help veterans transition their skills from the needs of the military to the realities of being an armed citizen that resonates with me personally.

Quiet Professional Defense was created in 2013 and now offers courses teaching the defensive implementation of firearms, including handgun, carbine, shotgun, and precision rifle. They



also teach the New Mexico Concealed Carry and strive to share their knowledge and experience with the legally armed American citizen. Learn more at <http://qprodefense.com>. If I was in the area, I am sure that Quiet Professional Defense would be getting some of my money. Give them a call.

I want to recognize another Network Affiliated Instructor, too. Will Cambell operates his own teaching enterprise, Armed Safely, and is also one of the instructors at Action Impact in Detroit, MI. Action Impact is a top of the line shooting facility and gun shop with classes teaching gun owners at a variety of skill levels, from introductory courses, to concealed carry training, to a class entitled Stand Your Ground Laws teaching the legalities, tactics and shooting skills of using defensive deadly force.

The Network has enjoyed working with Will over the years via long distance phone calls. He has never been anything but professional, articulate, and easy to work with...everything that you want in an instructor. I am willing to bet that he is the kind of instructor that will do a good job no matter if he is working with a first time shooter who is trying to learn CCW basics, or an experienced shooter who wants to iron out a flaw so they can move up to the next level of competition. If you are in the Detroit area, stop in to the Action Impact Range and say "Hi" to Will for us! See <http://impactrange.com/Default.aspx>.

I want to close by acknowledging the Armed Citizens' Network very generous affiliates, and the many contributions we've received in the past months to help pay for our Foundation's booklet, *What Every Gun Owner Needs to Know about Self-Defense Law*. It is not at all unusual for me to tell a firearms instructor who wants to know how much a dozen copies will cost him or her that we will be happy to send them any reasonable quantity at no charge, but that we do appreciate donations to defray the expense. Learn more about the Armed Citizens' Educational Foundation at <http://www.armedcitizensnetwork.org/educational-foundation> and if you, too, value access to our free booklet, please know that we always appreciate tax-deductible contributions to help carry on this educational effort.

*[End of article.
Please enjoy the next article.]*

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Editor's Notebook

Protecting Privacy

by Gila Hayes

One of the toughest issues law abiding gun owners face is separating murderous actions from the tool used in the violence reported

unceasingly by the media. Would preventing access to a gun necessarily stop a determined murderer or would he or she resort to other options—explosives or a truck driven at high speed into a holiday crowd?

These and related thoughts often interrupted my reading of this month's review book *Blind-Sided*. Studying a book like this over a period of weeks provided a good chance to evaluate my own blind spots, and I recognized that my reaction to the election season's anti-gun barrage was making it hard for me to give honest consideration to an academic study about monsters who used guns in horrendous murders.

Similarly, I had trouble balancing *Blind-Sided's* several discussions about how mental illness does not necessarily correlate to mass murders, when author Gregory Moffatt stated that he thinks that more than half of the murderers he studied did suffer from mental illness. He also noted how often a mass shooter's mental deterioration is well known amongst family, neighbors, and even authorities, yet their freedom is unrestricted.

This is a particularly tough issue for gun owners to balance. Moffatt quoted a gun permit licensing official who, when asked about a man who shot and killed two

guards in the U.S. Capitol building in 1998, responded, "In the United States of America, you're allowed to be a garden-variety nut." The problem is that what looks nutty to one person, may merely be the proactive measures of a solid citizen preparing to weather an increase in crime.

Gun owners rightly fear being reported as dangerous nuts for safety practices established to protect themselves and their families. Those outside the gun-owning community fear what they do not understand, and many do not understand the preparations undertaken by responsible gun owners. This adds potential for false or vindictive accusations to legislation like Washington State's recently passed Initiative 1491 that allows restrictions on gun possession if law enforcement or families convince a court that the gun owner poses a threat. Added to this we have existing fears about "swatting," when a false accusation instigates a SWAT team response against a disliked individual or one who is part of a hated faction—gun owners, for example.

In troubled times, it is tempting to hunker down with our own kind and focus on a counter offensive to destructive legislation, unfair court decisions and an all-out attack by popular media. We need to be smarter than that! Prioritize threats, treat everyone with courtesy, and diligently maintain your own privacy. It is entirely within your powers to be a good and friendly neighbor to people of different political viewpoints, while guarding your privacy as protection against the possibility of a vengeful false accusation.

*[End of December 2016 eJournal.
Please return for our January 2017 edition.]*

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In addition, material presented in our opinion columns is entirely the opinion of the bylined author, and is intended to provoke thought and discussion among readers.

To submit letters and comments about content in the **eJournal**, please contact editor Gila Hayes by e-mail sent to editor@armedcitizensnetwork.org.

The Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network, Inc. receives its direction from these corporate officers:
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We welcome your questions and comments about the Network.
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