

BORN TO GUN?

Going concealed in Lane County BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

The pistol wasn't the first gun given to me as a gift, but it was probably the most unexpected. My father usually gives books for Christmas, and that was what I was anticipating. Dad even disguised the gun by packaging it up to look like the box had a novel inside. Imagine my surprise when, thinking I was getting a copy of the latest Book of the Month Club selection, I pulled a .22 semi-auto out of the wrapping paper. My proud parent, dressed as Santa Claus for the occasion, had a camera at ready to capture the moment.

After a minute he dropped the camera in disgust, "You're holding that gun like a nun holds a cock," Dad told me. "You have to grip that thing."

Dad never took me shooting as a kid, though he did take my brother out several times. But when he found out that my then-boyfriend — let's just call him Bob — had given me not only a 12-gauge shotgun but an SKS semi-automatic rifle with an ammo clip of unusual size, and that Bob had begun to drag me to various spots out in Bureau of Land Management forests around Lane County to murderize innocent beer cans and paper targets, Dad decided I needed something small that I could carry around with me for personal protection.

Bob was thrilled. He regarded the .22 as something we could practice with before he bought me something with a bigger caliber.

Years later, Bob, his arsenal of firearms and I have long since parted ways. I'm still a bit ambivalent about guns. I like target shooting. I admire my friends who hunt and kill their own game. But in the wake of this summer's mass shooting in Colorado, and in view of the fact that each time Obama has gotten elected gun sales have spiked, you can't help but to wonder just how easy it is to get a permit to pack a pistol around. In Oregon, you can get a license to carry a concealed handgun without even really knowing how to shoot. According to the most recent statistics, more people died in Oregon in 2009 from gunfire than died in car accidents.

CONCEALED CARRY COUPONS

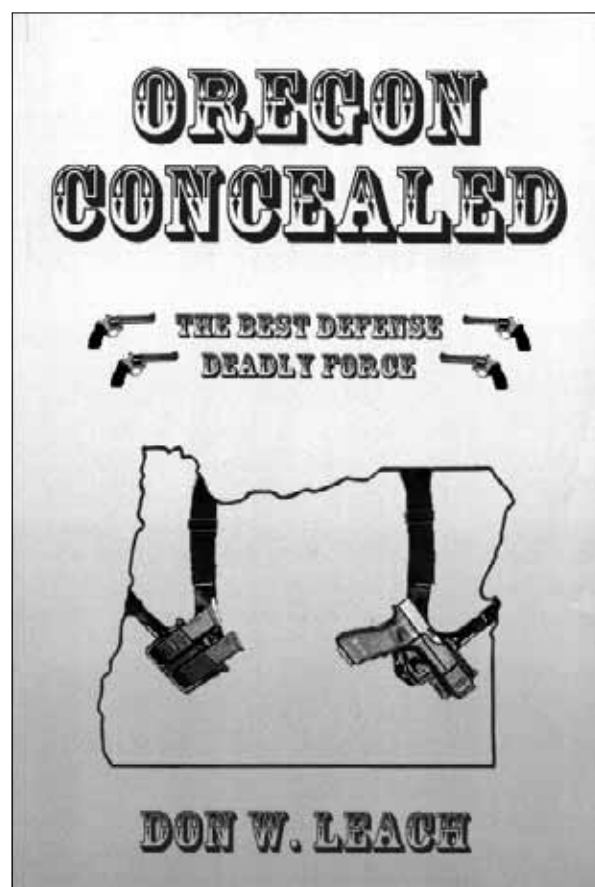
In order to get a concealed weapons permit in Oregon, you have to demonstrate "handgun competency," among other things. You can do this by taking a class. No sooner had I thought about looking into the concealed handgun license (CHL) issue than emails showed up in my inbox cheerfully informing me Groupon and Living Social were each offering coupons for handgun classes with Oregon Concealed.

"Grizzlies and pandas aren't the only ones with the right to bear arms," the Living Social ad punned badly, "Get your paws on today's deal from Oregon Concealed and catch a four-hour gun safety course for \$35 (regularly \$70)."

Not really sure of a better way of selecting a weapons class, I went for it. A \$35 class, a \$65 application fee for the permit, and as long as I passed a criminal background check I should be good to go. The permit application says you have to be a citizen — or declare in writing to the Immigration and Naturalization Service that you intend to become one — you must be over 21, you can't have any outstanding arrest warrants, or be a unlawful drug user, a registered sex offender, stalker or felon, nor have had a misdemeanor conviction in the last four years, be on pre-trial release or found to be mentally ill and you can't have been dishonorably discharged from the military.

Meet all those requirements and under Oregon law once you get your license, you can bring your concealed weapon into most public areas and buildings. That includes schools, according to Don Leach, the attorney and self-professed former coal miner and Cold War spy who taught the class I took

on a rainy Saturday morning in November. Leach informed us that he brings his gun to football games. "One gun if it's a Ducks game, but two if it's the Beavers," he chuckled. They aren't searching you at the gate for guns, he informed me and 11 other class members, including one other woman, at the Village Green hotel in Cottage Grove; they are searching you for alcohol, and that, Leach said, is just so they can make money selling you beer.



While you can bring your gun to public schools, K-12 and higher ed, according to Leach, you can't bring your concealed weapon into federal buildings such as courthouses or post offices. You also can't carry a loaded firearm while riding a snowmobile.

DON'T BE STUPID

"If you are awake and don't say something stupid, you get your certificate," Leach told us. There was no test, though if you want to skip class, Oregon Concealed offers an online video and test that you can take instead of class.

Actually, you have to say something "really stupid," Leach clarified, in order to ensure that the class felt comfortable asking questions and sharing gun stories.

That is how I learned some people in this town think you can make a silencer for a gun by putting a potato over the end of the barrel. This is apparently a better way to blow up your gun than it is to silence it. In the interests of learning about gun safety we also watched YouTube videos of people shooting their own feet, almost shooting their heads off and whacking themselves in the face with the recoil from their pistols.

When Leach flashed a photo of a happy looking baby teething on the handle of a revolver, I was sure some horror story would ensue. The baby, one of Leach's 21 grandkids, as it turns out, was actually an example of a kid wearing good ear protection at firing range, and the gun was unloaded.

Leach, his wife, Linda, and their two sons run Oregon Concealed. Leach's grandkids appear in gun safety videos. Don Leach is a self-described older gentleman with some health issues, which is probably directly related to at least one of a list of handy quotes he gave out at the beginning of the class: "Don't pick a fight with an old man. If he's too old to fight, he will just kill you."

Leach has a folksy charm, calling those who might find themselves on the other end of your loaded weapon "Bad Guys" and peppering the course with tales of gunshots gone wrong and CHL bearers successfully defended. Linda, friendly and efficient, sat in the back of the hotel conference room doing paperwork — processing coupons, selling books, fingerprinting people.

An Oregon permit means you can carry your concealed weapon in 13 other states including Alaska, Montana and Vermont. But if that's not enough for you, a couple extra dollars, a photo and fingerprints (those are the ones cheerfully taken by Linda during class) will get you a Utah permit, which is recognized in 33 other states. But wait, there's more! The class also qualifies you for an Arizona permit which allows you to pick up another couple states. Oregon, on the other hand, does not give other states reciprocity, Leach said, meaning that their permits are no good here.

Since I wasn't envisioning any cross-county trips with a pistol strapped to my thigh, I decided to pass on the Utah and Arizona options.