

LOCK AND LOAD

To get the concealed license in Lane County, once you've taken your course — online, at a hotel or at a gun range — and get your certificate, you fill out the county's application, get two friends to agree to be character references — the form suggests you tell them that you are doing this — and head down to the Sheriff's Office to pay your fee, give them your ID and get fingerprinted. In 30 days or so, if you pass the background check, you get your license.

While it is required that you take a handgun safety course, you do not actually need to have shot a gun. Leach brought in an array of handguns to class ranging from a cute little revolver with a folding grip to another, much larger, revolver dubiously called a "Judge" that was capable of shooting shotgun shells. He popped magazines and rolled out cylinders to show how to check each one was not loaded. We then moved on to a discussion and photos of how to hold your handgun.

Note to Jack Bauer: Leach says you are doing it wrong, but he's OK with it "because in real life you don't over-intellectualize it; you just get it done."

Leach covers a lot in four hours, and for those who didn't take notes as avidly as I did, he also gave handouts. And a DVD, featuring all the YouTube accident videos and more. And he wrote and published a book that can be yours for only \$14.95.

MY HOME IS (NOT) MY CASTLE

One of the first rules Leach taught is a play on the former military policy. Don't ask. Don't tell. Don't show.

Don't ask if someone is carrying, don't tell people if you are carrying and don't let your concealed weapon show. He also brought to class some purses, holsters and other means of hiding your gun on your person. Fond of threes, he stressed practice, practice, practice — using cheaper ammo for that and more expensive (and deadly) hollow points for when you mean business. Practice with the good stuff too, so you know how it feels to shoot it, but the more deadly stuff is also more spendy.

Leach didn't recommend you just start plugging away at the "Bad Guys." He recommended that you start with a "less lethal" alternative for your first response. After that have a gun. The largest caliber you can shoot well, he said. Then have another gun. And extra ammo for each gun. Know the law. "Know how to dial 911 and use it before you need it. Police are just there for clean up."

Let's say you kill someone, Leach said. He instructed us to say, "I feared for my life." Or if it was someone else in danger, "I feared for Bob's life." After that you just demand a lawyer and say nothing else.

In Oregon, Leach told us, we don't really have a "castle doctrine." In other words, just because someone breaks into your house doesn't mean you get to kill him. You have to fear for your life or that of another. But for example, let's say you go in your bedroom and there's someone hiding behind a curtain who's not supposed to be there: "I'd be putting holes in that curtain — at least 15 of them." He added, "I'd rather be tried by 12 than carried by six."

Leach cited 21 feet as the range within which you need to react to a "Bad Guy." Melinda McLaughlin of the Eugene Police Department says it's actually even larger — 30 feet. McLaughlin says that statistic comes from the Force Science Institute, a scientific research group that examines deadly force. She says the



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research shows it "takes less time for a person who is armed with a knife to assault someone within 30 feet, or sometimes even more, than it would take for [the other] person to recognize the threat and draw a weapon for a defensive use."

Though Leach wasn't the most trusting fellow when it comes to the cops — he told several tales of run-ins, in all of which he came away the winner and the police looked like dorks — McLaughlin says, "Most CHL holders get a CHL because they are complying with the law and officers know that."

Guns sold by dealers in Oregon are fairly regulated; private sales are less so. If you buy a gun in Oregon from a dealer or at a gun show you have to provide ID and a fingerprint, and a quick background check goes through the Oregon State Police. There is no waiting period and while the Firearms Instant Check System keeps a record for five years of those attempting to buy guns, that database is not open to public inspection. Also not open is the database of concealed handgun license holders, nor does Oregon keep a record of who owns most guns.

only once when the trigger is depressed, while a fully automatic keeps firing with the trigger held down.

Romney was wrong; it's actually not illegal to own an automatic rifle. There are limits on how automatic weapons are bought and sold, but it's not illegal to own them, and the 1994 Clinton-era assault weapons ban that banned manufacturing of assault-style semi-automatic weapons, as well as high-capacity ammunition magazines, expired in 2004. The Obama administration has bandied about a discussion of renewing the Federal Assault Weapons Ban, which is what has likely led to the recent post-election surge of guns and ammo purchases.

Gun purchases aren't the only thing that have gone up recently. Sgt. Carrie Carver of the Lane County Sheriff's Office, which issues CHLs for Lane residents, says that applications for new concealed carry permits have gone up, too. Back in 2006 there were 811 CHL applicants for the year. In 2009 there were 2,032. That number has gone down a little, but Carver says for 2012 the average is about 179 applicants a month — that's new permits, not renewals. Exactly what is driving this upsurge in concealed carry permits, Carver is not sure.

*'You're holding that gun like a nun holds a cock,'
Dad told me. 'You have to grip that thing.'*

BUYING AND SELLING

Concealed handguns aside, a lot of men seem impressed when they find out I have an SKS rifle. Picture an AK-47 and that will give you an idea of what the gun looks like, and no, you can't carry it concealed; it's too big and the license is for handguns only. Guys are less impressed when I admit I haven't fired it or the .22 in a while. Bob stopped taking me out shooting after I started hitting the centers of the targets more than he did, though I tended to alternate hitting bulls-eyes with whacking myself in the head with the recoil of his .40 caliber Glock pistol. And without Bob I'm much less of a head-over-to-Bi-Mart-and-load-up-on-ammo-to-go-unload kind of girl.

The next logical thing the guys then ask is if I will sell them the SKS (ostensibly for their own girlfriends; this particular semi-auto is apparently a good chick gun).

It's easy to get confused in the morass of federal, state, county and city gun laws. Even Mitt Romney did during the presidential election, saying at the Oct. 16 debate, "We of course don't want to have automatic weapons, and that's already illegal in this country to have automatic weapons."

For those of you who aren't gun nuts or haven't dated one, a semi-auto automatically reloads, but fires

Federally, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) website is peppered with useful information on how to buy and sell guns correctly, including a series of informational cartoon videos and a FAQ with answers for those who say things like: "I want to import firearms, ammunition and implements of war."

Federal gun laws forbid kids under 18 from buying handguns or owning them, but with exceptions, according to the ATF. Long guns (rifles and shotguns), however, are fine for kids to buy under federal law if not purchased from a federal firearms licensee, and youth 18 to 21 can buy handguns, just not from a federal licensee. The lesson here for some might just be: Don't buy your gun from a federal licensee — though they are the folks who can legally sell guns across state lines.

If you are a private seller, selling to another Oregonian, there's no background check needed or record of sale required, though you are not supposed to knowingly sell to felons or others who can't legally own guns. Giving guns as gifts is also fine, Leach said, reminding us, "Beware the man who only has one gun. He probably knows how to use it."

Bob once bought a Browning .20 gauge semi-auto shotgun at a garage sale in south Eugene. This seemed like a bad idea to me, but Bob was super-pleased to add it to his small arsenal. I think he's still pissed, though, that I wouldn't sell him the SKS or the .22 when we broke up. ■