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SAGA SNIPPETS

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Constitutional Court Judgement & Expired Licences

As many of our members already know, the Constitutional Court handed down judgement on the 7th June 2018, whereby it decided that Section 24 and Section 28 were not unconstitutional.

The Court thus took a very narrow and technical approach to the law and in essence 430,000 plus persons are sitting with a situation where they are in a possession of a firearm with an expired licence.

In some cases, the expiry of the firearm licence may well have been due to administrative errors on the part of SAPS, with applications being lost or not been timeously dealt with, or there being no DFO or personnel available to accept such renewal applications at the police station or other reasons, such as the applicant being overseas or in hospital at the time that applicant had to renew his/her firearm licence.

Since the Constitutional Court judgement, SAGA has met with both the National Commissioner, General Sitole, and General Masemola, head of Visible Policing, on Wednesday 13th June 2018 to discuss submissions and possible alternatives in light of the Constitutional Court judgement.

General Sitole and General Masemola advised that they had to comply with the Constitutional Court Order and that there would indeed be a Directive with guidelines as to how SAPS proposes to deal with the situation.

SAGA Trustees also attended Parliament on Thursday, 14th June 2018 and there, the National Commissioner advised the Portfolio Committee on Police that a Directive would be issued by that afternoon or the following day. The National Commissioner also advised that persons with expired firearm licences would not be treated as criminals and that SAPS has no intention of criminalising such persons. The National Commissioner further advised in Parliament that green licence cards are still valid.

After the Parliamentary session, various parties interacted with General Masemola and General Sitole, including representatives from SAGA and GOSA, and General Masemola advised both parties that submissions and alternatives could be made to the SAPS Legal Department.

Having heard nothing from the National Commissioner with respect to the directive, SAGA wrote to him on Friday, 15th June 2018, as well as to General Masemola on Monday, 18th June 2018 requesting a copy of the Directive. To date no response has been received and nor is SAGA aware of any Directive being issued by the National Commissioner.

However, over the weekend of 16th and 17th June 2018, the Limpopo and Western Cape Provincial circulars came to light, as well as on the 20th June 2018, further internal circulars also came to light, which have already been posted to SAGA's website.

A meeting was held with the SAPS Legal Department on 22nd June 2018 with representatives from a number of firearm associations. At this meeting various submissions and alternatives were made to the SAPS legal department to consider.

SAGA is aware that SAPS have had various meetings at all levels with regards to implementation of the Constitutional Court Judgement, but to date no Directive has been received.

Our advice to our members is, if you have a firearm with an expired licence, to keep your firearm locked in your safe until we have further clarity from SAPS as to what they propose to do.

Please take notice that the National Commissioner was at pains to advise that no one would be criminalised in terms of the Constitutional Court judgement and that he did not want to create criminals out of anyone with expired firearm licences.

We will continue to keep our members updated as matters develop.

By Damian Enslin

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Transporting & Safeguarding Sporting & Hunting Firearms

By John Welch

Part 1

In this two-part series I deal with an owner's responsibilities when her or his firearms are not in the prescribed safe or strongroom. In the first part I shall deal with responsibilities relevant to the transportation of firearms to and from, and usage at the hunting area or shooting range, and in the second part, I will deal with the carrying of a firearm for self-defence. The purpose of these articles is not to provide solutions for all scenarios but rather to serve as a constant reminder to firearm owners to think ahead and be vigilant at all times.

Members are aware that although SAGA is the predominant pro-firearms association in the country, we recognise the constitutional freedom of choice of every law-abiding citizen. We believe it is your choice whether to own firearms or not; whether to carry and use them for personal protection; whether to hunt; collect firearms and ammunition; participate in sport shooting or use firearms in your occupation. Whatever your interest in firearms, your choice comes with concomitant responsibilities to use your firearms lawfully, responsibly and safely.

My experience with firearm owners, stretching over a period of about 60 years, is generally that they are remarkably responsible when it comes to the safeguarding and use of their firearms. Despite what the anti-gun lobby wants the government and the uninformed to believe, most firearms that are stolen are taken by force during invasion of person and home. It is unfortunately also true that far too many firearms are either stolen or lost (even one is too many), from both private owners and government institutions, and this reflects negatively on all firearm owners.

The law is very clear as to a person's obligation to safeguard his firearms: when it is not carried on his person or under his direct control, it must be locked away in a prescribed safe or strongroom. However, what happens when firearms are removed from the safe to take them to the shooting range or game farm? They are bagged and placed in the vehicle. At the game farm they are removed from the vehicle and placed in the room or tent. Often the farm owner does not provide a safe. Is he/she obliged to provide one? Often a hunter takes along several rifles and perhaps a shotgun or two, however, he/she hunts with only one at a time. What happens to the other firearms while he/she is busy with one? The same happens at the range – you want to test ammunition; do accuracy tests and ensure that the telescope is correct – because of the number of rifles they are left at the bench while you check and patch targets, often without anyone in attendance.

On their way to game farms and ranges, hunters and sport shooters must, of necessity, stop at filling stations and restaurants. Often gun bags, animal horns and other give-away items are clearly visible through the bakkie's windows. Many shooters also inadvertently advertise their interest in firearms by having stickers on the back of their vehicles that they belong to hunting associations or shooting clubs or that they prefer this or that make of firearm. Although in principle, there is nothing wrong with this, bear in mind that you are drawing attention to the fact that there might be firearms in your possession.

The laws (or their application) do not change from one part of the country to another, neither from one scenario to another. Therefore, irrespective of whether you are at home or on the game farm, when you are not in possession of your firearm, or when it is not under your direct control, it must be locked away in a prescribed safe. You may not leave your rifles in your tent or room while out hunting with one rifle, even (or especially) if a non-hunter (or someone else) remains behind at the camp. With the high incidence of farm attacks, one can hardly argue that a farm is a safer place than the city and that accordingly, the firearm was safe in the tent or room. Depending on the facts it might be a mitigating factor, but it will not be a valid defence. Just before publication we received news that on at least four occasions over the past weekend hunters' rifles had been stolen.

A lot has been written in hunting magazines about reaching agreement with the game farmer or outfitter when booking a hunt, however, very seldom have I seen any writer even suggesting that the hunter should also establish whether a safe would be made available by the farmer. I suggest it should be one of the questions asked.

The situation en route to the game farm could often be even worse than on the farm. Not only could the vehicle be broken into during a stop at the filling station or restaurant, it could be hijacked or stolen or be involved in a collision. To remove your rifles from your vehicle every time you visit the toilet or restaurant after you

Transporting & Safeguarding Continued

have filled up with fuel may be more dangerous than leaving them in the vehicle with the travellers taking turns to visit the toilet and get something to eat. Also, if the vehicle was properly locked and parked in your sight while having lunch, it could be argued that the firearms were still under your direct control.

It goes without saying that, with the exception of a self-defence firearm (section 13 license), all firearms conveyed to the farm or shooting range must be unloaded. In fact, I propose that the rifle bolts should be removed and stored separate from the rifles (if possible). With the exception of hunters, not many firearm owners may be aware of section 24 (3) of the Nature Conservation Ordinance of 1983, which *inter alia* provides that no person shall convey on a public road traversing land on which game is found or likely to be found, excepting a pistol or revolver with a barrel not exceeding 100mm or an otherwise unloaded firearm, which is securely closed in a gun bag. This is a typical example of an impractical prescript where the legislature wished to prescribe to citizens what the maximum length of the barrel of their self-defence firearm ought to be.

The safety of shooters and firearms must also be ensured on shooting ranges. Often shooters take along several firearms and more often than not some of these firearms are left in the vehicle or on the firing line while inspecting and patching targets. This is generally an unsafe practice as there have been many reports of theft of firearms at ranges. A vehicle is NOT a safe place to store a firearm. Unless you have a range officer to temporarily look after the firearms at the firing line, do not leave them alone.

A discussion on safeguarding firearms would be incomplete without a reference to the rules of safe handling of firearms. These rules remain the same irrespective of whether one is a hunter, sport shooter or one who carries for personal protection. Strict compliance with these basic rules will ensure that negligent discharges are eliminated and even in the event of so-called accidental discharges or mechanical failures, no -one is killed or injured. These rules are: 1. All guns are always loaded. (When receiving a firearm from anybody, it remains your own responsibility to ensure it is safe!); 2. Watch where you point your firearm – never point a firearm, loaded or unloaded at any human or animal you are not willing to shoot; 3. Keep your finger off the trigger until your sights are on target and you are ready and prepared to shoot; 4. Be sure of your target and what is behind (and adjacent of) the target; and 5. Never use alcohol or drugs before or while handling firearms (illicit drugs should obviously never be used). On game farms and shooting ranges there are many more safety rules, however, they are there to prevent or reduce criminal and civil liability.

For many years now, our legislature has drafted laws trying to cover everything. The problem though, is that it never can foresee all scenarios, hence there will always be grey areas causing uncertainty and therefore loopholes. I have always been an advocate of reasonableness rather than strict "cast in stone" prescripts. If, for instance, the law stipulates that when your firearm is not in the safe, reasonable steps should be taken to safeguard it, a court will adjudicate the matter based on the particular facts and rule whether the steps you had taken were reasonable or not. And if you are not satisfied with the trial-

court's decision, you can take it on appeal to a higher court. Should two courts rule that the steps were not reasonable, chances are good they are correct and you are wrong (or otherwise). In such a way we shall have precedent about reasonableness. This system will ensure that every person takes the best possible steps to ensure firearm safety, rather than the current system where one is in the wrong, despite it been practically impossible to comply to the letter of the law.

Although it is true that familiarity breeds contempt, it also is true that to become fully proficient in the use of firearms, one needs to use them, first under guidance and then as regularly as possible (as one can afford). Never try something that you are unfamiliar with, with a loaded firearm. Always make personally sure that it is completely unloaded (also the magazine) before cleaning it. A typical example here is when a pistol is equipped with a so-called magazine safety. In order to drop the hammer safely one needs to insert a magazine. What happens now is that, once the pistol has been cleaned, the magazine is inserted to drop the hammer. Often the slide has been locked back as well, and when the slide is released, a cartridge has been inserted into the chamber (in many cases without the person taking note thereof). Because of bad habits or training, the trigger is pulled rather than released under control – obviously, a shot will go off and if the pistol was not pointed in a safe direction, it could have disastrous consequences. Seek expert advice if you are uncertain how to disman-

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tle and reassemble your firearm; do not fiddle around with or adjust the chronograph with the loaded rifle pointing at it; do not run up to the target to patch a bullet hole you had missed, unless you have unloaded the firearm; should you have left the firearm at the shooting line with someone to look after it, ensure that such person knows he/she must not touch the firearm while you go forward to the target; etc.

When I grew up my elders used to say "be careful, the devil loads the gun" – this is utter nonsense – people, not guns (or the devil), cause accidents. People, not guns, commit crime. It remains our responsibility to ensure a safe environment where we all can enjoy life. The saying "look before you leap" is appropriate. We all need to be vigilant and carefully consider our actions. Only when we are proficient in the use of our firearms, will handling them become second nature. Be safe!

Remember to Breathe

By Kevin Michalowski
06/15/2018

Inhale. Exhale. Repeat.

We don't even have to think about it. In fact, most of us don't ever think about breathing until we can't breathe. Then, it becomes a priority.

This topic came to mind yesterday as I completed the qualification shoot allowing me to stay employed with our local police department. All that shooting I heard a couple weeks ago indicated that my qualification was coming up, but I was not worried because I think I train enough to maintain my level of proficiency.

So, when I rolled up to the range Wednesday morning and offered to lend a hand setting up the targets and cover barriers, I wasn't even thinking about breathing. Then, we started shooting the timed events. After each of the longer strings of fire, I noticed that I was breathing a bit heavier than I expected. That is when I noticed I was holding my breath while shooting. What a rookie mistake.

Breathing is important. I know this. I have trained people to do this. Yet, when the shot timer sounded and I moved to cover, issued a verbal warning and started shooting, I stopped breathing. It became most noticeable during the string of fire that required me to shoot eight rounds from behind cover. I was required to fire two rounds kneeling and two while standing from each side of a barrier. I remember making a mental checklist: firm grip, focus on the front sight, smooth trigger press, re-establish the sight picture, smooth trigger press, move, repeat.

With all of that thinking, I had forgotten to breathe. That is a big mistake.

Of course, you will not end up holding your breath until you pass out, but failure to breathe leads to premature muscle fatigue. This can be really important during a fight. Think about this: The intensity of the situation causes your heart rate to increase. At the same time, you are taking in less air and are starving your muscles of oxygen. You can expect your hands to shake. You can expect to have a more difficult time holding the sights on target. You might even end up having an even more difficult time manipulating the firearm or the magazine.

You've got to remember to breathe.

As soon as I noticed that I was holding my breath, I heard inside my head the voice of an instructor I had at the police academy. He was saying, "You can calm yourself through autogenic breathing. Exhale in a long breath as you count to four. Then, inhale in a long, deep breath as you count to four. You will feel your heart rate slow down. You will notice a physical change."

He was right way back then, and the rules still apply. Breathe. I know there is a lot to think about when trying to shoot straight under pressure, and we often believe our breathing is automatic. But trust me, if you don't actively think about controlling your breathing when shooting, you will end up holding your breath and then gasping for air. It is a sequence that could take your sights off the target when you need to be the most accurate you can be.

You've got this. Just remember to breathe.

Taken from: https://www.usconcealedcarry.com/remember-to-breathe/

6 Defensive Concepts That Competitive Shooting Teaches You

https://www.agirlandagun.org/6-defensive-concepts-that-competitive-shooting-teaches-you/

Posted by Julianna Crowder
12 June 2018

There are pros and cons of competitive shooting sports as they relate to defensive firearms training. The bottom line is that competitive shooting sports will not replace self-defense training. Even though shooting matches can mimic real-life scenarios, time on the shot timer it is not real life and paper targets are not shooting back. However, even in this controlled environment, competitive shooting remains one of the most effective ways to hone your gun handling and marksmanship skills. In order to be effective in a defensive situation involving your firearm, you must be proficient in these six fundamental concepts that are strengthened by participation in competitive shooting sports.

Safe Gun Handling
Competitive shooting sports promote and enforce safety procedures and respectful range etiquette. Because only one person at a time is allowed to handle a loaded firearm under the direction supervision of a range officer (RO) there is a great deal of control over the situation. If any safety infraction happens, the RO is there to immediately stop and correct the action. In fact, if you violate any of the four core safety rules, you will be disqualified (DQ'd) for the day. It can be pretty embarrassing to DQ for a safety violation. You learn quickly to not make those mistakes again and your community of shooters will hold you accountable.

Knowledge of Your Gun and Gear
If you are not "one with" your gun, holster, and mag pouches, you will be after a few matches! During a competitive shooting match you are working under stress and you will see how well your gun and gear perform for you. Most people don't carry the same gun for self-defense as use for competition, but it is common to carry a subcompact version, which you can use to establish a baseline. Even if you carry something completely different, you will be more aware of your holster and your body placement, and have a higher awareness in general.

Speed and Accuracy
Accuracy matters most. Never compromise your speed for accuracy. If you are not able to hit what you shoot at, you will always lose a gunfight or points down in a match. There are two things that should be done fast in a gunfight/match: drawing and reloading. Shooting competitively will give you experience and knowledge of when to shoot fast with a flash sight picture and trigger slap, and when to slow it down for a perfect sight picture and smooth trigger press. Distance, target presentation, and personal skills are all are tested during a match. You will know your strengths and weaknesses, so that you can manage your risks in a defensive situation when distance, target presentation, and personal skills are called upon.

Moving and Cover
Gunfights are not duels. Survival depends on your ability to move efficiently from the threat and take hard cover to protect yourself. IDPA requires you to think about movement and how to use cover while engaging targets, while USPSA is more on the stand and deliver movement and working around sneaky vision barriers at times. Even 3-Gun matches make you think about how to be efficient while moving from position to position while reloading or switching guns. In matches you will see mesh or solid walls to simulate cover, and it is important to remember that walls, unless heavily reinforced with concrete or steel, are not sufficient cover for a self-defense situation.

Mindset and Decision Making
Mindset for self-defense is very different than for competition. The advantage of competitive shooting sports requires a "winner's mindset" and ability to make decisions in the moment as an athlete. You have an opportunity to formulate a good plan, practice the plan, execute the plan, and then learn from the outcome. In self-defense situations, there is not usually time to form a plan and decisions are made very quickly. Having a proper mindset ahead of time of what you will or will not do morally, legally, or based on your skills will aid in the decision-making process.

Trigger Time
All of these concepts are important for competition and self-defense. There are differences in the execution of shooting skills for defensive vs sport, but with the right understanding of how you apply the concepts, trigger time is trigger time — and time well spent!

How The Second Amendment Became A Women's Movement

"Guns are not the problem in America. Men like my attacker … are the problem."

I'm not sure many women can point to one incident that inspired them to become a full-time concealed-carrying gun owner. For many, it's a series of events including formal education and personal experiences that add up over time to finally persuade a woman to take her personal protection into her own hands.

Much like women, the process is complex, spanning weeks or months, even years, in which she works to provide herself with the particular answers she needs to become comfortable with her decision. But one of the main reasons I encourage every woman who carries to keep telling her story is that sometimes, all it takes is one chance encounter to transform someone into a full-time concealed-carrying gun owner.

A Life-Changing Moment
Someone like Kristi McMains. She grew up around guns in southern Indiana, had passed a firearms training course, legally obtained a concealed-carry permit and had purchased her first firearm. While she did carry her Beretta with her when she started living alone in Louisville, Ky., she had not been vigilant about carrying consistently.

That is, until she saw Kimberly Corban on the CNN Town Hall "Guns in America" with Anderson Cooper on Thursday, Jan. 7, 2016. "As a survivor of rape and now a mother of two small children, being able to purchase a firearm of my choice and carry it wherever me and my family are, seems like my basic responsibility as a parent," Corban said as she addressed then-President Obama during the event.

"I have been unspeakably victimized once already and I refuse to let that happen again to myself or my kids." Something in Kimberly's courageous statement resonated with Kristi, and in that moment, she made a commitment to carry her rearm consistently. Thank God she did.

Just 19 days later, with her Beretta in her purse, a man stalked Kristi through a shopping center. When she entered the parking garage alone, he emerged from the shadows, clutching a knife. With this monster bearing down upon her, stabbing her with his weapon, Kristi pulled out her firearm and saved her life.
"Guns are not the problem in America," said Kristi. "Men like my attacker—who are willing to violently change one person's life for no reason except for pure evil—are the problem."

In the wake of that violent attack, Kristi shares her story with other women, encouraging them to take responsibility for their personal protection.
"Be safe at all times. Be aware of your surroundings. Trust your instincts. Always be able to protect yourself. Refuse to be a victim, and instead be a fighter and a survivor. Live to tell your tale and make a criminal regret the day he chose you as a 'soft target.'"

McMains' path to becoming a full-time concealed-carrier resonates with many women. Most of us didn't have mothers who carried guns or were avid hunters. We're trying to navigate how to become the worthy role models and trailblazing pioneers our daughters and the next generation of female gun owners need us to be.
Today, there's no shortage of information readily available for women looking to become proficient concealed-carriers. The massive influx of female gun owners over the past 10-15 years has birthed organizations, women-only firearm training courses, Facebook groups, and even Ladies Nights at the local gun range. But how did we get here?

A Surge In Interest
Women's interest in guns began increasing in the 1980s, coinciding with more women entering previously male-dominated professions like law enforcement and corporate America. As women became more independent, taking control of their careers, finances and living arrangements, home defense and personal protection became an increasing concern.

In October of 1989, after covering the Gun Rights Policy Conference for Machine Gun News, Sonny Jones was inspired to launch *Women & Guns*—a groundbreaking magazine written exclusively for female gun owners. Sonny wrote almost the entire first issue herself, 16 pages of black and white print with no ads, with a focus on an in-depth feature article on concealed- carry options for women.

Catering to established female gun enthusiasts and eager to tap into a new market of women who were interested in but intimidated by guns, Smith & Wesson introduced the LadySmith line of revolvers marketed specifically to women as lightweight and designed for smaller hands in 1989. Gun manufacturers quickly jumped on board, seizing the opportunity to gear their marketing campaigns to the strong, independent women of the '90s.

Beretta ran an advertisement for one of its semi-automatic pistols in which it referred to the firearm as "homeowner's insurance."

In July 1992, a full-page advertise-

Continued....A Women's Movement

ment from Colt Manufacturing, Inc. was published in the southeast regional issue of *Ladies Home Journal*. The ad, which showed a mother tucking her child into bed above two semi- automatic weapons, bore the head- line: "Self-protection is more than your right ... it's your responsibility."

Gun control advocates argued the ad, and ones like it, were used to scare women into believing they needed a firearm for personal protection and argued that such ads were intended to trick women into buying guns. In response to this manufactured public outcry, the editors of *Ladies Home Journal* apologized for publishing it.

But the industry didn't back down to the noisy few. *Women & Guns* launched a counterattack with a cover line that read, "Are You Too Stupid to Read This Magazine?"

An official with Smith & Wesson used the controversy to launch a renewed effort to market to women, calling it a sign of progress in the women's movement: "Firearms are one of the last bastions of male dominance," he said. "Today, in 1992, it's OK for women to be CEOs of companies and go into space as astronauts, so why shouldn't they own guns?"

Gun companies encouraging women to empower themselves by purchasing guns for self-defense enraged many in the feminist movement, including Betty Friedan, whose call to action prompted the foundation of Women Against Gun Violence. Friedan called the attempts to equate female gun ownership with feminists a "horrifying, obscene perversion of feminism."

Thankfully, the industry's continued efforts to appeal to women worked. Not only did they begin purchasing firearms, but they began hunting, joining shooting sports, and carrying guns for self-defense in far greater numbers.

Life or Death

Today, it's common to hear the argument that firearms and gun rights are "women's issues." When it comes to self-defense or protecting their children and their family's lives, all any woman has to do is put themselves in the shoes of women they likely know who have been victimized in one way or another.

In 2017, women are increasingly staying single well into their 20s and 30s, working odd hours, living alone or as single mothers, and realizing that when seconds count, a firearm could mean the difference between life and death.

In Dayton, Ohio, 911 dispatchers confirmed a woman was forced to call into the emergency system twice in a 60-minute period as a man actively attempted to break into her home. The first call was made at approximately 3:00 a.m. on the morning of Sept. 10, 2015, when a stranger banging at the door jolted her awake.
The first 911 transcript reads:
Caller: Someone is trying to break into my house!
Dispatcher: Can you see someone or hear someone, what's going on?
Caller: Someone is banging on the door.
The emergency dispatcher asked the terrified woman a few follow-up questions, but eventually ended the call after instructing the woman to "Keep an eye out for the officer and call us back if you hear anything else."

For more than an hour, the homeowner was tortured with the sounds of a home intruder relentlessly attempting to break into her house. When she ultimately discovered 22-year-old DeBrandon Dickerson breaking into an upstairs window, she was forced to take matters into her own hands and shot the would-be assailant.

The second 911 call transcript reads:
Caller: Someone broke into my home, I shot one!
Dispatcher: Someone broke into your house and you shot them?
Caller: Yes.
This time, the dispatcher remained on the line until help arrived.

A third emergency call came into dispatch regarding the break in—this time from a relative of Dickerson who found him with a gunshot wound to his chest. Dayton Police said at the time of the shooting, there were seven officers and one sergeant on duty, but all were working other calls.

Modern women understand that ultimately, their personal protection is their responsibility, prompting hundreds of thousands, if not millions, to become gun owners every year, many of whom go on to obtain concealed-carry permits. But not every story has a heroine's ending.

On the night of Wednesday, June 3, 2015, in the driveway of her Berlin, N.J., home, 39-year-old Carol Bowne was brutally stabbed to death by her ex-boyfriend. This unspeakably tragic story is made even more inconceivable by this fact: Fearing for her life, Bowne had filed a restraining order against this man—and applied for a firearms permit in an effort to defend herself. Not days, not weeks, but months prior to her death.
According to reports, Bowne submitted her application for a gun license to the Berlin Township Police on April 21, and checked on the status as late as June 1, just two days before her murder.

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Although New Jersey state criminal code requires applications be granted within 30 days, Bowne was unable to defend herself with the firearm she wanted, and needed, to carry for protection. She did "the right thing" and followed the law, but in the end, an impotent restraining order and a complete dependence on her local police department resulted in her tragic death.

Women are acutely aware that restraining orders are often ineffective, or worse, often only serve to anger and increase aggression from those threatening them. The reality is if Carol had owned a firearm, she would have at least had a fighting chance against her attacker.

Women Lead The Way
Realizing the influence the female population had on the public's impression of gun owners and their ability to sway the way people viewed Second Amendment rights, the National Rifle Association began serving women directly in the 1980s. In 1990, they opened the Office on Women's Issues and Information and launched a massive public relations and recruitment campaign in October 1993 called "Refuse To Be A Victim." Still going strong in 2017, this program teaches the tips and techniques needed to identify dangerous situations in order to avoid becoming a victim.

"Women are the fastest growing segment of firearms buyers in the country, and the NRA is a natural home for women firearms owners," said NRA spokeswoman Catherine Mortensen.
"Increasingly, women today don't want to rely on a spouse or neighbor for protection. They want to be able to protect themselves and their families."

The influx in female shooters paved the way for organizations like NRA Women, The Well Armed Woman, Girl's Guide to Guns, A Girl and a Gun, HerHandgun, Shoot Like a Girl, Girls Really Into Shooting (G.R.I.T.S.) and The Cornered Cat.

In a survey conducted by the National Shooting Sports Foundation, 73 percent of firearms retailers reported seeing more women in their stores in 2013 compared to 2012.
That story has been widely reported, from outlets as disparate as *The New York Times* to *American Rifleman*. But there's one question no one seems to have a singular, clear answer for: Why?

Explaining The Surge
Part of the reason more women started coming into their own with firearms was a boom in the hunting industry. In the early 2000s, hunter safety instructors began enrolling more women than ever: mothers taking the course with their sons, wives eager to hunt with their husbands, daughters looking to hunt with their dads and single women interested in harvesting their own meat.

Between 2001 and 2013, the hunting industry witnessed an astonishing 85 percent increase in female participation, ushering 1.5 million new women into the hunting sports.
That's exactly how I got my start in the industry as well. I grew up in a hunting family, was taught gun safety by my father at an early age, was the president and CEO of AIM Hunting, active in Second Amendment politics, and loved shooting sports. But I always used my dad's or my husband's guns, not my own.

When my son became interested in hunting in 2010, I decided to take a hunter safety course with him at the local high school. It was there, connecting with women of every age and walk of life in my own community that I realized just how powerful the women's movement had really become. I met a widow, taking the course so she could sit in her husband's hunting spot at their family cabin. A college student trying to reconnect with her father through hunting when she went home for Thanksgiving break. A mother accompanying her daughter and son, so they could head into the woods and work together to fill their freezer for the winter.

For us, hunting was the gateway to becoming not only a gun owner, but a concealed-carry permit holder as well. Becoming comfortable with firearms in an inclusive environment like hunter safety promotes independence and oftentimes inspires women to branch out to shoot and buy more firearms, like handguns.

A National Support Network
In my home state of Wisconsin, completing a hunter safety course qualifies you for a concealed-carry permit. I sent in my application right away and bought my first hand- gun, a Smith & Wesson M&P SHIELD 9 mm.

By that time in my career, I had moved on as co-founder/co-editor of the popular website Guns & Curves, to become the first female editor of the Second Amendment news site, Bearing Arms. My years in the industry may have made me aware of how I should carry. However, I wasn't prepared for the reality of incorporating that knowledge into my everyday life. Like many women, when I received my permit, I was faced with the seemingly daunting task of finding the best way to carry and trying to fully accept the responsibility of carrying a loaded firearm.

Continued....A Women's Movement

But what was once an overwhelming and intimidating process has become a reasonably common and easily manageable undertaking: Just find a local chapter, connect with women in your area, and have instant, personable resources who have practical advice to help new female gun owners find their own way.

Not only are new women always looking for advice from others, women who have been carrying for years are eager to help those coming up to join the ranks. This is what makes national organizations like The Well Armed Woman (TWAW) and the NRA's Women On Target so successful and helps contribute to the increasing number of women who carry.

"I became a TWAW chapter leader to be a resource for women looking to safely and successfully incorporate firearms into their lives," said Jessica Keffer. "I've worked with so many women from purchasing their first firearm to ongoing training as concealed-carry permit holders. For each of them, becoming a gun owner is a huge decision. Women tend to analyze everything from price, size, weight, fit, feel, holster options and carry positions. They spend countless hours researching their options. For most women, the biggest part of the process is accepting the responsibility that comes with firearm ownership, and it's a privilege to be able to mentor them through that!"

According to the NRA, 73 percent of female gun owners have taken at least one firearms training class. Participation in target shooting soared to 5.4 million women in 2013, up 60 percent from 2001. Since the federal government doesn't break down background checks or concealed-carry permit applications by demographic, it is difficult to pinpoint just how many American gun owners are women, but estimates vary from 12 to 17 million, spanning the political spectrum.

Certainly the years President Barack Obama spent in office, combined with the 2016 "gun run" over fears Hillary Clinton would take the White House, greatly contributed to the growth in gun owners, both new and repeat. But in May 2017, the NSSF reported 988,473 background checks had been performed so far this year, a 6.5% increase over the same period last year, indicating the firearms industry is still very much growing. It's no secret why: The industry is changing and there is no stereotypical "gun owner" in today's society.

Stacy Washington, a conservative black Air Force veteran, radio show host and gun owner, says the increase in female gun owners and concealed-carry permit holders isn't about politics, but about "personal safety and protection." "A firearm is an equalizer for women because women have a harder time defending themselves when they're attacked by a man; men have more body mass," she explained.

"Women overall—in particular, minority women—are looking toward guns to protect themselves against crime," Detroit firearms instructor Rick Ector told Fox News. "Women are definitely drivers in the market right now."

In an interview with *The New York Times,* Mary Stange, a professor of women's stud-ies at Skidmore College and co-author of *Gun Women: Firearms and Feminism in Con- temporary America*, said "There's this idea that women are more affiliative[sic], more peace-loving, more pacifistic, which should then make women as a group gun averse."

But the reality is that millions of women have actively rejected that notion, by buying their own firearms and training to use them. Thank goodness.

Marion Hammer
The Right-To-Carry Pioneer
The success of the right to carry movement has many authors, but if the countless participants had to be narrowed to a single name, that name would be Marion Hammer.
Ms. Hammer's involvement in the gun rights movement began as a volunteer in 1968, inspired by the enactment of the Gun Control Act by Congress that year. She moved to Florida in 1974 and by 1978, she was named Executive Director of the Unified Sportsmen of Florida, NRA's in-state affiliate. For more than a decade, Marion worked the halls of the Florida Legislature to make the Right to Carry a reality, and in 1987 her efforts paid off when then-Governor Bob Martinez signed the state's landmark bill into law. Florida became the model for the nation and proved that arming responsible citizens was a safe practice that would reduce crime rather than increase it. Within 10 years of the passage of Florida's Right-to-Carry law, 30 states had similar statutes on the books and today, 42 states enjoy similar laws.

Marion Hammer became NRA's first woman president in December of 1995 and has served on the Association's Board of Directors since 1982. To this day, Ms. Hammer is a daily presence in Florida's capitol, defeating anti-gun legislation and dismantling statutory and regulatory hurdles that stand in the way of law-abiding gun owners. To tell the story of Right to Carry, one must begin in Tallahassee—and start with Marion Hammer.