

Making a Difference

Choosing to Have Fun:

Amy O'Connell of New Hampshire

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One of my favorite cartoons shows a man on a path in the woods. Just behind him is another path veering in a different direction, and a signpost. The sign pointing to the path he is traveling says "The Rest of Your Life;" the other reads "No Longer An Option."

Two lessons are being taught. The first is that once you have opted to not follow a particular path, there is no changing your mind and going back. That doesn't mean that you can't alter your life, but you must bushwhack through the forest to intersect that other trail; you can't simply walk back. The other lesson is that each decision you make matters. Some very much.

Unfortunately, life does not erect signposts to let you know when you are facing a momentous choice. As you look back you might be able to discern those particular moments that determined your future. Some of them are frighteningly obscure. I have studied the tapestry of my life and shuddered at the little events, the tiny choices, the random encounters that made me who I am. I could so easily have been someone very different. So, could we all.

This sounds far more sinister than I intended. I shudder when

contemplating the minute details that could have made my journey far different from what it has been, because I love my life! (Not every little detail, mind you, but generally I am content with who and what I am. Would I have been as pleased as someone else? Would you?)

This has been a rather somber introduction to one of the most enthusiastic, bubbly people I know, but her response to an interview question prompted this line of thinking. When asked how she became interested in guns, she said in part, "Those workshops opened a door to a world which we are thrilled to have entered!" It will be interesting in a few years to learn how she has proceeded along her pathway through that thrilling world.

Amy O'Connell is a young woman who has enjoyed shooting for many years. Nothing fancy, mind you. Just plinking away occasionally with a .22 rifle. Still, over the past few years she became increasingly aware of changes in the world. It began to seem a more dangerous place. She decided she would like a gun for self-protection.

Her husband, Tim, concurred with her about the need for "...a great deal of education prior to purchasing a gun." They enrolled in several workshops.

It was those workshops that opened the door into the "thrilling

world" they have entered. Both O'Connells knew they needed to practice and continue learning. The classes led to the purchase of a handgun, and the search for a convenient range to work on their skills.

Through the Internet and conversations with friends, they selected a club in nearby Maine. "We filled out the application and attended our first meeting. Following our orientation, we could not wait to get back to the range and actually went back later that day to practice at the pistol range! We are so lucky to have such a great club right around the corner."

The rod and gun club was a big surprise, as it is to most women who visit most clubs. They are "...the most wonderful, friendliest people we have ever known." In my experience any gun club with which the young couple had aligned would have presented the same personalities. Gun folk are friendly and helpful!

However, their paths would likely have been quite different had they selected their other most likely option. Major Waldron's Sportsmen's Association in Barrington, NH was equally accessible. It has an indoor range, and through the leadership of Bob Mackowski provides an extraordinary range of NRA courses, including on-going tactical pistol classes. When Amy and Tim were making



Amy O'Connell and friend afield.

this fateful decision their primary interest was in handguns and self-protection. Opting for the South Berwick Rod and Gun Association put them on another road.

SBRGA is my club. We have an annual "Introducing Women to the Shooting Sports" (IWSS) event. Amy is a gregarious, out-going person. While she is very comfortable with men, she also wanted to share her interests with other women.

"I signed up for the course to get to know more people in our club and to obviously get more education. I never had the opportunity to work with shotguns, and I was especially excited to learn more about them.

"When I stepped onto the Trap

Range ...I was instantly addicted. John, Stan, Barry, and Lois were so awesome. The shotgun segment was by far the most fun and exciting. And the excitement that the instructors projected was truly contagious!

"That was just the beginning. I could not wait to get home and tell Tim all about it late that afternoon. And I could not wait to go to Thursday Night Trap and have Tim experience it first-hand. Although we did not own a shotgun, the whole group was so happy that we came to check it out. They were willing to provide us with all the necessary instruction, let us try their guns, even provided the ammo! We had a great time! But,

the nicest part was, the whole group had just as much fun as we did ... and seemed genuinely pleased we were there."

Amy now owns her own shotgun, a Remington 870, and was contemplating placing another under the tree for Tim, who has followed her lead and is now hooked on Trap as well.

Her horizons are limitless. Currently, she is planning to get her hunting license next season, participate in snowshoe biathlon this winter, and, long-term, would like to try mounted cowboy shooting. Snowshoes are easy to come by, and she already has the "accessories" for the other two: a bird dog and a horse!

Her other long-term goal is "...to be instrumental in starting a Women's Shooting Group" at the club. Women are workers. Amy had immediately volunteered with the club's annual fundraiser. Lois Kupersmith, another IWSS alumna, is her worthy mentor. Lois assisted at the trap range during this year's program, as well as everything else that arises. Along with her husband, she is a regular Thursday night trap shooter. Another woman "mans" the kitchen as steward. Quietly, we have infiltrated this bastion of maledom. We have been heartily welcomed.

It is not only individuals, but also groups and even movements that come to these crossroads. Some roads lead to greater opportunities; some to stagnation. There are times, to march and shout, and times to quietly teach. There are times to simply participate.

Women are the key to the future of gun ownership. There are more of us. We tend to be both more

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able for an average or above woman, but was a little big for petite Barb and me. Robin loved the interior of this purse, and the way it felt when she carried it. I loved the color the leather, and the fact that this bag looks completely different from all other purses. Perhaps it is the beautiful soft lines, rather than the harder edges that many other purses have that kept us looking at this one.

If you want a very modern, high end bag that you can carry in company with other designer bags, if you want to ask for a special present for a birthday or anniversary, or if you just want to treat yourself to the best, these bags might go on your wish list. The Glacier is \$359, other of Kate's bags range from \$259. Their website is designerconcealedcarry.com

In conclusion, there are hundreds of bags to choose from, in a wide range of styles, prices, and features. Most manufacturers have a return policy that insures you won't be stuck with a bag you hate, but ask before you buy. Also ask whether they have a holster for the purse you are considering that will fit your gun properly. The holster should cover the trigger guard completely, while allowing you to get a firing grip on the gun before drawing it.

It is worth a little time and effort to find the perfect holster bag, or bags for you, so that you can always have your gun in a safe, accessible place wherever and whenever you go. If you don't love the purse as a purse, you will find reasons not to carry it, and your gun might be at home when you need it. But if you do love your purse, it helps make security a pleasure.

W&G

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gunowner.

If you tactically allow a potential assailant to know you are armed with the thought of discouraging an attack, as long as you do not combine such actions with a verbal threat, your actions are legally ambiguous. Whether or not the police bring charges against you will depend upon the totality of the circumstances including the politics of the officials you have to deal with. What you say or don't say to your attacker will be important. If the police feel you have over reacted, if they feel you escalated the situation, you will be arrested.

In areas where open carry is allowed, some gunowners are engaging in "open carry" protests. If you are going to do that, make sure you know what the law is. Have a lawyer on retainer and have enough money to pay her. Be very polite to those people around you who see that you are carrying a gun openly. The idea is to establish your right to carry openly, not to prove that gunowners are both obnoxious and arrogant. Also, remember there are places where it is illegal to carry even if you have a permit. Those places include all federal property that is posted (such as the post office); most court houses; jails; schools; mental hospitals; many government buildings; and parts of airports.

You can use reasonable force, including deadly force, to protect yourself or another from imminent threat of serious bodily injury or death. In most states you may not use deadly force to prevent the theft or destruction of property. If someone is trying to steal your car, assuming you are not in the car at the time, let them take the car and

call the police. The cost of a new car is less than the cost of a defense attorney. There are limited times when the use of deadly force is justified to protect property. This usually occurs when the destruction of property is apt to result in injury to people. An attempt to set a building on fire, hijack an aircraft or blow up something would be examples.

What is "reasonable" depends upon the situation. In some states, before you can use deadly force, you have a duty to retreat from an attacker but only if you can do so safely. If someone comes after you with a knife and you can get into your car and lock the door before they can reach you, you should do that. On the other hand, you should never retreat from a well traveled area into a remote area.

In most states, you have no duty to retreat in your own home when faced with an intruder. You may have a duty to retreat if your dispute is with another household member.

You should always do your best to avoid a confrontation. In the case of an intruder in your home, I favor retreating within your home just far enough so that there is no question that the person is an intruder. It is axiomatic that you never shoot unless you have a good view of, and are sure of, your target. I also believe that once you have determined that the use of force is justified and you are about to use deadly force, you should give your attacker multiple warnings before you shoot. There may be very little time between the warnings and the shooting, but it is still a good idea.

Although the amount of force you use must be reasonable, it does not have to be equal. If someone comes after you with a club (a dan-