

# Grassroots: IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Written by: Larry D. McWhirter

## BLUE MESA SHOOTING ACADEMY WWW.BLUEMESASHOOTING.COM



Larry D. McWhirter teaching a class.

I spent my early childhood on a farm in rural Missouri. Like most boys of my generation, my father taught me to shoot at the ripe old age of 6. He would support the muzzle end of the .22 and, although he didn't know the terminology, gave me an early introduction to sight alignment, sight picture and trigger control. When my family moved to Western Colorado when I was 12 or 13 years old, I began hunting with my father and his brother's group. I carried an old .30/30.

My first serious introduction to handguns came from Ray Rose, a Gunsite graduate, who was teaching classes in my hometown of Montrose, CO. This was a

very thorough class lasting 16 weeks and I loved it. On graduation, I immediately signed up for his advanced class. Other than my scuba diving activities, I had never enjoyed anything so much in my life. On graduation from this class, I signed up for and attended Gunsite Academy. Because Ray was known by the folks at Gunsite, I was allowed to use his classes as the necessary prerequisite for their basic class and was allowed directly into their "Intermediate 350" class. I spend a week there, again having the time of my life. This is one dedicated, no-nonsense, serious and down-to-earth teaching facility.



Larry D. McWhirter instructing students on the range.

It was at this point that I decided that I wanted to teach shooting. (I have been actively teaching scuba diving classes for 30 years.) The NRA recommended an instructor in my area who was teaching instructor classes by the name of Linn Armstrong. A friend and I attended and became certified "Basic Pistol" and "Personal Protection in the Home" Instructors. I began teaching my own classes, and since I was so enthralled with Gunsite theology, my classes were heavily based on this. Shortly thereafter, Linn made arrangements for an NRA Rep from Headquarters by the name of Charlie Bassett to come to our area to train and certify "NRA Training Counselors." I was invited to join and I became a Training Counselor in the above two referenced disciplines.

The next year Linn, who was now a "Senior Training Counselor," offered two additional disciplines, "Basic Rifle" and "Basic Shotgun." I signed up and graduated from these and applied to the NRA for the additional discipline of "Home Firearm Safety." I am now certified both an instructor as well as training counselor in five disciplines. According to Charlie Bassett, there are only about 1800 or so training counselors in the entire nation. I have recently become certified to teach the "Refuse to be a Victim" class.

I am actively teaching, carry CCW permits from 5 states and, of course, am an active NRA member. I offer regular scheduled classes in all the listed disciplines, and an advanced class featuring real world shooting scenarios. I have studied both Massad Ayoob and Col. Jeff Cooper's writings extensively and incorporate many of their ideas into my classes. This is literally a labor of love for me. I have been married for over thirty-six years and have two grown children.

## CCM INTERVIEW

**CCM: What training methods do you employ? Do you have any recommendations?**

**Larry:** I graduated from Gunsite Training Academy's Tactical Pistol 350 class in June 2001 and my classes are



Larry has been a professional scuba diving instructor for over 30 years.

based very strongly on their teaching doctrine. Because of this, I firmly believe that I offer the most comprehensive and complete "basic pistol" course on the Western Slope of Colorado. While I am a firm believer in the NRA and all that it stands for, I have caught more than one certified Instructor making errors while teaching a class. I study profusely and pride myself on being up-to-date on the latest teaching methods and equipment. I have been a professional scuba diving instructor for over 30 years, and have borrowed several training techniques from those experiences. My full length class includes a night shoot.

My son, who is an officer with the Arizona DPS, has offered several suggestions which I have incorporated into my classes. I have studied under Rob Letham and other experts and have also incorporated many of their ideas into my classes. I am an NRA Certified "Training Counselor" and therefore train and certify instructors as well as students in a total of five disciplines. I carry CCW permits for five states and have received additional training from most of them. All my classes are based on "real world scenarios" not competitive shooting. I firmly believe that the most important lesson one can convey to their students in a CCW class is "Avoidance is by far the best policy." My Nevada CCW Instructor stood in front of our class and stated "The male of the species comes with a built in defect. It's called testosterone. The male has a tendency to fight. This must be avoided if at all possible." I couldn't agree more!

Lastly, be patient, especially with new shooters and never arrogant or boisterous. The instructor's attitude

is the most important asset he/she can possess.

**CCM: How long have you carried a concealed weapon?**

**Larry:** For about 8 years.

**CCM: What weapons do you carry?**

**Larry:** My primary weapon is a Kimber Pro Carry in .45 ACP. I also carry a Smith and Wesson J-Frame Scandium snubby when the Kimber is impractical for various reasons.

**CCM: What type of ammunition do you carry?**

**Larry:** In .45 Auto, I primarily carry Speer Gold Dot as this is the ammunition of choice for the Arizona DPS according to my son. I have also been extremely impressed by published test results. I carry the new Speer Gold Dot .38 Special +P W/135 Grain bullets designed especially

for short barreled revolvers in my snubby. I also really like the Winchester SXT.

**CCM: What concealment holsters do you use?**

**Larry:** I prefer the Massad Ayoob IWB from Mitch Rosen (Model ARG). It is comfortable, efficient and the sturdiest holster I have ever seen. I also like the Summer Special by Milt Sparks.

**CCM: Do you have any advice for our readers?**

**Larry:** Take a quality class. Then take an advanced class. But first, carefully check the instructors' credentials. There are good and not so good ones out there. Determine just exactly what you wish to accomplish with the class. Do you wish to learn just the basics? Do you want to prepare yourself for serious CCW carry? Prepare yourself for home defense. All the above? Be certain the instructor is qualified in all areas that interest you before laying down your money.

I always allow students to attend a couple classes with no obligation before committing. This allows them to become familiar with my teaching style and technique.

Avoid like the plague any instructor who makes a statement such as "Because you're a woman, you should use a revolver." That may or may not be the case. It is the job of the instructor to help a student determine just which firearm is "right" for them. Preconceived notions have no place in this business.

Then practice, practice, practice and continue to practice. Read everything you can get your hands on by Massad Ayoob and Clint Smith. Also, of course Concealed Carry Magazine. I enjoy the articles by Gabriel Suarez.



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