

# 4 Ways Having a CCW Made Me a Better Person

by Wendy LaFever - Friday, February 7, 2020



"You, all of you," said our concealed-carry class instructor sternly as he met our eyes one by one, "are all going to have to take a good, hard look at the way you live. And you might have to change it."

It was North Carolina, and although I'd really rather not say *just* how long ago it was, I was taking the mandatory instruction for a North Carolina concealed-firearms permit. I had just recently moved out on my own and was living in the nicest neighborhood I could afford. Unfortunately, the nicest neighborhood I could afford at the time featured a house across the street that had been raided by the Raleigh SWAT team a few weeks prior. I had decided that it might be in my best interest to obtain a firearm and a permit to carry it with me. Luckily, the instructor for the class I was attending was an attorney who was well versed in the state firearms laws. What he had to say may have seemed glaringly obvious, but it was also quite profound and thought-provoking.

He explained that one of the criteria for whether use of deadly force would be considered justifiable was that you had to be a "reluctant participant" in the situation. That meant that, with few exceptions, you could not be the person who instigated the incident (and if you had, you had to have made an attempt to de-escalate or retreat). Sitting there and listening, I realized that it wasn't just about legal concerns; for me at least, I felt that I had a *moral* obligation to make it as unlikely as possible that I'd ever have to use my brand-new revolver for anything other than target practice. And to do that, I had to make some changes...for the better.

### **1. I became a more polite person.**

Robert A. Heinlein, one of my favorite science-fiction writers, once famously said, "An armed society is a polite society." That may or may not be true from situation to situation, but in my case it sure was. In the past, I'd thought nothing of letting someone who had cut me off in traffic know that he was "Number One" by using a well-known (and quite vulgar) gesture. Now, the thought of possibly inciting a road-rage incident genuinely frightened me in a way it never had before. I discovered a whole new perspective: There was nothing that anyone could do to me in traffic that would be worth having to possibly employ deadly force. So what if someone cut me off and made me miss a light? I'll be home three minutes later. So what if someone made a rude gesture at me? Sticks and stones. So, what if I got a dent in my bumper? I have insurance. And this extended to just about every corner of my life. These days, if someone is rude to me, I simply ignore it or shrug it off...and my "social finger" stays firmly clamped on the wheel at the 10 o'clock position, thank you.

### **2. I became a more competent and lawful driver.**

Show of hands: Whom among this readership has never driven significantly faster than the speed limit on purpose, let an inspection sticker slide for a couple of weeks, done a rolling stop at a stop sign, or swerved to change lanes at the absolute last possible second? That's what I thought. For the majority of law-abiding people, the time when we're most likely to, well, *bend* the law a little bit is when we're driving. So, this is the time when we're most likely to encounter law enforcement. Although every interaction I have had with law enforcement while carrying concealed has been calm and pleasant, having to explain to the officer that I was carrying concealed was a bit nerve-wracking. It's also the time when we're most likely to inadvertently upset our fellow drivers, even if we're doing our best to be polite (see point 1 above). Over a very short period of time, I started thinking of everything I did behind the wheel of my car as an "Is it worth it?" moment. So now my inspection and registration get updated *tout de suite*, I check all my mirrors before I change lanes, and I cheerfully allow people to merge in. Yes, even if they speed down the closing lane and sneak into the open lane at the last second.

### **3. I became choosier about who I let into my life.**

Of course, you are not the only person who can get you into trouble. Sometimes, we have people in our lives who aren't, perhaps, as centered or mature as they should be...and sometimes there's nothing to bring that out as starkly as carrying a firearm in their presence. Ever had a friend who thought it was funny to lean out the passenger-side window of your car and yell things at

pedestrians because you, the driver, could just speed away? Or who felt like it was OK to have vociferous arguments with strangers because they had a buddy who carried a concealed pistol? Or who thought it was cool to tell people that the guy/girl they were with had a gun...and then ask you to show it off? I did.

Please note the use of the past tense.

What I quickly came to realize is that those people had been putting me into potentially hazardous situations long before I ever made the choice to carry concealed, and that if they'd ignored my requests to stop before, they were going to keep doing so. And that I was better off without them in my life.

#### **4. My situation awareness improved.**

Ask any law-enforcement officer, any martial-arts instructor, any self-protection expert, and they'll all tell you the same thing: One of the best ways to not be a victim of a crime is to be aware of your surroundings. But it's an easy lesson to forget when you're busy, fatigued or distracted. However, once I became acutely aware of the responsibility of carrying that firearm, things changed for me. Gone are the days when I'd casually sling my purse over the back of a chair and then wander away from it to use the bathroom or say hi to a friend. Gone are the days when I'd pause in a parking lot to reply to a text. Gone are the days when I'd park somewhere dark just because I didn't feel like paying a fee for a well-lit, guarded parking garage. Gone are the days when I'd answer the door without checking to see who was there. Gone are the days when I'd yell back at catcallers. Gone are the days when I'd walk by myself at night. These days, I pay attention to where I am and where I'm going...and I think ahead.

Are you interested in getting a concealed-carry permit of your own, or just getting firearms instruction?