

On Wisconsin Outdoors

With the Dick Ellis Experts

August 23, 2010

Gun Safety *It is no accident*

By Dick Ellis

“I’ve always expected everyone in my household to be familiar with firearms, because I like to hunt and there will be guns in my home, but also because I have several service handguns,” said Scott

Heitman, a hunting partner and Waukesha police officer with 27 years on the force. “I also want anyone in my family to know how to make a firearm safe if they do come across a gun anywhere.”

As an enforcement officer, Heitman must pass mandatory qualifications firearms course requiring shooting a minimum of 720 handgun rounds annual. Range training with M16s, shotguns, and other service firearms is also mandatory.

During a trip August 19-22 to northern Wisconsin that also included kayaking secluded rivers and backwaters and bear baiting, three sets of moms and dads piped into Heitman’s expertise to introduce our 16-year old daughters to proper handgun use. Charlie and Val Koch and their daughter Mackenzie, Heitman, his wife, Robin and their daughter Savannah, and Lori, Taylor and I shot Heitman’s 9mm semiautomatic, Robin Heitman’s .357 magnum revolver, and the 9mm



Wisconsin hunter and Waukesha police officer Scott Heitman goes over safety rules wife his wife, Robin, and Lori Ellis before shooting the .357 magnum and 9mm semi-automatic with their 16 year old daughters and parents in northern Wisconsin August 20.

semiautomatic handgun that had admittedly remained in its case since I purchased it, romantic that I am, for Lori’s present at Christmas in 2005.

Heitman’s unofficial “students” watched as he and Charlie Koch set targets at 20 yards on private property with a steep ridge as a backdrop and listened as the avid Wisconsin outdoorsman with family hunting property in Adams-Friendship delivered primary rules of firearm safety: we would always maintain muzzle control and point the barrel in a safe direction; we would keep our fingers off the trigger until ready to fire; we would handle every gun as if it was loaded; and we would know our target and what was beyond.

With our daughters first taking turns with the semi-automatic 9mms allowing the shooter to fire one round with each pull of the trigger until a 15-round clip was empty, and then a 6-shot .357 revolver, we watched as their shooting proficiency increased with their comfort level. Our daughters previous firearms experience, in particular handgun experience, ranged from very moderate to none. Ear protection and individualized instruction helped that comfort level increase quickly over the hour-long session until hundreds of spent casings littered the ground in need of gathering and the targets were riddled with ammunition holes.

“No one should be afraid of a gun,” Heitman said. “The more familiar you are

with a firearm and the higher the comfort level, the more relaxed and safe you'll be. It's when you are not familiar with the gun that accidents happen."

Handgun rounds echoed across the northland as one by one young women and parents took turns challenging the targets with all three handguns. Another sound also rose into the air, in particular as the session carried on. The cheers of celebration as each of the youngest shooters began with more frequency to actually hit the plastic soda bottles and cardboard targets that they were aiming at. Like so many other activities that challenge us mentally or physically, success with a firearm lays the foundation to build more confidence overall.

"There are some preconceived notions about guns that make people afraid," Heitman said. "Once people shoot guns and become familiar with how they work, it's fun and safe. My wife (Robin) is a very good shot with her .357 and it's because she was introduced to the right technique and developed good habits. Savannah, Taylor and Mack were hitting what they were aiming at after they understood what they were being taught. They were learning their site-picture and how to line up the sites. They were introduced to the basics and they had a great time. Now, it's a matter of shooting practice, while practicing the rules of safety.

Heitman recommends that any Wisconsin resident seeking to learn how to shoot or to properly introduce their children to firearms safety contact a local gun club or hunters safety course for assistance. ^{OW}

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Mom teaches daughter. Robin Heitman, an experienced firearms shooter for many years, introduces 16-year old daughter Savannah to safety rules and sighting points before shooting Robin's .357 revolver Friday in northern Wisconsin.



Armed with hearing protection and the safety rules of an experienced hunter and police officer, Taylor Ellis, 16, is ready to test her skills on the target range with a .357 magnum revolver Friday in northern Wisconsin.