



Citizen's Arrest

A hesitant use of force

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My partner, Pelletier, and I were working the night shift. We were out on routine patrol through the city's business district when we passed George's Garage and noticed that the door was hanging open.

Everyone in our small city knows about George's odd obsession with working late into the wee hours while normal folks are home nodding off in their recliners to the drone of the television. Not old George, though, but still that open door wasn't routine. Pelletier and I knew what had to be done.

The garage was dark when we entered, except for the dim glow given off by the trouble light hanging from the hood of the pickup parked inside. Pelletier hollered to the guy lurking in the shadows behind the truck who, as luck would have it, turned out not to be our friend George.

Our routine shift took a definite downturn when the big guy sauntered out of the shadows, around the front of the pickup, and raised his right arm in Pelletier's direction. Pelletier shouted a warning, two shots rang out, and the intruder dropped to one knee. Thank God for my partner, because in the shadows I hadn't seen the gun in the intruder's hand.

The big guy wasn't done just yet, though. Rising up on his good knee he pointed the handgun in my direction. In a split second a decision had to be made...shoot or be shot? I steadied my firearm, and at point blank range pulled off a round, which found its mark.

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Sergeant Jeff Melau applauded our work. "Now what should you do?" asked the veteran police firearms instructor.

What should we do? What should we do? Honestly, I had no clue, so I said the first thing that popped into my head. "Make sure he's down?" I offered, meekly envisioning myself doing the old kick the dead guy routine like in a Hollywood western.

Down? If this had been real life, I would have just blown this guy's esophagus to kingdom come with a Glock .40 caliber to the chest, and I wanted to make sure he was down? My partner, City Councilman Mark Pelletier, did no better. We were clueless. The adrenaline was pumping, and our brains were experiencing the aftershock—one of us, I'm not sure whom, finally said something about summoning an ambulance.

"You have just shot a person," offered the sergeant in the tone one uses when teaching kindergartners. "You need to



STAR JOURNAL PHOTO BY LAURIE LENTEN

Citizen Police Academy member, Kevin Peterson, left, practiced defense and arrests tactics on Sergeant Kurt Helke at Tuesday evening's class.

get him some medical attention."

Ah, yes, medical attention would be the logical and reasonable thing to do after shooting someone, right? Police Chief Mike Steffes (aka "The Intruder") lay at our feet, having just taken three simmunition (training) rounds traveling at 400 feet per second in his side and chest, and Pelletier and I went simultaneously dumb.

We had not only just irrevocably broken the cardinal rule of handling a firearm—NEVER POINT A GUN AT ANYONE—but also had pulled the trigger and fired an actual training round at an actual person. At our debriefing session, the Chief said that, yes, he definitely felt the impact of the rounds through the firefighter's gear he was wearing.

I felt conflicted. It was a simulation training session. The training room and garage had been made "clean" with all real firearms and ammunition removed, but I had still aimed a firearm at a person and pulled the trigger. Pelletier and I had "stopped the threat," which is the underlying purpose of using deadly force, and I felt strangely exhilarated in a slow motion kind of way. I wanted to laugh and say "holy cow" at the same time.

For our past two sessions of the Citizens Police Academy, we've discussed the use of force and deadly force. Our mild-mannered group of eight to 10 has fired guns on a range and in simulation exercises, learned how to handcuff and used intervention options, including training batons and training pepper spray on the very good-natured Sergeant Kurt Helke. Let the record show that my attempt at using pepper spray on Sgt. Helke looked more like I was spritzing him with Calvin Klein.

We've succeeded at some things and messed up at others, chickened out at times, and laughed a whole lot. I'm thinking that perhaps we're even more amusing to have around the police station than a box of doughnuts, although we have lived up to the second part of the word.

(Editor's note: Columnist Laurie Lenten is participating in the first Rhinelander Citizens' Police Academy, and is filing weekly reports on her experience.)