



# Father and the Second **AMENDMENT**

*William L. Robbins was born and raised as a typical suburban New York kid during the 1960s. Bill learned to shoot a .22 rifle and earned his first NRA Junior Marksman patch as an eight-year-old boy at sleep-away camp in the woods of Maine. Bill has lived in California since 1995, where, in addition to starting and running businesses, he enjoys reading, writing, cycling, and shooting sports.*

by William L. Robbins, CRPA and NRA Member

**M**y first memory of firearms is a fond one, involving my late father, Stanton I. Robbins. Thanks in part to this memory, dating back some 50 years, and, more recently, to the times I spent at the shooting range with my dad during his retirement in San Diego, I became a firearms enthusiast, a CRPA and NRA member, and an active supporter of the Second Amendment.

My story begins in October, 1967. I was six years old, and had accompanied my father, then, age 36, to a police supply store in some gritty neighborhood in the Bronx, NY, where he would complete the purchase of a revolver for duty carry. Born in July, 1930, my father had grown up in the Bronx during the Great Depression and WWII. In 1948, he set out for college in the mid-west, sight unseen, to Indiana University. The IU campus in Bloomington was a long way from the Bronx, where my dad, as a three-sewer-stickball-playing kid, acquired his street smarts, his hilariously uncouth sense of humor, and his proudly un-refined New York accent.

Dad was a Korean War veteran. He served with honor and earned a lifetime of lighthearted ribbing from those who knew him well, as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps, in the bustling port city of Pusan (re-named Busan in 2000), South Korea, where he managed the largest liquor warehouse in the theater of operations. His im-

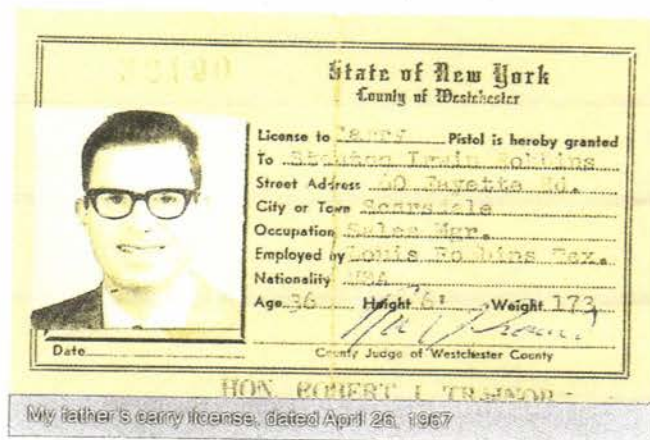
mediate family members and long-time friends always found it amusing that, in a hot war against communism, my dad was in charge of the U.S. Army's vital supply of booze. Ironically, or, perhaps, as a result of his unusual Army service, my dad was never much of a drinker.

The men of my father's generation were a patriotic sort, in a humble, quiet way. They sought public service without fanfare, and supported their communities with pride. Employed full-time in the textile industry in New York's famous Garment District, my father was also an auxiliary policeman in my suburban NY hometown (officially, a village). Eventually, he became captain of the local auxiliary force. Our town had its own police department and, in those days, when violent crime was something that seemed only to happen in the city, and "homeland security" meant leaving the front-porch light on after dark, auxiliary policemen were allowed to carry pistols. When on duty, my father wore a full uniform, complete with all the time-honored law enforcement accoutrements, including the patrolman's hat, badge, duty belt, and wooden "billy club," or night stick, which, to this day, hangs by its original leather lanyard from a hook on the coat rack by the front door of my home in Los Angeles. As veterans of WWII or the Korean War, my father and his fellow auxiliary policemen—an unassuming group of weekend and night-time



volunteers who got on the train every weekday morning and commuted to respectable jobs in Manhattan—all had at least basic military training in firearms, plus time on the police range, which was located in the basement of our town's police headquarters. I still remember joining my father for one of his practice sessions. I was a little kid, down at the police range with my dad and some of his fellow officers. How Norman Rockwell was that?

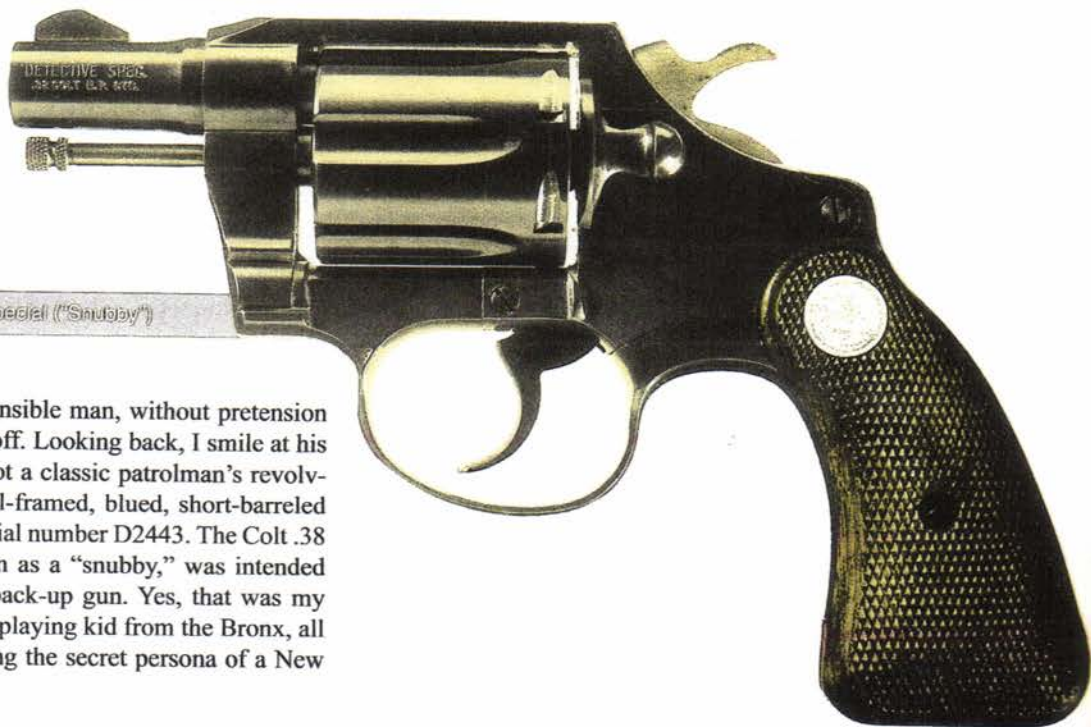
Back we go to the police store in the Bronx, where I rode shotgun as my dad completed his purchase of a pistol. My father carried with him to the store his State of New York, County of Westchester, License to Carry a Pistol #32190, dated April 26, 1967, and signed, by hand, in blue ink, by a county judge. The license bore my father's glossy, black & white photograph, with his flat-top haircut, thick black eyeglasses, and his earnest smile. My dad was just the kind of guy who you would have trusted to carry a gun. Besides, his carry license was restricted, as typed-in on the back, "to target shooting, hunting, and as an Auxiliary Policeman."



My father's carry license, dated April 26, 1967

From my childhood, I recall how my dad would dutifully strap-on his Colt .38 (holstered on his belt, not concealed) every time he went on duty, which usually consisted of minding the crosswalk at Sunday morning church services, or patrolling the tree-lined streets of our town on Halloween eve, also known as "Mischief Night," when youthful troublemakers from the "bad" side of a town that had no bad side would throw eggs at parked cars and tip-over memorial stones at the cemetery. Thankfully, my dad never had reason to draw his weapon in the line of duty. Mostly, my dad's pistol sat in a grey-painted metal lock-box, buried in the back of his bedroom closet. My dad never spoke much to me or anyone else about his gun, the only firearm he owned when I was growing up. Of course, I knew about it. After all, I had accompanied him on the day he purchased his revolver, and always knew where he kept it. The thing is, I never sought to pull-out the lock-box in my father's closet that contained his gun, and besides, I did not know where he kept the keys.

In 1995, married for two years, my wife and I moved from the east coast to Los Angeles. Two years later, after his retirement from a grinding career in the Garment District, (in 1972, my dad's father, my grandfather, was stabbed to death by a knife-wielding mugger in the elevator of the building on 7th Avenue where my grandfather, my father, and my uncle had worked together for years), my dad and my mother followed me and my wife to California, settling in San Diego. It was there that my father and I started going to the local shooting range, to spend some quality time together and to give his old Colt .38 a workout. My dad had large hands with big, clumsy fingers. When he held his diminutive Detective Special, it disappeared into his clenched fist. He would hold the gun the old-fashioned way, with his right hand extended toward the target, and his left hand on his hip. By the early 2000s, with



Colt .38 Short Barrel Detective Special ("Snubby")

Dad was a modest, responsible man, without pretension or the slightest need to show off. Looking back, I smile at his choice of weapon that day; not a classic patrolman's revolver, but, instead, a carbon-steel-framed, blued, short-barreled Colt .38 Detective Special, serial number D2443. The Colt .38 Detective Special, also known as a "snubby," was intended for concealed carry, or as a back-up gun. Yes, that was my dad, the three-sewer-stickball-playing kid from the Bronx, all grown up, apparently harboring the secret persona of a New York plain-clothed detective.



## My Father and the Second Amendment

his advancing age, my dad's aim had become a bit wobbly, but, he was still a pretty good shot. Today, I still have the sturdy, thick-gauged metal lock-box in which my dad stored his gun, along with an original, darkly tarnished key to the lock. Unfortunately, I do not have my dad's Colt .38. He sold it to a licensed dealer at the range in San Diego around 2005.

After selling his Colt .38, my dad made another uncharacteristically colorful statement in firearms fashion when he purchased a big, shiny steel Smith & Wesson Model 686P, 6-round .357 Magnum, with a 4" barrel and a Hogue grip. That S&W .357 Magnum did not disappear in my father's fist. Instead, it stuck out with authority and spewed flames whenever he fired-off a round. Effective? Yes. Practical? Not so much. To my senses, that gun was more hand-canon than pistol.

Smith & Wesson 686P, 6-round .357 Magnum with 4" Barrel



Enjoying my time at the range with my father, I eventually purchased my first firearm, a Beretta 92FS. As with my father's purchase of his Colt .38 and his S&W .357 Magnum; my purchase of a Beretta 92FS was driven, in large measure, by my expectation of what the ideal handgun should look like, and how I saw myself using it. To me, the Beretta 92FS exemplified the serious, semi-auto pistol. As with an Italian sports car, the Beretta has its idiosyncrasies, but in its many variants, the Beretta has served its role as a U.S. military, border patrol and law enforcement side arm for many years with distinction. As with many firsts, my Beretta will always hold a special place in my heart. Even so, as I became more experienced with handguns, I was drawn to the intuitive simplicity of design and reliability of operation that defines Glock pistols. Eventually, I added a G19 and a G26 to my collection. Next came an out-of-state concealed carry permit (thank you, State of Utah).

For more than ten years after my father retired and moved to California with my mother, he and I enjoyed an occasional weekend hour or two at the range, as well as the mock-ceremonial, post-range cleaning of our "shootin' irons," always on my mother's kitchen table, with disassembled handgun parts spread around and the scent of gun powder residue, Hoppe's No. 9 Solvent, and Mill Run Brite-Bore Gun Grease creating a nostalgically familiar, historically authentic, father-and-son tableau, fit for the cover of the Saturday Evening Post.



The 1980s Mill Run Brite-Bore Pistol Cleaning kit, used by the author's father for more than 40 years, and still owned by the author.

My father passed away in 2011, a few months shy of his 81st birthday, succumbing in hospice to malignant metastatic melanoma. His S&W .357 Magnum passed legally to me after I completed and submitted the requisite State of California paperwork. Having no practical use for a hand-canon, I eventually sold it. I cherish the memory, more than the thing itself. I am thankful for the time spent together with my father down at the range, and around my mom's kitchen table, as we shared the kind of uniquely American experience that the Second Amendment still enables us to enjoy.