

I was registered to submit verbal testimony on this bill this morning, but indicated that I needed to be able to do so before 8:45 AM due to conflicting responsibilities. By 8:50 AM, my name had not been called and I therefore had to leave. I apologize for taking your time to ascertain that I was not there and any time that might have taken from any other witness. However, because I feel so strongly about this bill (especially the gun storage provisions), I will offer another bit of written testimony. It will not be as powerful or as dramatic as what it was that I was going to say to everyone on this committee ... particularly those cavalier members who seem to think that the so-called right to bear arms provides freedom to be irresponsible and anti-social -- because nothing beats looking in the face of a productive, responsible, alert and ancient member of our society who has a story to tell about a lifetime of anguish caused by a preventable gun accident experienced in my youth.

I did present written testimony for the original bill. Hopefully there is still a record of it. I thought it did a pretty good job of describing and explaining what it is like to be shot by your best friend when you are just seven years old. But there has been no feedback regarding my testimony -- apparently such is the case with the Oregon Legislature -- so it is quite possible that NO ONE read what I had to say, and so no one was able to vicariously experience the outcome of a preventable accident.

I was seven years old when my best friend shot me. As has happened so many hundreds of thousands of times in the, he didn't know what he was doing (none of us did) when he showed off his brother's "antique rifle" that he kept stored in his closet (it turned out to be a Sharpe's muzzle-loading hunting rifle ... commonly referred to as a "buffalo gun.") and rammed a "dead bullet," stored in his brother's night stand, down the barrel (it was a .45 caliber bullet). The gun literally exploded in my friend's hand, which was pointed at me. Luckily, I was able to turn away and the bullet entered my right shoulder from the back (exiting in the front and then entering my wrist by the thumb and exiting at the pinky) instead of hitting me directly in the left shoulder or chest. I say "luckily" because I survived.

I never really recovered from that accidental shooting. I compensate. Most of my life. Corrective surgeries went on for years until I stopped growing, invariably during the summer so I wouldn't miss any school. I am now accustomed to the disfigurement of my right hand and wrist (I remain right-handed, but only out of stubbornness and severely limited in what I can do), but was incredibly conscious of it in my formative teen years. To say that it shaped my personality and everything I have become and done is not an overstatement. Those few seconds changed my life forever, and I still live with the outcome, today. For example, any sudden, unexpected loud noise instantly generates the ringing sound I heard while I held my mangled, bloody arm in that bedroom 65 years ago ... I even wrote an award-winning essay while in college, entitled "Ringing," that explained it in great detail.

Such pain and anguish (and any grit or courage I have mustered to overcome it) was not necessary. Storing guns safely is the most direct solution ... for thousands and thousands of people. This is why I strongly support this legislation and hope that you do, too.