

# WHAT WEAKER SEX?

IT MUST BE SAID that no matter what your age, size or sex everyone has the ability to protect themselves. It is having the will to do something not your size, whether you are male or female. Now, the ladies reading this might say "that's ok for you to say, but being a man what do you know?" I know what would put a man off and what someone could do to me to stop me in my tracks. But it is true to say what do men understand about the fear many women have walking down the street, and how can a man give them advice on what to do or say to stay safe? That's why I'm keen for women to do more when it comes to passing on their ideas and knowledge to others. As a man I can't see it all from a woman's viewpoint. But I can say this, that some of the most determined people I have trained with and who have shown strength beyond their size have been women.

Any problems I have had when I worked on the night club door or looking after someone's private party was always with someone smaller than I was. Now it could be alcohol, drugs or their three mates standing behind them that gave them the bottle to have a go, whatever it was they had come to the point that they would not back down. I knew I had a problem - not from how big the person was - but from how determined they were. I have had the privilege to train with and teach some very determined women who have shown more bottle than many men who have come to train with me. Over the years women have given a lot to the martial arts, taking on all aspects, from judo and karate to the hard contact styles of kick boxing, Muay Thai and boxing.

The main thing that comes across that I have found by training with some of these ladies is the spirit that they show in their training is of a high standard. Most of the ladies who have trained with me have at one time been involved in some form of street confrontation. From attempted rape to being beaten up at a bus stop or being punched and kicked by a man after asking him just to move away from a doorway. Maybe women do have a harder time on the streets. They may not be attacked on a daily basis but the threat they generally feel is real. I am ugly enough not to be bothered with the day to day harassment of someone chatting me up in a pub, or have them look at me in an uncomfortable way on the bus going home from work. So are the martial arts covering all the aspects of women when it comes to staying safe on

## By Alan Charlton Self Protection Association

the street? The threat women face from attack may not be the knife wielding monster but the day to day fear many face just going about their normal routine.

This type of threat and fear of something that could happen was made very clear to me once when travelling home late at night on the tube. This particular tube station would close all the exits but for the main entrance late at night. So if you wanted to cross to the south side of the station you had to walk over a very dark footbridge. This particular night only a hand full of people got off at this stop. Handing in my ticket I thought nothing about walking over the footbridge. As I started walking up the steps I felt very uncomfortable, there was a young lady walking over the bridge - she was about 10 steps in front of me. To walk over the bridge would normally take no longer than two minutes but this night it seemed to take hours. I could feel how uncomfortable the lady in front of me felt, about having me walking behind her.

I wanted to say to her, "excuse me. It's OK. I'm not a threat, I'm just on my way home". But the fear was so real that to this day I'm convinced that if I had tried to talk to her, just to reassure her, it would have made the situation much worse. So I slowed down to give her time to get across the bridge. By the time I got to the top of the bridge she was on her way down the other side. What made it more intense was that the footbridge had high concrete walls; you could not see to the left or right - it was like a tunnel and your footsteps would echo from one end to the other.

When I got to the other side and started walking down the steps my heart sunk because the lady was taking the same turning I would have to take to get home. The feeling was getting worse. It may seem strange to say but I felt her fear. We seemed to be linked by invisible chains. The faster she walked

and the more I slowed down seemed to make no difference to the distance between us. And the feeling of danger she felt from me was getting worse. I could take no more when I got to the bottom of the steps. I did not move for about ten minutes and when I did I took the other street adding fifteen minutes to my walk home. I felt that bad about the situation. As I'm writing this now years later it still make me feel uncomfortable, just thinking what she must have been feeling and just thinking about how many times this type of situation happens every day.

### Every Day

It is hard to understand how we are going to feel about a situation until we find ourselves in one. But most of us can understand the feeling of the fear of danger. I have trained with and talked to many women who want to do something about their fear. When it comes to preparing themselves for the danger they feel on the street the harder and the more real the training the more confident they feel about handling a real situation. Again this is something that comes from inside the individual but it can be developed over time. If the pressure of a situation can happen every day then taking some time to understand yourself



Sharon Thompson great punching power.

and what you can do about it is essential.

I am not talking about having great punching and kicking power but more about understanding situations and threat assessment. Most situations can be dealt with by seeing the possible dangers before you have to react in a physical way. What would be the best way to get this information across? Are men the best people to pass on this information or are women better prepared and do they have a better understanding of what women are looking for? For me, I feel it depends on the information given out. Look at it this way, one of the best female self-defence books on the market is "Dogs don't know Kung Fu", by Jamie O'Keefe. No matter how nice a dress Jamie could get himself into, in no way could he pass himself off as female. It's the information that brings home the true nature of the danger and what you can do about it.

In his book "Unleash the Lioness" Robin Houseman gives a fantastic insight into what women can do, with basic and the hard-hitting truth about fighting back. In just over one hundred pages he makes the truth clearer than many so called women's self defence courses that waffle on about what to do for ages. The danger is having someone teaching self-defence courses in your local sports centre where the idea is a quick profit on a six-week course with poor information. What if the information and content is unworkable? It may make the people on the course feel more confident but it's dangerous to send them out poorly armed for the real dangers of the street when they may have to face a possibly dangerous situation every day.

### Not a Ring Craft?

There are limits - and I'm not talking about having women fight in no-holds barred fights against a man stronger and heavier than they are. It would be a mismatch when you're talking about something that is a ring craft. Like all competitions, you set limits for safety reasons. Someone like Sharon Thompson who has taken part in some very hard training sessions (that would have most people making their excuses and walking away) has tested her ability along with the men on the now infamous Animal Day training sessions. So I was pleased Sharon took some time out to talk to me about this article and how she feels about training with men.

"Belief in oneself comes from testing yourself and the limits that you are willing to take yourself to. Training with men can build your confidence, like when you find yourself holding your own against them within your training. But fighting someone who is stronger and heavier than you within the confines and

rules of a training hall can take away your confidence in yourself, so you should always separate the two. In respect of making things work on a street level understanding the threat and how to get away from a situation that could develop out of control very quickly is more important. I can see how women may feel uneasy about walking into a training hall full of men, but that's taking the first step, I have never really had a problem with that. It makes your training more demanding, making it feel as real as possible can help you control your fear of a situation".

I have been lucky enough to see Sharon demonstrate her striking power many times and I believe that not many people could take a right cross from Sharon and still be able to eat solid food. Sharon is currently training for the London marathon. I'm sure with Sharon's outlook towards training she will finish in a good time.

### How big a monster could you handle?

At this point in time I am very lucky to have some great people to train with, people who are keen to push themselves to the limit. Sevim has been training with me for many years and she is always keen to know if she can get the better of the guys on the mat. Just the fact that she is willing to try demonstrates she has more bottle than a milk float. The guys in the group tower over her, each having more weight in one leg than the whole of Sevim's body. But if she gets her arm around your neck she will put on a choke that will have you fighting for your life. You can punch pull and scratch but she will not let go until you're on the floor tapping for her to stop. In fact it has taken



*You think she would be bigger.*

a lot of persuasion to make Sevim understand just how much pain we are in, and if we train for groin and throat attacks Sevim finds it hard to get a partner.

After one particularly hard training session I made the point about just how much courage it takes from the ladies to train with us. If we put it into context just by scaling up the training partners to what Sevim, Liz and Tracy have to face every time they get on the mat to train with us, it would be like stepping in the ring with the biggest guys from WWF but without the fake kicking and punching. Just think about it. Would you face off someone standing close on seven feet and weighing thirty stone? I think I would have left with my excuses in the car park along with the smell of burning rubber as I drove off. Weaker sex? I don't think so. By training with the men, women can find out just how weak and easily hurt, little boys like us men, can be.

### Women taking the lead

So it's great to see people like Liz Clark running ladies self defence courses that



*Liz Clark taking a lead on womens self defence.*



Strike.



Move in.



And Tim wishes he were back at basket weaving class.

are structured to cover women's fear of street violence. With the understanding of having been involved first hand in some very dangerous situations, she can cover what is workable. She is in great demand having been on national television and radio talking about her experiences. She also runs short courses for ladies self defence. It must make the women on the course feel much more comfortable and able to accept the idea that you can do something about your safety, when the

information comes from another woman who has had to face her fear. After a short course some of the women may feel they would like to take up the fighting arts, which is great.

But the lead has to come from somewhere. I'm not only talking about the thousands of women who train and enjoy their martial arts every week up and down the country but also the millions of women who have the fear of someone walking behind them. We

greater opportunity to do something for women's self defence in a big way.

Remember it's your right to protect yourself and only you can do something about it.

To contact Liz Clark about Women's Self Defence Tel: 07967 243667  
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