

Women in the Martial Arts

WHY DO WOMEN decide to join the martial arts? I am sure there are many reasons. For instance, to learn how to protect themselves, they may have been a victim, to get fit, to compete, to socialise, to build up their confidence, the list could be endless. I can't speak for others, but I can tell you my story and how it's helped me.

In December 1993 whilst out doing my Christmas shopping I was attacked in a shopping centre in a shop, by two people. The attack happened very fast. The male attacker, within seconds of turning around, tapped me on the shoulder and said a few words, then punched me to the floor. He then continued to attack me, with his girlfriend, whilst I was on the floor. Even though I considered myself to be streetwise nothing made me so angry and scared. The fact of the matter was it happened in broad daylight in a busy shopping centre. I suppose at the time I thought no violence would have occurred. Wrong! I was pre-occupied and not aware of my surroundings.

I live in an area that has a high crime rate and have had to deal with many situations involving street confrontations and violence within the home where people are aggressive. Last weekend there were two shootings just down the road from me. This is an area that is becoming notorious for shootings. Not a place where you would want to bring up your children.

In 1997 I started training with the Self-Protection Association (SPA). I had trained in other systems before, but never felt they were practical for what I wanted to learn and experience. I chose the SPA because of its simplicity and its reality training methods.

When looking for a system you must ask yourself, what do I want? Go and attend the class. The instructor should always allow you to watch or participate in the first lesson for free, so you can get a feel of it. They shouldn't make you feel pressured into joining but give you the information that you require, always have a chat with the instructor and ask yourself do I like this person? Could I consider training with this person each week? Are they easy to get along with? Are they allowing me to ask questions? Have they got a sense of

humour? Remember you will want to learn from someone that knows their subject, has gained lots of practical experience, enjoys what they teach and is willing to build your confidence up in a positive way. I would suggest visiting as many schools, organisations and people as you can to compare the different systems and find out what suits you. No two systems will suit the same two people.

Women can feel vulnerable in many situations that men would not experience. Women are perceived as the weaker sex, but are we? Alan Charlton who is my instructor and a personal friend who wrote an excellent piece (*Fighters, April 2001*) where he talked about a situation one evening coming home. He highlighted that women can fight and hurt men, but do men really understand what women go through on a day to day basis?

Two weeks ago I was travelling home from work late one evening and noticed a man staring at me on the train. When this normally happens I will look at the person so they know I know they are looking at me, look away and then look back at them. Someone who's just looking at you because they might find you attractive, like what you are wearing, for whatever reason will look away as they know this will make you feel uncomfortable. It is an intrusion of your space even though they are not close to you. Anyway this particular evening I did the same, but the man persisted to look at me so I carried on looking at him so he knew that I had clocked him and was probably drawing a description of him. I could see he felt uncomfortable and turned away.

My train came to my stop and he got off one door before me. I allowed the man to walk in front of me, up the stairs. As I was coming out I looked to the right out of the station window to see what direction he had gone in and he hadn't turned right, so I thought okay he's turned left. As I came out I looked left and didn't see him. I then turned immediately to my right he was standing there just lurking about. I thought "What does this pervert want?" As I started to cross the road, he went to cross as well, until I turned around then he stopped. I walked to the top of

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Women's Self-Protection

the road stood there and turned to see what he was doing. He pulled down his hat and walked to the top of the road on the other side and looked over the top. He realised I had stopped and was looking straight at him. At this point he looked very shifty. I looked down to my side and there was a glass bottle. I thought to myself "You just come and I will smash this bottle in your face". When I finally got in I felt angry that this person thought they could try and hurt me. Even though I was tired I had forced myself to be switched on to my surroundings, I hadn't then I could have been a potential victim. You need to be switched on all the time to avoid a potential situation that may result in an attack.

As explained earlier, my true motivation in finding a self-protection class was to learn to help myself, limiting the number of situations I could get myself into and not become a victim. It's a great way of ridding yourself of aggression. Like most people I think we all have experienced good and bad but the difference is whether we deal with these experiences and whether we let them get the better of us or whether we learn and become stronger and better people. I hope I always opt for the latter.

My training at the SPA has taught me the most important thing that I can be switched on 'awareness and avoidance'. Apart from the practical learning of the techniques, we learn drills, we learn how to deal with putting ourselves under pressure and doesn't feel comfortable. I don't know anyone who has been in a confrontation and has felt comfortable with it. Adrenaline flows and many people experience different things, including faster heartbeats, shallow breathing, sweating palms, shaking legs, dry mouth. Therefore it is important that you make your training as real as possible. I push myself as hard as I can by training with the guys. Alan is a fantastic instructor, he makes you work hard and makes you enjoy the sessions. I would definitely recommend private tuition to him (Alan don't forget the cheque!)

As a young girl being brought up in a strict culture I was exposed from a young age to the true dominance a man can place in an environment. Growing up I learnt very quickly that if people don't get what they want from you easily they will try and bully and intimidate you and this can sometimes lead to violence.

I consider myself to be a very strong and determined individual and don't like to be bullied or intimidated. I know that if my life is at risk I will fight to survive. I believe that no one has a right to invade your space outside of the home, inside of the home, within the work place, or anywhere you find yourself. We should respect each other as individuals and if you can't reason with someone, then we should be able to walk away. This would be great if we lived in an ideal world but we don't. There are people out there who are really nasty. They want to either take something from you, whether it is materialistic or they want to invade your physical space.

One thing that has kept me going is believing in myself, and having the

spirit to keep going. Even if all odds are against you, you must never give up. Most street confrontations are about attitude. So when you are out by yourself as a woman and you feel vulnerable think, "Look if you mess with me I will really hurt you, by any means". I know this may seem extreme. I'm not saying if someone is asking you for the time you should bash them over the head, no, what I'm saying is most people know when they feel uncomfortable and if you find yourself feeling vulnerable then you must think big. Most attackers don't like someone if they fight back, they will want to run off. If they want your money, then just give it to them, this is not important. It can be replaced but, if they want to hurt you, then you must hit hard and fast and try and get away as soon as possible.

I am now teaching women self-protection to allow me to pass on my experience and knowledge in a positive way. A good friend of mine Liz Clarke has been teaching women self-protection for a while now, after becoming a victim herself. She is an inspiration to all of us.

To finish on a positive note, I would

just like to send a big thank you to my instructor, Alan Charlton and fellow class mate Tony Falconer. Both Tim and myself were tricked this weekend into believing that we were helping Tony out. We went through all our training drills, which was tough. Alan opened up an old injury by nearly crushing me and after slipping Tim the tenner whilst Alan went to get the frozen peas, on his return, Tim nearly put Alan asleep from a choke. Tim's arm was in an awkward position and he couldn't get it out (thanks Tim). Alan honoured both of us with our Black belts. Thank you. I'm feeling the pain, but let me tell you, my chest has expanded by at least six inches!

If you would like to contact myself for courses, seminars, instructing, advice, please do: 07050 614116 womensselfprotection@yahoo.co.uk

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