

FEATURES

Your body is best defence: York martial arts teacher

PJ Todd

As the number of women being attacked increases so, it seems, does the catalogue of self-defense tips. Women are bombarded with conflicting advice from the police, women's groups, the media and their friends about the methods they should use to fend off aggressors. Unfortunately, cities are consequently producing rag-tag armies of women who are haphazardly armed. And the only ones apparently benefiting from the confusion are the criminals.

One of my friends, a student at York, wears a whistle around her neck that she plans to blow in her assailant's ear; a female professor at York keeps illegal mace in her office to ward off late night prowlers; and a beautiful blonde model I know carries a steak knife in her purse. She isn't sure what she'd do with it if she were ever attacked, but she thinks she "would stab the guy in the eye."

BUDDY SYSTEM

At York, female students fear walking after dark on the campus and through the underground tunnels. Some are using the 'buddy system'—doubling up to go anywhere at night.

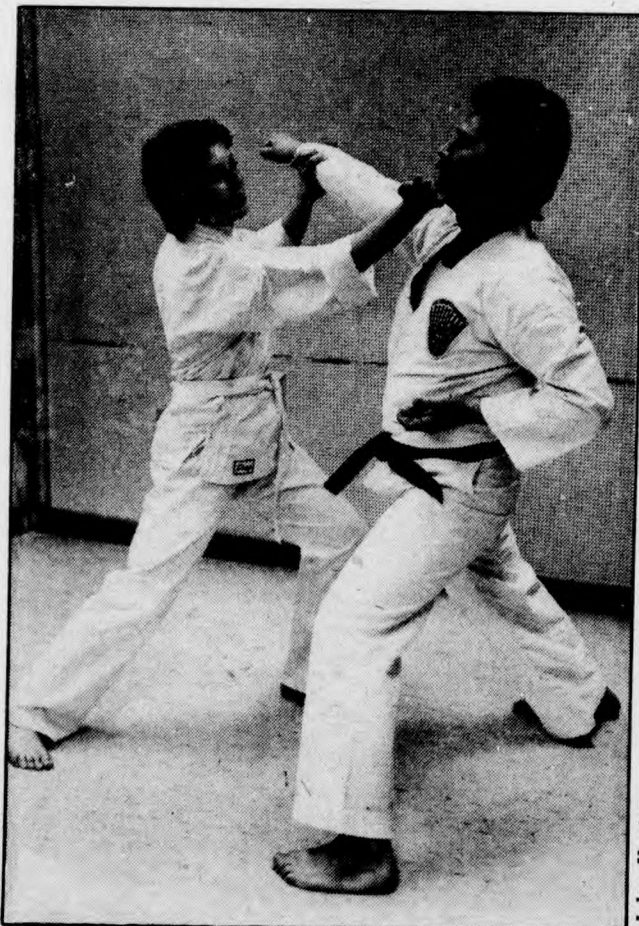
The recent attacks in the Vanier residence especially, have affected the lifestyles of many women. One of the victims of the January attacks has warned her floormates, especially the guys, that "they better not surprise me or come into my room unexpectedly. I am ready for an attacker now." And there are many York women who will not make the long and isolated walk to the parking lot unless they have a male escort.

Women are taking a number of precautions, in any number of combinations, but according to a 3rd-year York sociology/philosophy student, their efforts are generally ineffective. "A woman cannot depend upon others for her own security. Carrying weapons is dangerous," cautions Michael Rybyj, "because they can easily be turned against you. I see the student security guys walking women to their cars and I hear women being told to stay behind locked doors at night. But when you come right down to it, the only one who can protect a woman is the woman herself."

CRIME IS INCREASING

Rybyj is critical of a passive approach to personal security—it's too much like applying a bandage to a wound that needs radical surgery—"if someone wants to do harm to you they will. No bodyguards are going to stop that."

Rybyj speaks with authority. He is a Brown Belt (one level below Black Belt, the highest degree in martial arts) who has been studying the implications of female self-defense for several years. And his observations have made him angry. "I do not like what women are forced to deal with in their world. It is obvious that crime is increasing at York, and I know that it will get worse. I just don't want to see someone get killed here before people start



Karen Droge blocks Rybyj's punch with a jab to the chin.

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recognizing the severity of our problems. People think women cannot protect themselves physically, well, they are absolutely wrong. Women have been given a rough time in the past, but things can change. Women do not have to take this abuse."

Rybyj's frustration with the attitudes towards women—the attitudes of both men and women—has motivated him. He has developed a special women's program in self defense at the Aiki Kempo Karatedo club in Mississauga, where he works as an instructor. Rybyj wants to train women to have the confidence they need to effectively exercise self-defense techniques.

NO PUNK HOODLUM

Anyone not familiar with the philosophical perspective of the Aiki Kempo club might mistake Rybyj for a strong-arm vigilante determined to physically abuse the criminal. It is true that he advocates self-defense and that he thinks women should be able to defend themselves against aggressors, but there is nothing of the punk hoodlum in him. "I will only fight if I have no other option. I've talked so many people down, because I realize that words are always better. Let them know that their attitude is not cool and they will usually become less aggressive."

Twenty-nine year old Rybyj, who wants eventually to become a lawyer, has been living on the York campus in the graduate apartments for the past three years.

Rybyj's belief that women can benefit from training in the martial arts and his proximity to the York security problem have inspired him to start an Aiki Kempo Karatedo program at the university. "I have already started a Woman's Program at the Mississauga club and I am currently doing the necessary paperwork to start classes on the campus." He introduced the Mississauga Women's Group in January and initially had only one woman student. "She was so afraid I would cancel the class because there was only one client. No way. As long as there is one lady interested I am going to teach her."

The class has since expanded to ten students, some of whom also attend the co-ed classes, and they meet Saturdays and Sundays for one hour sessions. "Training here makes women aware of their own strength. They do not have to be submissive. I know that the police are advising women that if they are attacked they should 'submit and live'," said Rybyj, his voice rising in indignation. "What is that. That is not good. I do not think that submission is an acceptable alternative. Women can and should defend themselves."

FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE

Rybyj suggested that a first-hand experience might be a good learning experience for an eager *Excalibur* reporter. I have never had any self-defense training and consequently avoid late night subway stops or lace keys through my fingers because I've been told to gouge an attacker's eye with them. I have never felt confident with the metal keychain slipping in my fingers, but I was cautious about "learning to fight". I spent Saturday afternoon at the Aiki Kempo club talking with the other women participants and I joined in the self-defense class.

The women, dressed in loose-fitting white robes filed into the large workout room, the walls of which are lined with huge mirrors. Sun streamed down upon our heads from massive windows. Solitude and mental concentration are necessary components of the Aiki training and this atmosphere is conducive to the necessary serenity. "It is total awareness that is going to help you the most in an attack situation. Here, through exercises, we expand your capacity to see and hear. You must be constantly aware of your surroundings," Rybyj instructed us. He confided to me later that his heightened sensitivity has spilled into other areas of his life. "I notice small animals and flowers when I walk on the campus now. It is definitely a spiritual experience when you study the martial arts with the right attitude." In terms of protection, a woman's "best defence is knowing who is near her at all times. Many hazardous situations can easily be avoided if you see things happening. The good martial artist always expects the unexpected."

In class we ran through a half-hour of warm-up exercises — jogging, arm and leg stretches, sit-ups, push-ups and deep breathing. No one is ever forced to perform beyond their capabilities.

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Jules Xavier

Demonstrating another possible technique to deter attackers, Karen Droge delivers a punch to Instructor Rybyj's groin.

Legal aid uncovered

Marcia Johnson

A group of dedicated volunteers work all year long giving legal aid to students and needy members of the surrounding community, but many York students don't realize that they exist until they're in some sort of trouble with the law.

The Community Legal Aid Student Program is operated out of Osgoode Hall here at York and at satellite clinics all over the city. Recently, CLASP received a much needed grant of \$5,500 from CYSF that has gone straight into the general fund to help in the maintaining of the full-time lawyer and half-time lawyer plus the small support staff there. They are all members of the York bargaining unit which means that they get annual raises. Since the CLASP budget is not raised each year, the grant was gratefully welcomed by the staff.

One-third of what CLASP does is directly for York students on the main campus and at Glendon. For anyone else to qualify, he or she must undergo a means test. All students are eligible. Cases range from immigration to landlord/tenant law to OSAP affidavits. The service is not qualified to deal with wills or real estate but volunteers are more than willing to point people in the right direction.

Sean Dewart, a division leader for Workmen's Compensation, stated that many people coming for help have a misunderstanding about the penalties they are facing. This is expressed in the fact that there are approximately fifty cases of shoplifting each term from York's Bookstore. "Students don't realize that they are risking a criminal record," he said, "and usually it's only for something like a five-dollar book."

Shoplifting can be even more of a serious offence if the theft is perpetrated by a visa student. Penalty can be deportation.

CLASP also runs during the summer. However, staff members usually don't find out whether or not government funding is enough to keep them operating in the summer months until April. Assuming all will be the same as in previous years, CLASP will still be in full force for the summer of 1982. Many cases are still in process that time of the year so summer hours are essential.

For the volunteers themselves, the pressure is much less in the summer than at any other time of the year. During the regular season, academics take of most of their time. Dewart says that many volunteers choose to work at CLASP as a release and then get involved. Unfortunately, they don't tend to regulate themselves and marks suffer. The Dean is now watching the situation so that it does not become more commonplace.

One aspect of CLASP which Dewart considers to be quite important is its dealings with immigration. People's lives can be ruined if their cases are not handled well. Refugees from El Salvador, for example, depend on CLASP to protect them from facing authorities in their native land. Some cases have to be fought in the federal court.

CLASP is an organization which sometimes finds itself the object of media attention. Dewart feels that this is important and makes CLASP a more progressive force than it might otherwise be. The clientele is restricted to law students because of its insurance policy. If anyone else were to work there, CLASP would be subject to charges of negligence should anything go wrong.