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Reaction stressed

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The Women's Aiki Kempo Program reflects Rybyj's desire to cater to the needs and abilities of his students. The Aiki style is a synthesis of many other martial arts techniques.

In class, Rybyj stressed the importance of a woman's reaction to an attacker. The best reaction is to run. Or as Gary Lynch, another Aiki student said, "make room to run." If fleeing from your assailant is impossible, Rybyj's instructions are firm: "a woman must make a 'commitment'. Decide whether you are going to stay and fight. If you decide to defend yourself, be confident and focus all your energy upon that 'commitment'. Suppress your fear. Overcome it — fear is just fear and it will only get in your way."

Rybyj told us that "freeze up" is the most dangerous moment in the attack. "When a woman is attacked she is surprised and hesitates or stops completely. But after training a street attack can seem like an extension of your class work. You can react spontaneously and you don't lose your chance to surprise your attacker."

All of the women in Rybyj's class are enthusiastic, though their reasons for joining the program vary. Paula, a U of T graduate presently employed as a French translator recalled the 'rape scare' several years ago at the university. "I began taking karate then because I was frightened, but I like this program better. I am not sure if I feel safer, but I am in good shape and come here for the fitness."

Another member of the class, Miriam Michelucci, 19, studies business at Ryerson where she once was a member of the Wado-Kai club. Within four months she had received her yellow belt, but transferred the status of the belt to the Aiki club because they offer "the best of every martial art and I feel more like an individual in the program."

One of the women in Rybyj's course is there strictly for the self-defence techniques she is learning. Karen Droge, 22, is a surveyor for a civil engineering firm, and she claims her "lifestyle keeps me in potentially dangerous situations. I drive a cab and I like to go out by myself at night. If I want to go to a bar or somewhere in the evening I do not want to have to be afraid." Her family and friends are critical of the martial arts. "They really put me down, but I used to be scared to death of men." She was attacked a month ago and has vowed "I'll never be pushed around again in my life."

When I finished my first Aiki Kempo class I was exhilarated. I had learned to punch, block, side-step, break out of a wrist and neck grip. And I have learned to keep my eyes open — something Rybyj hopes to teach every York woman.



Reporter PJ Todd in a basic blocking stance.

Anderson Lookin