

MEETING UP WITH A MUGGER

By Susan Bartelstone, Personal Safety and Crime Prevention Specialist

From
**Think Fast-
Talk Fast-
Fight Smart!**
Personal
Safety
Workshop

*The safest thing
to do in a
robbery is
cooperate.*

*No property you
own is worth your
life!*

*No absolutes exist
in crime scenarios
and no advice can
address every
variable.*

*Evaluate each
situation
individually and
only respond in
the way you
instinctively judge
best.*

YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE! Muggings can be simple and straightforward, senselessly brutal or deadly, or anything in between. Most muggers, however, look for an "easy" target and a quick getaway. They primarily select people they think will be easily intimidated and offer no resistance. This selection is made on a gut-level, based on so-called "victim" characteristics that they sense. Assertive body language, assertive responses and a "non-victim" attitude are the key to keeping yourself safe in a mugging.

- ▶ **Keep the encounter brief.** The average robbery lasts only 52-60 seconds. Act as if you're conducting a routine business transaction and try not to prolong it.
- ▶ **Adopt a "non-victim" posture.** Head up, shoulders back, feet shoulder-width apart. Keep your expression blank—not scared, not angry. Make eye contact (*I see you; I'm aware you're there*) unless the person is high, drunk, acting erratic, or enraged. Experts advise this is the best way to defuse a confrontation.
- ▶ **Adopt a "non-victim" attitude.** Don't beg, plead or cry. No arguments, questions or discussions either.
- ▶ **Respond assertively.** Speak as little as possible and keep your tone of voice firm, reassuring and conversational. Reinforce what you say by nodding your head when you say "yes" and shaking it when you say "no." Deep breathing will keep your voice firm and help control fear and panic.
- ▶ **Verbalize your cooperation.** Use assertive sentences that focus on behavior (*"I'm going to give you my money; you don't have to hurt me"*).
- ▶ **Keep gestures to a minimum.** Don't make any sudden, jerky movements. Keep hands visible at all times. "Talk" the robber through each movement you make (*"I'm taking my left hand and reaching into my pocketbook ... there's a lot of stuff in here and I'm trying to find my wallet"*).
- ▶ **Be observant.** Look for signs of drugs, alcohol, or crazy behavior. Confrontations with a person in any of these states are unpredictable, no matter how cooperative you are.
- ▶ **Use your wits.** Don't tell a mugger you have no money. Stall for time with fast-talk or bargaining until you can attract attention or create an opportunity to escape.
- ▶ **Plan ahead.** Carry a small amount of "mugger money" that can be handed over quickly. Keep larger amounts hidden elsewhere on your person.