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ix months pregnant, Amelia Brown* was walking along a street in the financial district of a major city, lost in maternal daydreams. It was Saturday; the street was quiet. A man grabbed her by the arm, said, "F--- me, bitch," and pulled her toward an alley.

Brown struck him in the face. It sent him backward. She stepped toward him and jabbed him in the stomach with her elbow. He doubled over. She grabbed him by the hair, yanked his head down and brought her knee up as if to smash him in the jaw, but stopped short, as if to say, "See what I can do?"

He fell on the sidewalk. Waving her finger in his face, she yelled,

"Don't you ever, ever do that again."

"My next thought was, I can't miss my train," she recalls. "I was going to see my obstetrician, and it was difficult to get appointments. So I just left him there."

Let him rape you, we grew up believing. If you fight back, you might get hurt. As girls, we didn't question the voices of authority in our minds that perpetuated this bogus myth. We continued to submit to rape—and many other forms of abuse. But as women, we have decided that this "advice" is ridiculous. Since when can a woman be raped without being hurt? And studies have shown that women who resist an attack are less likely to get raped than women who don't resist.

So we've started to fight back.

By Mariah Burton Nelson

WOMEN

WE ALL HOPE FOR A

SAFER, MORE PEACEFUL

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PROTECT YOURSELF.

FIGHT

Back

WOMEN FIGHT BACK

Through martial arts and self-defense training, women are discovering their physical power, but it's not Clint Eastwood's "make-my-day" variety. "If you come here to learn how to beat somebody up, you're in the wrong place," says Olympic gold medalist and four-time tae kwon do world champion Lynnette A. Love, a fourth-degree black belt who co-owns the National Institute of Taekwondo and Fitness in Temple Hills, Maryland. "We have five tenets: courtesy, integrity, self-control, perseverance and indomitable spirit. If you learn how to kick and punch and don't learn when to, you haven't learned the most important half of the art."

Get Physical

We weren't raised to fight. As girls, we weren't taught how to scream, run, hit or kick—in short, how to take care of ourselves. It's remarkable: Girls who live near the water are taught to swim, and girls who drive cars are taught to steer and brake. But in this world where verbal, physical and sexual assaults are commonplace, girls are not taught how to resist attacks. "Don't take candy from strangers," they warned us in school. Big help. About 40 percent of rapists, it turns out, are acquaintances.

Discouraged from sports training and fighting skills, many women became physically retarded, literally slowed or delayed

in their physical development and its expression. In our culture, it has been taboo for women to be strong and to physically exert their strength. "I've taught black women, Hispanic women and white women," says karate black belt Susan Erickson. "What they have in common is they have no sense of their physical power."

Girls learn that female strength is unattractive to men, and that being attractive to men is paramount. "There are young girls who could be a lot better at tae kwon do than they are, but they're afraid of what the boys will think," Love laments.

"Most women would rather be hurt than hurt someone else," adds Erickson, 38, a fitness specialist who has taught self-defense in the Washington, D.C., area for five years. Many men "rape-test" potential victims beforehand, Erickson says. For example: "If a man in the supermarket repeatedly bangs you in the heels with his shopping cart, and you act timid, he may try and get you in the parking lot. But if you say, 'Stop it! I don't like what you're doing,' he'll back off. Yet most women are too embarrassed to say anything. Sometimes they even apologize."

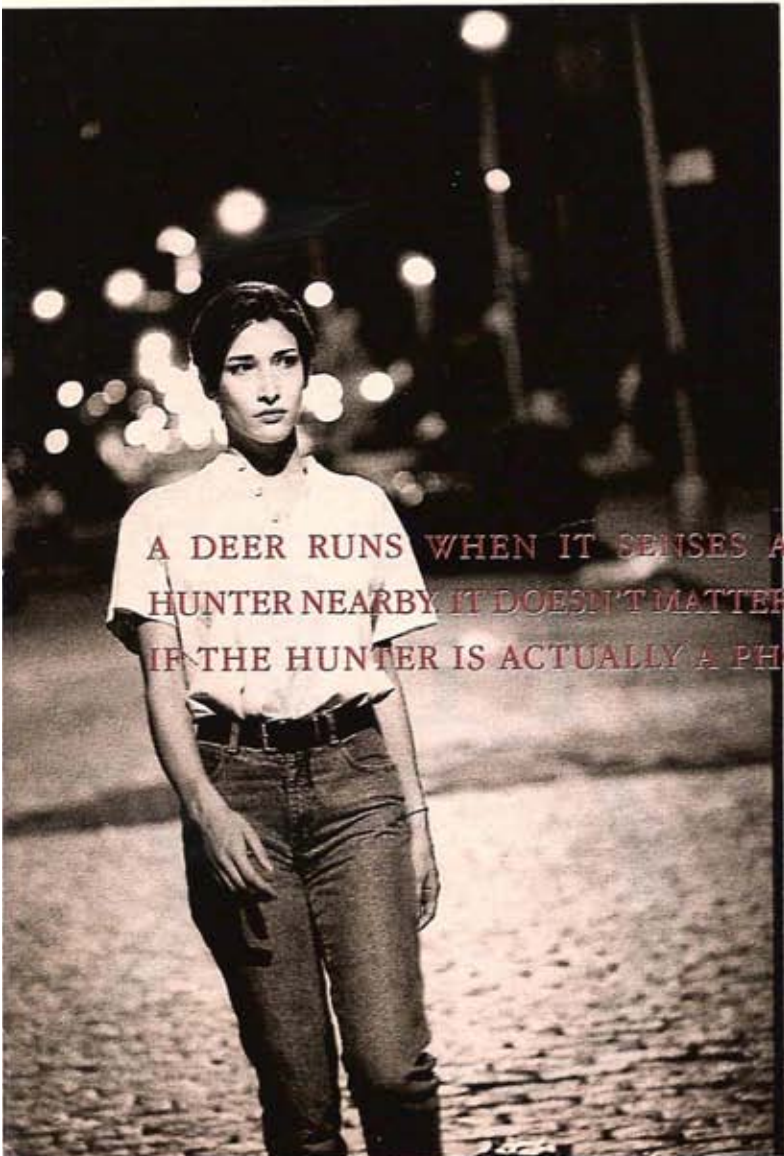
The Wake-up Call

There comes a point in our lives when we say something's terribly wrong here. For Amelia Brown, a legal secretary, the wake-up call came one morning in 1987, when her husband's brother burst into her bedroom and raped her. For weeks afterward she was debilitated by fear, unable to stay home alone, answer the door or even answer the phone. At the suggestion of a friend, she began to study with and eventually to teach at a by-women and for-women self-defense program called Chimera. That prepared her for the attack, four years later, by the man on the street.

Pam McDonnell's wake-up call was sounded during a robbery. Riding in a New York subway car with just two other people, one male and one female, McDonnell watched the man rob the woman of her jewelry. Afraid she would be next, McDonnell shrank in her seat, feeling powerless to do anything but hide. When the woman got off the train, the man followed.

"I can watch him rob her, but I can't watch him assault her," McDonnell thought, so she exited, too, and ran to some maintenance men for help. The thief jumped back on the train.

"It was one of those 'Ah-ha' moments," says the 5-foot-2-inch McDonnell, now a 44-year-old karate black belt who teaches self-defense at Manhattan's Karate School for Women and at the L.C. Security Consulting Group in Brooklyn. "My knees were weak, I was in



A DEER RUNS WHEN IT SENSES A HUNTER NEARBY. IT DOESN'T MATTER IF THE HUNTER IS ACTUALLY A PHOTOGRAPHER. THE DEER RUNS AWAY. IT DOESN'T FEEL SILLY. AND IT DOESN'T WORRY ABOUT HURTING THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S FEELINGS.

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*Amelia Brown is a pseudonym, and some of the facts of her life have been changed to protect her identity.

SHAPE

Three out of four women will be victims of at least one violent crime during their lifetimes. The best way to survive an attack is to avoid it in the first place. Sometimes it's just the bad luck of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Sometimes it's a matter of appearing to be an easy target.

Nonetheless, you can protect yourself. Attitude, body language and awareness can be just as important as knowing how to perform self-defense moves to get out of a dangerous situation.

First rule: Don't be timid. "Attackers select people who look vulnerable," says Anita Bendickson, who, along with her partner Mary Brandl, conducts self-defense workshops for companies, community groups and universities. Simply projecting a confident image—keeping your head up as you walk, being aware of your surroundings and making sure you don't look lost—can significantly cut your risk of even being approached.

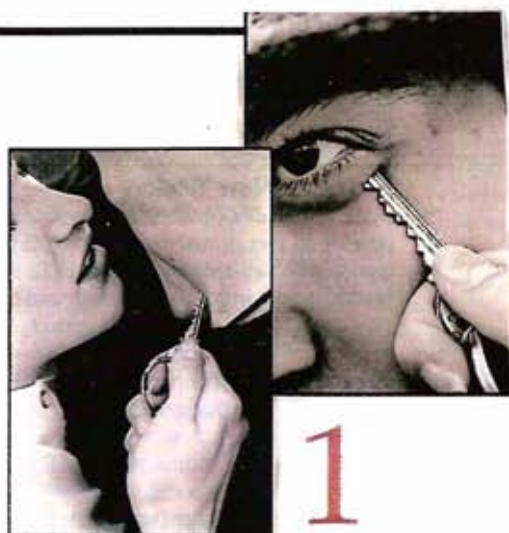
Susan Bartelstone, a Manhattan self-

period of time. For self-defense tactics to be effective, on the other hand, classes can be short term and a person does not have to be physically fit. Most self-defense courses last from two to 30 hours and teach participants how to prevent an attack as well as how to handle one.

Training can be an invaluable asset if you are confronted on the street. A person who has practiced self-defense techniques may be less likely to freeze up under pressure. "When you have training, there's a [better] chance that you will do the right thing," says Bartelstone. "Training makes you more likely to respond."

The moves shown on these pages are simple and easy for people of any fitness level to perform. However, some general guidelines are offered by the experts:

Yell, don't scream. Yelling makes a stronger, more powerful sound. Commands such as "No!" "Stop!" "Call 911!" or "Leave me alone!" will not only attract attention, but will also let the attacker know that you mean business. Yelling also makes you angry, a key factor in creating the fighting mentality you need.



Keys: Walk with one key held between your thumb and first finger and the rest of your keys gripped firmly in your hand. Use the single key to strike at the eyeball or a soft spot on the attacker's body, such as his windpipe or groin. The windpipe is one of your best options because even if the attacker moves his head, his throat will remain in the same position. Try tapping your own windpipe and you'll see how little pressure you need to cause a reaction.

STREET SMART: FOUR MOV

protection specialist, suggests maintaining a "driving state" at all times. When you drive, you are constantly aware of your surroundings—checking mirrors, looking to your sides and behind you. Bartelstone says this awareness should be carried over into other daily activities, including walking.

According to statistics from the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women, 1,872 women are raped each day in the United States. And studies show that, of women who have been assaulted, nearly 75 percent who did something to protect themselves—fight, run, talk, yell—escaped or reduced injury. This means that women need to prepare mentally and physically to handle any situation that could place them in danger. Often it isn't just a question of getting away but of minimizing your risk of getting hurt. A 1992 survey of rape victims found that 49 percent of them said they were "fearful of serious injury or death during the rape."

Self Defense vs. Martial Arts

Studying martial arts focuses on mastering physical techniques over an extended

Make sure you intend to hurt your attacker. "Fighting means you intend to stop that person no matter what you have to do," Bartelstone says.

Aim for vulnerable targets. Look for anything you can use as a weapon, such as hair spray, an umbrella, keys or a pencil, and jam it into the attacker's eyes, ears or throat. Other vulnerable areas are the groin, knees and shins.

Trust your instincts. If you are uncomfortable or feel a situation is dangerous, get out of there. "The critical distance for an attacker is handshake distance," says Bendickson. If you think someone could be dangerous, don't let him get that close.

Above all, if the attacker has a weapon, use your brain as a defense. The only safe response to an assailant with a weapon is a verbal response. Try to diffuse the situation through negotiation. Remember that you should respond to each situation in a way that makes you feel safe, and sometimes a bad situation cannot be avoided. "Even if you submit to a rape," Bartelstone stresses, "it does not mean you consented to it."

—Robin L. Heinz

Here are some things you can do to protect yourself even if you have no formal self-defense training. Although these moves can be effective if done properly, it is important to remember that nothing is foolproof; if you are in a dangerous situation, your first priority is to *run away* as soon as you can.



2

Knee to the groin: This move takes a little more planning than the first one, but is still easy and effective. Facing the attacker, grab his arms or hips for balance and pull him close toward you. Slightly bend your supporting leg and bring your other leg under him, between his legs, and hit the groin area full force with your knee. Think of using your hip to drive your knee into the target. Coming from underneath is more painful than hitting the area from the front. And don't use your foot—it's too easy to grab.



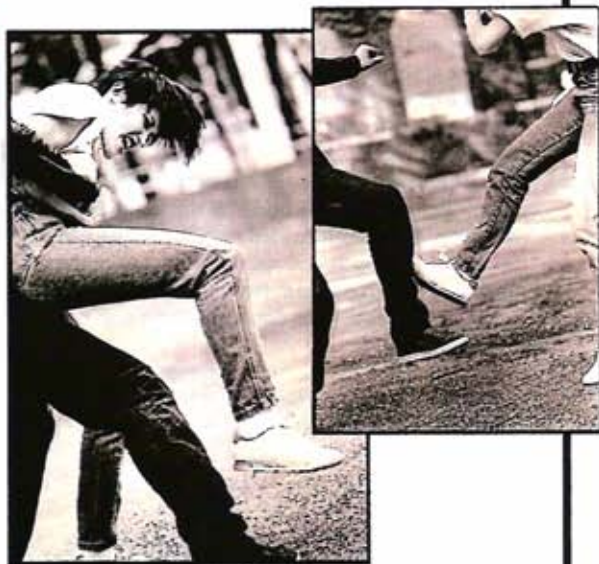
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Pinching: Yes, pinching. This is very effective if the assailant grabs you from behind, but also works if he is in front of you. Megan Reisel, a fourth-degree black belt and instructor at Safe and Alive in Los Angeles, says to reach back (or forward) with both hands if you can, and grab a small portion of the attacker's upper or inner thigh. Pinch the skin as quickly and as hard as you can. Use your fingernails and pinch tiny bits of flesh; the sensation is almost like little electrical shocks. This will give you enough distance and reaction time to kick him and get away.

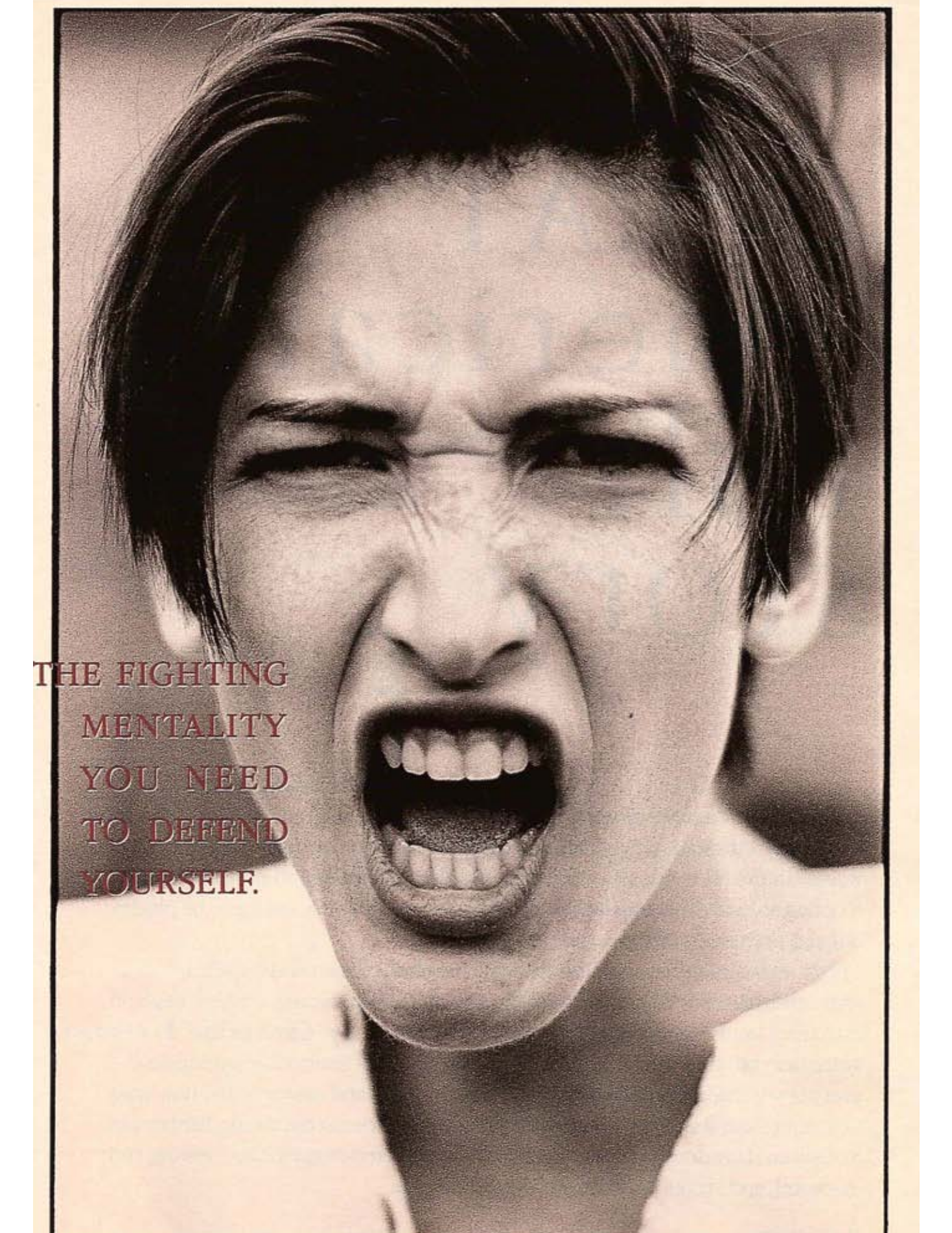
ES THAT CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE

4

Stomping and kicking: Like pinching, this can be done with the attacker in front of or behind you. Slightly bending your supporting leg, lift your other foot and stomp down on the attacker's instep as hard as you can. Bartelstone says the bones in this area of the foot, where the shoelaces are, are the most fragile and easiest to break. This move will give you a chance to get away and find help. You can also kick the assailant in the knees or shins.



If you haven't been able to stop the attacker after three or four moves, Bartelstone suggests that you drop to the ground while pulling your knees in, keeping your legs between you and the assailant and your head tucked into your shoulders (to avoid head injury). Lean on your buttocks and lower back, using your arms for support, and kick as hard as you can into the assailant's knees, shins or feet. Be sure to kick low so that he can't grab at your legs. However, if he bends over, go for the face. This should enable you to hurt him and get away.



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