

To Educate and Empower



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To Educate and Empower

I am a teacher, but not the kind you think of in a traditional school setting. My high school career counselor once told me I would make a great teacher because I was well organized, listened very well and could communicate what I read. No! That was not what I envisioned for myself after graduation.

Throughout my childhood I was “the shy kid”. I managed to make it through high school without ever standing before a class to give a report. I always seemed to come down with the flu, a cold, or some mysterious illness to convince my mother I needed to stay home; coincidentally on the very day I was to give an oral presentation. I would receive a lesser grade for turning in a written report, but I was alright with that. Why? Because I was petrified to stand and speak in front of students who tormented, teased, and bullied me for years. So the very thought of being a teacher was a terrifying image, and one I dismissed completely.

Skip ahead 3 years: I was married and had a son. My husband at first was a caring and gentle person. Yes, he was somewhat controlling and stubborn, and looking back I did not realize how reclusive we had become with my family or friends, after only 6 months of marriage.

1 out of every 4 women will experience a violent partner at some point in their life. (www.domesticshelters.org)

Most women do not choose an abusive partner. In the 80's no one talked about domestic violence or spousal abuse. There was no legal recourse and it only became an issue in the court system after the 1990s.

Here I was with a baby, a husband who was excessively jealous and living in a household where the money was handled only by my spouse. I was only 20 years old.

Domestic Violence is the leading cause of injury to women ages 15 to 45, higher than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined. (www.epsilonsigmaalpha.org)

Verbal belittling and emotional and physical abuse soon became my daily life. I felt ashamed and somehow responsible; asking myself repeatedly what I had done to make him this way. I hid my bruises, lied about the scars, and was told to “fix the problem” because divorce was not an

option in my family. I would discover much later my mother had experienced the same abuse in her first marriage, and that shame was hidden by her mother; my grandmother had given the same advice to my mother that she had given to me.

When the abuser is the money earner in the family, restrictions on finances keep many victims from leaving. Also the threats of violence directed toward children if the spouse attempts to leave is a cause for many to stay out of fear. (www.domesticshelters.org)

It wasn't until the life of my child was endangered, did I find the strength to break free and report the abuse to authorities. In 1984 my only legal recourse was a restraining order. I was divorced the following year, and six months later moved out of state for my safety and the protection of my child.

According to the Partnership Against Domestic Violence, every 9 seconds, a woman in the United States is beaten by her partner. Their first domestic violence experience usually happens between the ages of 18 to 24.

I had become a statistic!

Fast forward to the present; I am happily remarried, a mother of 4, and grandmother of 6. I overcame my shyness and fear of speaking in public to become a Women's Self Defense Instructor. I began taking martial arts classes at the late age of 42, and throughout the course of my training learned that not only did I have a voice, I also had the power to help others.

I had found a way to educate and empower others against domestic violence!

Women's self-defense training has changed over the decades since its inception in the 1960s. Female students were instructed to only fight back against deviants and non-white attackers. Keep quiet and don't fight back was the normal coaching because "you will be hurt less if you don't resist". This was also my experience in a workshop I took in the 1990s. This training helped jump start conversations amongst women about real threats, such as husband and intimate partner violence. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports an average of 20 people per minute in the United States are physically abused by their partner. In one year that

equals over 10 million women and men. Nationally over 20,000 phone calls to domestic violence hotlines are received on a daily basis, yet less than 35% of those injured seek out medical attention.

Here we are in the 21st century, and attacks on women have grown from just Domestic Violence to now include Bullying, Rape, Stalking, and Cyber Attacks.

According to the Center for Disease Control, In the United States over 19 million women and 5 million men have been the victims of stalking.

What many people do not realize is how violence impacts everything around them. The World Health Organization reported the economic impact can equate to over 8 million days of lost wages for victims of domestic violence. There are physical and mental ramifications to consider as well. Women who have been abused are more likely to suffer from depression and suicidal thoughts, experience an increase in unhealthy behaviors and many suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The affects can last a lifetime and span generations.

Domestic Violence affects everyone, regardless of age, economic status, gender, race, or religion. Next time you are sitting in a group of women, look around the room. Whether it is an organization meeting, church services, or a social event – in a group of 20 women, statistically 5 of them have been the victim of a violent attack. Was it your friend, your co-worker, or perhaps a family member?

In 2017 I started Empower Kansas. Through monthly educational workshops, I offer hands-on classes for women to learn simple techniques for personal protection. One of the most poignant comments I hear from many women who chose not to participate is that “I don’t feel threatened in my small, rural community!” Yet in my home state of Kansas in 2013, 25% of Kansas homicides were the result of domestic violence. In 2016, those numbers had not changed. 69% of attackers were either a spouse or ex-partner; however the statistic that stands out the most for me is in almost 73% of attacks on women – the weapon used was a hand, fist or foot; not a gun or a knife. (www.kscourts.org) and this is the biggest reason why I teach self-defense. I have also begun offering Warrior Workshops through *Damsel in Defense*, with the mission to Educate,

Equip and Empower women about the need for self-protection.

One Domestic Violence Incident happens every 22 Minutes

One Domestic Violence Murder happens every 19 Days.

The news is inundated with stories about athletes beating their wives, celebrities abusing their girlfriends, and yet the problem doesn't seem to go away.

My job as a teacher has never been more important!

Self-defense training works! A research study done by Model Mugging surveyed 60,000 female students and discovered that after receiving self-defense training over 98% of the students were able to avoid assaults altogether. An amazing 80% were able to use only their voices and body language to deter an assault.

Having unarmed skills is your first line of defense. Many women travel and weapons are not always allowed in places like federal buildings or on air planes. Many victims are young college women, who are not allowed to carry a weapon on campus. Even our military train in unarmed close-quarter combat.

Effective self-defense training is not about just kicking and punching; it begins with Situational Awareness. If you can see a situation that looks unsafe, and can avoid it and escape, then you have won. Many are not physically able to fend off an attacker, so for them awareness is crucial. Good training also changes your body language. Confidence becomes a positive side effect, and to a would-be attacker makes you look like a less appealing target.

As a teacher and public speaker, I can attest to the positive side effects I have achieved through self-defense training. As a 54 year woman, I am beginning to feel the effects of aging. It takes longer to get up off the floor, my reflexes are slowing, and I am not much of a runner. For me, being able to survey a scene and knowing how to increase my chances of survival from a potential attacker means everything. Being able to teach those skills to others has been life

changing. I am looking forward to someday soon teaching my two young granddaughters self-defense.

As a teacher, I would like to offer a few basic safety tips:

1. **Be Aware of Your Surroundings:** Make it a habit to know what's going on around you. When you walk in a room, or when you leave a building, take a moment to look around.
2. **Get Off Your Phone:** Is that phone call or text message more important than your life?
3. **Lock the Door Behind You:** Make it an absolute rule of thumb whenever you get into your car to lock the door immediately. And when unlocking your vehicle, only unlock the side you enter not all the doors at one time.
4. **Don't Be Afraid to Speak Up:** If you see something that looks suspicious, say something!
5. **Trust Your Instincts:** If you feel something is out of the ordinary, it probably is. If you sense a place is unsafe, leave.

I am worth defending and so are you!