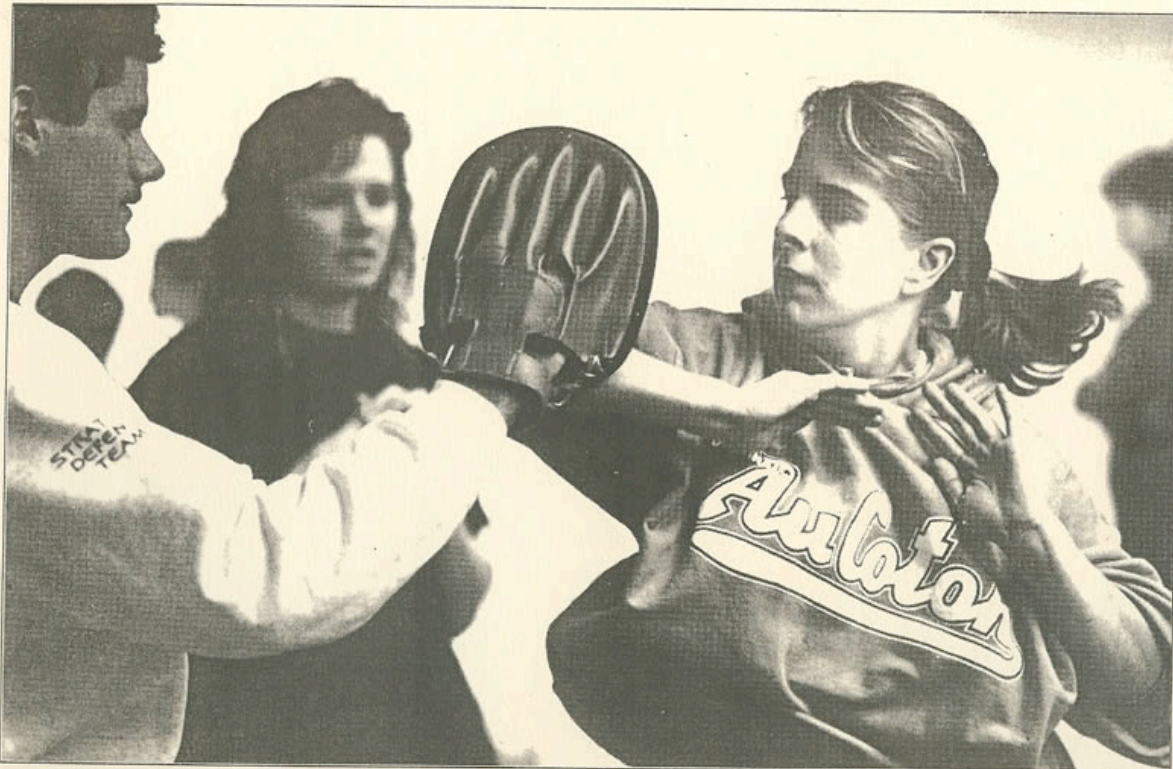


FEATURE

A LOOK AT PEOPLE AND PLACES

Kelly Sinoski
Staff Reporter



Now reporter Kelly Sinoski practices a new skill, using her elbow to administer a blow to the head of an attacker. Self-defence courses are making their mark as more programs are being designed especially for women. LEAH S. BRIGGS/NOW

Kicking butt

Self-defence courses teach women how to deal with potentially dangerous situations. Reporter Kelly Sinoski checked out a local program.

I came, I saw, I kicked butt.

At least that's how I felt after a five-hour lesson in women's self-defence at Surrey Fitness World. Six of us gathered that morning to learn knee-jerks and eye gouges, designed to help us survive a possible attack by a rapist, mugger or murderer.

We were a mixed bunch — young and old, timid and aggressive — but we had one common thread: to learn to protect ourselves on dangerous city streets, in dark parking lots and even our own homes.

When asked what had brought us to the seminar, three women answered: "I live in Surrey."

That's good enough for me, considering I came because my mother told me to.

One of the women, Amber Cole, 19, had ample reason for a self-defence course. She often works late at Guildford Park Mall and has encountered taunts and jeers from men she's met on the job and on her way home.

"You get guys who are ruthless and have no fear," she says as she waits for the course to start. "It doesn't matter where you are now. I don't like being afraid. If there's some way I can stand up for myself, it kind of takes away the feeling you're alone."

Cole's ambition — and that of other women like her — is what spawned the Confrontation Management Systems (CMS), a year-old project designed by

martial arts master Andrew Netschay to teach conflict management and women's self-defence.

Netschay, a 10-year veteran of traditional martial arts, says seeing women leave his course stronger and more confident is what keeps him offering seminars on hits and holds. He teaches women to be "response-able," with emphasis on awareness skills, verbal self-defence, street-proofing and fear control.

"I don't have any grand goals to empower everyone on the planet, but if I can get rid of the victims, the predators will have less to prey on," says Netschay, 24. "It's a matter of education. It's not about jumping up, spitting or hooking someone in the face, and it's not about hitting boards. It's about self-esteem and realizing you're worth fighting for."

Netschay's seminar started off with a theory lesson on how women can prepare themselves for trouble both verbally and physically. Then he taught the nitty-gritty stuff — the good stuff — like self-defence techniques and ways to break holds.

That's when I really let my aggression out. Hey, this is fun, I thought, as I pounded, kneed and headed the pads, pretending they were a real person. Fellow student Jan Chisholm, of Coquitlam, agreed. "I feel like I have some way to direct my energy now if I feel threatened," she says.

It was easy for us. But Netschay contemplates why some women don't fight. "Women are taught that as women they're too small, too powerless. But all these beliefs of stature and strength are wrong. Any confrontation has the same element. Predator and prey both decide their fate at the same instant."

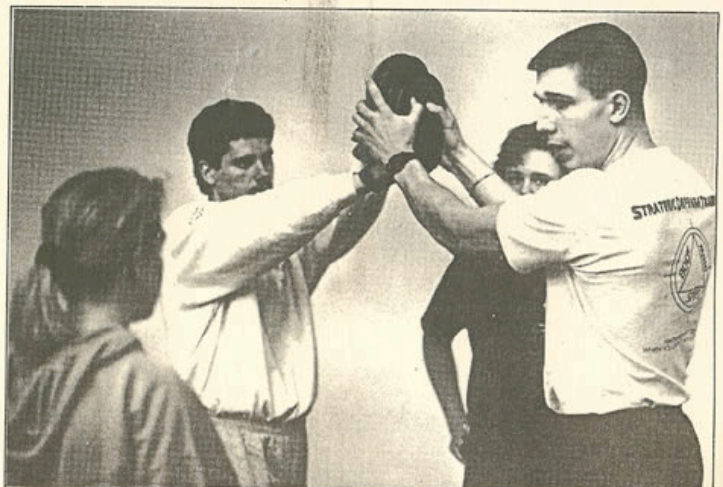
Netschay has seen a lot of women come through his self-defence seminars. Sometimes he later hears how they survived a date rape or gang violence — thanks in part to skills they

mastered from his seminars.

Yet despite the success, he doesn't want women to get too cocky or self-assured when they're walking the streets at night.

"It can happen in Stanley Park, it can happen in North Vancouver or West Vancouver. That's not a reason to increase our paranoia but to increase our awareness," he says.

"We're all going to be afraid. Fear exists. We need it, it's a fuel. It's up to us to channel it."



Instructor Andrew Netschay demonstrates the finer points of eye gouging technique as a means of warding off a would-be attacker. LEAH S. BRIGGS/NOW