

NOT-ME!

*Self-Defense and the Martial Arts
For and by People with SCI/D*

Written and Compiled by Erik P. Kondo

PRAISE FOR NOT-ME!



MUFFY DAVIS

Four-time Paralympic Medalist/Motivational Speaker

“I never want to feel vulnerable or an easy target. Thanks to Not-Me! I don’t! Erik’s easy to understand and implement information has enabled me to travel the world with confidence, knowing I can defend myself. It’s a must read for anyone wanting to learn how to protect themselves.”

TEAL SHERER
Actress/Producer

“Living alone in Los Angeles can sometimes be a little scary. NOT-ME! has given me the confidence and tools I need to keep myself safe. Everyone, whether they are disabled or not, should read this book.”



DAVID ESTRADA

Director Boston Chapter NSCIA

“I’ve known Erik for many years and I’m amazed at his dedication to teaching people about self defense. Like a spinal cord injury, no one ever expects to be a victim of a violent crime and this book helps prepare individuals to deal with that “what if” situation.”

NOT-ME!
SELF-DEFENSE AND THE MARTIAL ARTS
FOR AND BY PEOPLE WITH SCI/D

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A special thanks to the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation for providing a grant
for the production and distribution of this book

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THE BOOK WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GRANT FROM THE CRAIG H. NEILSEN FOUNDATION

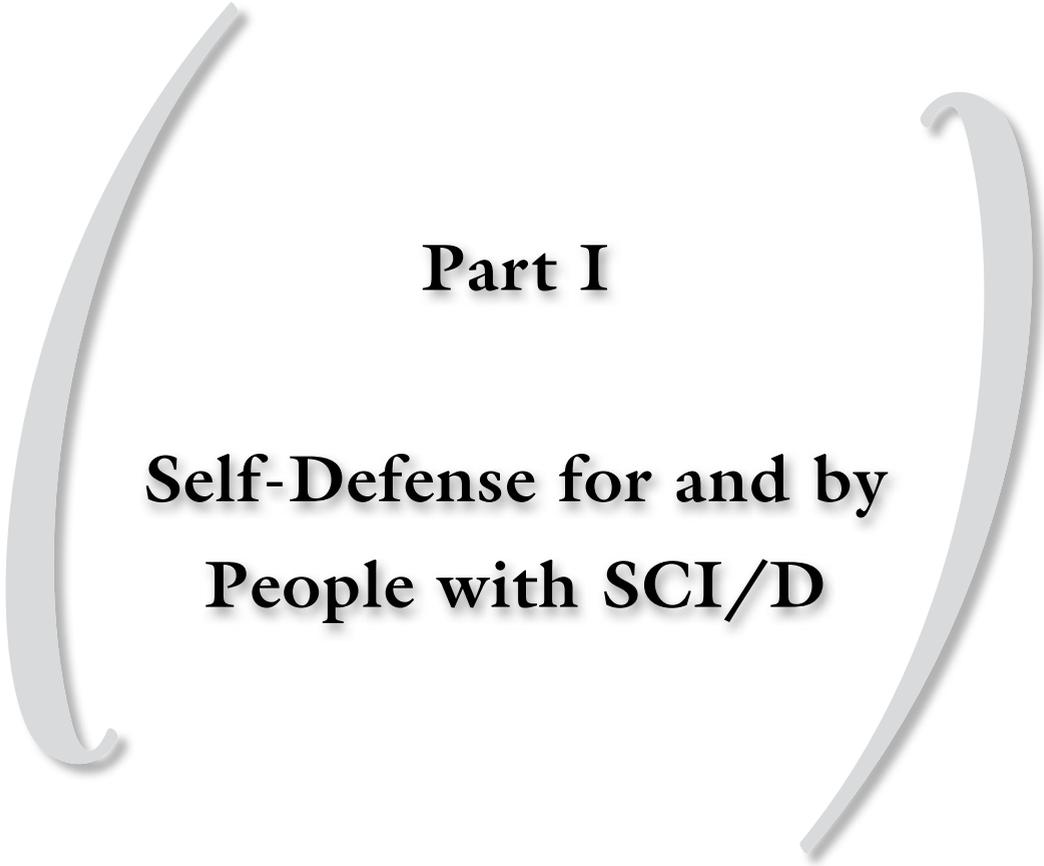
ABOUT THE CRAIG H. NEILSEN FOUNDATION:

Established in 2002, the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation is a private foundation dedicated to supporting cutting-edge research to find a cure for paralysis due to spinal cord injury (SCI) and innovative rehabilitation programs to improve the quality of life for those living with SCI. Mr. Neilsen, himself a quadriplegic for 21 years until his death in 2006, recruited experts in the SCI community to peer review all grants requests for scientific and clinical research, post-doctoral fellowships and quality of life program grants. In addition to other charitable distributions, the Foundation currently funds \$5 million annually in scientific research grants and \$1.5 million annually in quality-of-life programmatic grants which are disbursed throughout the United States and Canada.

Visit The Craig H. Neilsen Foundation’s web site at www.chnfoundation.org.

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Part I

Self-Defense for and by People with SCI/D

According to a recent government study, people with disabilities are 50% more likely to be victims of violent crimes than are people without disabilities...

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE 5D'S OF SELF-DEFENSE

On the surface this book is about self-defense for people with SCI/D. But the concepts of self-defense are the same regardless of whether the person involved is male, female, young, old, or has a disability.

The similarity arises because the goal of self-defense is to minimize the negative consequences of unwanted aggression and to provide peace of mind. The most effective means is to deter the onset of aggression in the first place.

“The goal of self-defense is to minimize the negative consequences of unwanted aggression.”

DECIDE

DETER

DISRUPT

DISENGAGE

DEBRIEF

DETER and prevent an act of aggression.

- Learn how to de-escalate a confrontation.
- Project confidence with body language.
- Be assertive.
- Detect danger.
- Practice situational awareness.
- Respond to the warnings of intuition.
- Create safety zones.
- Utilize boundary setting.
- Deceive when necessary.
- Build readiness.

If the aggression cannot be deterred then it is best to disengage and get away as soon as possible.

DECIDE
DETER
DISRUPT
DISENGAGE
DEBRIEF

DISENGAGE and get away from the aggressor.

- *Respond to the Opportunity to Escape.*
- *Create an ending.*
- *Carry out an exit strategy.*
- *Cause the aggressor to break off his actions.*
- *Evade and escape.*
- *Terminate the aggressor's ability to engage and cause harm.*
- *Don't corner the aggressor.*

All of these actions require preparation and the conscious effort to decide not to be a victim.

DECIDE
DETER
DISRUPT
DISENGAGE
DEBRIEF

DECIDE not to be a victim.

- *Use preparation and planning prior to an act of aggression.*
- *Train to respond to all forms of aggression.*
- *Practice avoidance and risk reduction.*
- *Acknowledge the existence of risk.*
- *Make and follow a safety plan.*
- *Take a self-defense class.*

But in order to create the opportunity to disengage, the aggressor must be disrupted and the aggression interrupted.

DECIDE
DETER
DISRUPT
DISENGAGE
DEBRIEF

DISRUPT the aggressor.

- *Respond to the Trigger to Act.*
- *Foil his or her plans.*
- *Apply verbal and/or physical techniques to disrupt the attacker.*
- *Use tactics such as the employment of weapons of opportunity.*
- *Execute a decisive strategy.*
- *Attack the attacker.*
- *Utilize any means available.*
- *Create the Opportunity to Escape.*

Finally, making the effort to debrief and discuss what has happened will help to reduce the long term after-effects and consequences of aggression.

DECIDE
DETER
DISRUPT
DISENGAGE
DEBRIEF

DEBRIEF and discuss the consequences of aggression.

- *Preserve evidence.*
- *Reduce the after-effects.*
- *Promote physical and emotional healing.*
- *Go to the police.*
- *Get legal advice.*
- *Seek support and assistance.*
- *Learn reliance.*

JULES' STORY

“Eleven years ago (I had been a w/c user for five years) **I was attacked in my room** in my hall of residence at University. We always left our doors open and a fellow student got into my room and assaulted me while I was in bed. I did manage to hold him off and, although it was a horrible experience, it could have been far worse. If he hadn't been so drunk he would have been much harder to hold off (he was about 6' and 210 pounds). Also, my strength and the fact that I was sober helped me. **I screamed as loud as I could** and one of my flat mates, heard me she came in and hauled him out of my bed and landed a haymaker with her first attempt.”

“**I managed to fight him off part way through the assault** but only because he was drunk. During the assault which took place in my own bed, **he kicked my chair away from me so I couldn't get away** I did not have any weapon of any sort in my room, and couldn't have reached anything anyway, I couldn't even reach my rape alarm.”

When I communicated with Jules regarding her story, she confirmed that she was able to prevent her attacker from causing her injury because of the fact that she was physically fit and worked out regularly. Being physically fit is an important component of “hardening the target.”

It is important to note that she also used her voice to disrupt her attacker and summon help.

Although, in this particular situation, locking her door would have been the easiest method to deter her attacker.

Self-defense for everyone must be seen as a comprehensive plan of action. The actual actions executed in any self-defense situation will vary greatly depending upon the particular strengths, weaknesses, and level of motivation of the individuals involved.

Aggressors vary, both in their level of motivation to attack and in their intent to cause injury from low motivation to high motivation. Self-defense for everyone must be seen as a comprehensive plan of action. The actual actions executed in any self-defense situation will vary greatly depending upon the particular strengths, weaknesses, and level of motivation of the individuals involved.

Aggressors' motivation to attack and cause injury:

low moderate high

The majority of aggressors are not highly motivated. These aggressors may be prevented from attacking by effective use of the non-physical steps of DECIDE and DETER. Many times these aggressors may be stopped by denying the opportunity to attack and the use of assertive verbal commands. For example, the attacker who runs away after receiving an elbow to the ribs or single kick is not highly motivated.

DECIDE DETER DISRUPT DISENGAGE DEBRIEF

The majority of aggressors are not highly motivated and therefore may be deterred from attacking.

The greatest danger comes from the highly motivated attacker. This individual by definition cannot be deterred. He will not be stopped by verbal commands or singular self-defense strikes.

This type of attacker will use his superior strength and mobility to forcibly remove you from your wheelchair in order to continue the attack while you are on the ground.

The goal of the highly motivated attacker is to cause serious injury, death, or complete submission to his will.

As with all self-defense situations, the goal is to minimize the negative consequences and aftermath of violent aggression.

In the case of a highly motivated attacker, the goal is to survive the attack without sustaining permanent or serious injury. The only way to achieve this outcome is by disrupting the attacker and causing him to disengage, and then seeking to mitigate the damage as soon as possible.

DECIDE DETER **DISRUPT** **DISENGAGE** DEBRIEF



Interlock choke. Demonstration of an interlock choke from the ground.

Specifically, this will require:

- ▶ Learning how to fall without injury.
- ▶ Learning how to redirect and deflect incoming attacks from a seated position.
- ▶ Learning how to redirect and deflect incoming attacks while lying on the ground.
- ▶ Learning how to create intense pain or injure the attacker in order to convince him to disengage.
- ▶ Learning how to cause the attacker to submit or be knocked unconscious if the opportunity arises.
- ▶ Learning how to summon and attract assistance.
- ▶ Learning how to best handle the post-attack stage.

The particular methods in which these actions are accomplished depend upon the individual abilities and limitations of the target of the attack, those of the attacker, and the circumstances surrounding the attack.

As mentioned previously, all of these factors apply to any self-defense situation, regardless of whether the person attacked is male, female, young, old, or has a disability. **Therefore, there is no such thing as “handicapped” or “wheelchair” self-defense. There is only self-defense.**

SHOT IN THE LINE OF DUTY

Former Police Officer Kristina Ripatti

On Verbal Skills:

“Verbal Judo was one of the most important things we were taught at the Police Academy. We learned to de-escalate a situation verbally and to only use violence as a last resort.”

On Vulnerability:

Since her spinal cord injury, Kristina feels more vulnerable to attack but wards off potential incidents by keeping her fighting attitude and by remembering her lessons in verbal de-escalation.

On Guns:

She also carries a gun. “I have a concealed weapons permit and have re-trained myself to fire from a wheelchair; it’s much different than firing from a standing position.” She advises anyone who may also want to learn to shoot that, “it’s not a decision to be taken lightly. It’s deadly, and it’s irresponsible to carry a gun unless you’re very familiar with the weapon and how to use it.”



There are many opinions on self-defense. What constitutes self-defense is different for everyone. For the sake of discussion, I will create four basic categories of general self-defense actions.

- ▶ Actions done to protect and defend your personal possessions.
- ▶ Actions done to protect and defend your body and/or spirit.
- ▶ Actions done to protect and defend others.
- ▶ Actions done to protect and defend your ego.

Actions to protect personal possessions are not the subject of this book. Actions to protect others are beyond the scope of this book. Non-physical attacks against your ego can also be resolved by effective use of verbal self-defense. As mentioned previously, low and moderately motivated attackers can also usually be deterred by the use of assertive verbal skills. Therefore what remains are self-defense actions done to protect yourself from a highly motivated attacker(s) attempting to injure your body and/or spirit.

Actions done to protect and defend your body and/or spirit.

A highly motivated attacker will not be deterred by verbal techniques alone. He will most likely attack in a vicious and forceful manner by either dragging you forward out of your wheelchair, or knocking you over backwards. His intent will be to cause serious injury by stomping, kicking, or punching without mercy.

The first part of self-defense involves educating yourself on how criminals behave and how attacks actually occur.

IN THE NEWS: TERRIBLE TRUE EVENTS...

Excerpts from news stories where highly motivated attackers have assaulted wheelchair users:

Woman in Wheelchair Assaulted:

...he threw her to the ground and sexually assaulted her.

Man in Wheelchair Knocked Unconscious in Street Attack:

The offender then spat at the victim and they had words before the offender then punched the victim, who fell out of his wheelchair and was knocked unconscious.

Wheelchair Bound Usher Attacked at Stadium:

The attacker was charged with third-degree assault for allegedly trying to push the usher from his wheelchair.

Two Disabled Men Attacked:

...a gang of men and youths, some as young as 12, attacked two disabled men in central Blenheim, pulling one off his mobility scooter and throwing the other into the Taylor River.

Mugger Attacks Disabled Woman:

...the mugger knocked her to the ground then continued to strike her as she lay defenseless, causing her further injury...

CHAPTER 2: THE GOAL OF SELF-DEFENSE

The goal of self-defense against a highly motivated attacker is to minimize the aftermath and negative consequences of aggression. This result can only be reliably achieved by preparation in the form of a complete plan of action long before the actual incident.

- ▶ It requires making the decision to condition your mind and body to respond decisively to a physical attack.
- ▶ It requires knowing how to use deterring verbal techniques to build readiness by invoking a surge of adrenaline and a combat mindset.
- ▶ It requires knowing how to best disrupt an attacker and how to motivate him to disengage and discontinue the attack.
- ▶ It requires knowing what debriefing steps to take after an attack to immediately mitigate the damage and promote healing.

TWO SETS OF EYES

Advice From Bob Vogel

“I always keep Schatzie my German Shepherd service dog with me. I try and be aware of my surroundings, but Schatzie is VERY aware of my surroundings. It’s a lot easier to rob a guy in a chair without a German Shepherd.”



CONFRONTATION AT A CONCERT

By Erik Kondo

“I sat to the right of the disabled seating section at the crowded outdoor stadium during the Elton John concert in Atlanta. Midway into the concert, an obviously drunk man came into the disabled seating section and began arguing with a seated concert viewer who had come in earlier using forearm crutches.”

“The drunken man was becoming increasingly more belligerent and hostile as the argument progressed. It became clear to me that the man wanted to claim a seat in the disabled section for better viewing.”

After watching for a few moments, I decided to act. I transferred into my wheelchair and eyed the distance to the man. There was fifteen feet of unobstructed concrete aisle. That was just enough running room to reach maximum velocity and momentum.”

“The man never saw me coming. His body was sideways to me. I pushed him as hard as I could on his hip while moving at high speed. The man backpedaled in a vain attempt to regain his balance. But as he did so, he began to trip on the extended feet of the power wheelchair users facing the aisle. He landed flat on his back in the middle of the aisle with everyone in the entire disabled seating section laughing at him.”

“The security guard, alerted by the commotion, came over and told me to “not start anything.” It was a great moment. But it was not an incident of self-defense.”

CHAPTER 3: “HANDICAPPED” SELF-DEFENSE

Now let’s examine how self-defense is usually presented to people with disabilities. Close your eyes and visualize a training session of handicapped self-defense. Do you have visions of men and women in wheelchairs throwing their attackers to the ground, while others defend against attackers with armrests? The visually impaired expertly wielding their canes as dangerous weapons, as amputees batter attackers with their metal and plastic limbs?

This politically correct vision makes self-defense for people with disabilities appear to be simply a matter of adapting able-bodied physical self-defense techniques to account for the disabilities. As appealing as this idea may sound, it has significant flaws.

The first problem is that self-defense is commonly confused with physical altercations that are based around the defense of the participants’ egos. In these situations, the combatants are generally not highly motivated attackers. They are willing participants in the engagement.

These are the situations that provide for great “fight stories.” He did this, I did that, next I did that, and then he did this. The stories—more often than not—have a happy ending of how the underdog defeats the aggressor.

For anyone at a significant physical disadvantage to an attacker, self-defense must be about maximizing the mental and emotional components (and minimizing the physical component) of self-defense.

In addition, for physical techniques to be effective, they must be powered by raw emotion and executed with a focused primal mindset.

A physical disadvantage is any circumstance where relative to your attacker, you have less physical ability. Other than having a physical disability, you could be smaller, slower, weaker, much older, or much younger than your attacker. The use of a weapon by the attacker puts you at a physical disadvantage. Having more than one attacker also puts you at a physical disadvantage.

RETIRED BUT READY

Former Police Officer Kris Gulden

Kris Gulden received a T4 spinal cord injury in a bicycle accident in 1998.

On Strategy: “A couple of days ago I called an appliance repair service, and two guys showed up when it was close to dark. Their van had no company name on it, they weren’t wearing uniforms and they didn’t look like the nicest people. My dog started barking at them, and even though she is very friendly, I didn’t quiet her and didn’t let the men know that she’s harmless.

People often mistake me for a man, but when the repairmen called me ‘sir’ I didn’t correct them. Then, when referring to the house, I said ‘we moved in’ instead of ‘I moved in,’ even though I live alone. Was I being paranoid? I don’t know. But I do feel vulnerable.”

On Tactics: “I learned self defense at the police academy, where they taught me to use the least amount of force possible. It’s better to talk your way out of something than to use mace, and better to use mace than a gun. People need to be smart and aware, to look at where people’s hands are and to avoid risky situations.”

On Preparation: “People with spinal cord injuries need to be even more aware and to use the common sense taught to children that many adults cast aside. For example, you should tell people where you are, you shouldn’t go some place unfamiliar alone, you should have a full tank of gas and a working vehicle at all times, and you should carry a cell phone and make sure the battery is charged.”

On Guns: “Don’t carry a gun. A gun is the last thing you want. It’s more likely to be used against you than to help. I’m trained in firearms and I don’t carry one.”

CHAPTER 4: A DETAILED LOOK AT THE 5D’S OF SELF-DEFENSE

Self-defense can be understood as a complete strategy that takes into consideration all aspects of human aggression and methods of defense. This strategy entails dividing the spectrum of self-defense into five time-distinct stages. When these stages are converted into individual steps, the self-defense strategy is created. This strategy highlights the aspects of self-defense that utilize preparation and prevention. It also stresses the need to minimize physical techniques due to any physical advantage of the attacker. Most importantly, it is a plan of action.

Here are the five steps:

DECIDE is the preparation step. It is the foundation of self-defense.

DECIDE not to be a victim. Use preparation and planning prior to an act of aggression. Learn about criminal behavior. Train to respond to all forms of aggression. Practice avoidance and risk reduction. Acknowledge the existence of risk. Make and follow a safety plan. Take a self-defense class.

DETER is the prevention step. It begins when you leave an area of safety and continues until the moment of the actions of **DISRUPT**. It involves repelling all potential aggressors and building your readiness for a physical assault.

DETER and prevent an act of aggression. Learn how to de-escalate a confrontation. Project confidence with body language. Be assertive. Detect danger. Practice situational awareness. Respond to the warnings of intuition. Create safety zones. Utilize boundary setting. Deceive when necessary. Build readiness. Diffuse confrontations.

MEET MICHELLE, Ms. WHEELCHAIR AMERICA 2009

As Ms. Wheelchair America 2009, Michelle traveled alone frequently. But due to her ability to utilize her awareness skills, strong body language and boundary setting, she has not encountered a situation requiring physical self-defense. Here's Michelle story:

One recent morning I parked my car in my assigned parking spot at work. While unloading my wheelchair out of my car, I noticed a figure approaching me. We made eye contact, and after briefly glimpsing his disheveled appearance and realizing that we were the only two individuals in the parking lot, my instincts told me that I didn't want to wait around to see if he intended to speak to me.

I decided to employ a tactic that I've used on other occasions when I've felt physically vulnerable. I banged my chair on the ground, slammed the car door, and cursed to myself as I did so. As I rolled myself to my office building, I made sure to sit up straight and hold my head up high, while pretending to be angry about something and in more of a hurry than I actually was. I tried to make myself appear unapproachable. He didn't follow me. When I got to my office, I immersed myself in a busy day and forgot about the incident.

That evening, I got into my car and drove myself to the gym for my daily workout. It wasn't until I reached my destination that I noticed the folded-up piece of paper crammed in the side-view mirror. I opened the paper. It was covered in red ink with psychotic scribbles, containing



various messages about blood, "Cain and Abel," curses, a "spirit-walker", as well as various religious rantings. At the bottom, it read, "signed, Homeless Tribal Leader." It would have been humorous, had it not obviously been the work of a person suffering from schizophrenia.

I turned the note sideways, and it stated, "I'll be back tomorrow at noon." At first, I thought, "Well, that's a little creepy..." but I didn't plan to hang around to wait for the note-writer. Then, I remembered that I would be leaving work the next day to give a presentation, and that I would be returning precisely at noon. I filed a police report and showed the letter to the officers. They said that they would survey the parking lot, and suggested that I call them for an escort each time I went to or from my car (which I did).

As I was on my way to the gym again after work, I passed by a new Taekwondo studio that had just opened up. Even though I still felt a little vulnerable, I remembered how the martial arts and self-defense training that I had taken as a teenager had made me feel incredibly confident and capable.

I decided to join and I have been a member of the American Taekwondo Association for three months now, and just passed my yellow-belt testing this morning. I hope that I never have to use the physical training in a real-life scenario—but I feel more confident knowing that I'm not defenseless.

In the previous story, Michelle applied the DETER concept of self-defense. She clearly understands the importance of communicating to potential attackers that she is not a victim. She did this by listening to her intuition when she detected a possible dangerous situation. Michelle made a deliberate effort to project a strong "do not mess with me" demeanor with her actions.

DISRUPT is the violent and most physical step of self-defense. Its sole purpose is to create the Opportunity to Escape. It begins with the Trigger to Act and involves the concept of attacking the attacker to surprise, shock, or cause injury to your attacker.

DISENGAGE is the immediate goal of self-defense. It involves your complete commitment to get away from your attacker. Alternatively, it is the sum of your actions that has caused your aggressor to discontinue the attack by his own choice.

DISENGAGE and get away from the aggressor. Respond to the Opportunity to Escape. Create an ending. Carry out an exit strategy. Cause the aggressor to break off his actions. Evade and escape. Terminate the aggressor's ability to engage and cause harm. Don't corner the aggressor. Flee to safety. Get out of there.

All of the four steps may be further defined by the emotions and mindset that accompany each step of the strategy.

The strategy provides a plan of action for self-defense. This plan begins by emphasizing the non-physical aspects of self-defense, DECIDE and DETER. DETER will also enable the execution of DISRUPT by building physical and mental readiness. DISRUPT must be maximized by raw emotion. It is like an explosion. An explosion could be the pop of a fire cracker, or it could be the roar of a stick of dynamite. The amount of emotion determines the size of the explosion. DISENGAGE exploits the opportunity to escape created by DISRUPT. It is decisive and done without hesitation.

The follow up to the previously mentioned four steps is the concept of **DEBRIEF**. This step involves dealing with the aftermath and consequences of an assault. These consequences could be physical, emotional, ethical, legal, and more.

The reality of self-defense is that not every assault can be prevented, and not every attacker can be either DETERRED, or successfully DISRUPTED. But the goal of self-defense is to DISENGAGE with the least amount of injury in whatever form the injury may take.

The education, training, and conditioning of the DECIDE step is an important aspect of the emotional and physical healing of DEBRIEF.

MY STORY: A SCARY LATE NIGHT ENCOUNTER

“My girlfriend and I were returning from a late dinner in Boston’s North End. As we approached our car, an obviously drunk and aggressive man approached us. His harassment quickly escalated and the situation spiraled out of control. I was thirty years old, and I had been using a wheelchair for eleven years. For the first time in my life, I realized I knew nothing about self-defense.”



Ground wrist. Demonstration of a wrist lock from the ground.

DON'T BE PARANOID... BE PREPARED

Advice from Duane Stevenson

Some words of advice from Duane Stevenson, who grew up in a high-crime area and who understands the criminal mind. Spinal cord tumors left Duane with limited use of his legs, so he uses crutches for mobility and as weapons. He is now a personal trainer and consultant for law enforcement personnel.

“People are more violent now,” Duane says, “back in the 80’s or 90’s they’d just drag you out of the car. Now they kill you. You always need a back up plan, which is usually a way for you to get out after you make sure no one is going to follow you.”

“In the ‘hood, you need to be especially aware. You can walk through Compton and be OK if you are aware, but if you’re not paying attention, something is likely to happen. You gotta look around, see it coming.”

As for disabled people, Duane says, “we can’t run. We have to stand our ground and be brutally effective if it comes down to a fight.”

“Remember, the people who would attack a disabled person are career criminals. They make a living by hunting down and hurting and killing people weaker than them.”

“They have no compassion, so you shouldn’t have any for them – you should fight until they can’t move, and then get out of there. To have compassion means risking your life.”

“You need to be prepared, to have a plan. Not so paranoid that you don’t leave your home, just prepared.”



Duane’s advice revolves around the concepts of preparation, having a plan, and awareness. But he also touches on the importance of Self-Defense psychology. The person who attacks someone with an obvious disability is attacking that person because he or she is looking for an easy victim.

Therefore, as a person with a spinal cord injury, you must communicate to your attacker that you are not an easy victim. If you physically defend yourself, you must attack the attacker without hesitation and with full commitment. Doing so requires invoking a mindset I call **violent emotional state**. I define violent emotional state as having such a powerful intent to injure your attacker that it overrides your own fear of injury.

This “hardens the target”: you. By making yourself “hard to kill” you are able to take punishment without receiving a serious injury. Hollywood stunt men are the epitome of this concept. The military uses this strategy when utilizing protective body armor. Warfare in the Middle Ages in Europe was largely based upon on the idea of building protective structures.

The goal is to minimize the injury sustained in a physical attack. In the incidents described in the previous news excerpts, the injuries were caused by three situations. First, the victim was harmed by the initial strike while the victim was seated in his or her wheelchair. Secondly, the victim was injured by the subsequent fall or from being thrown out of the wheelchair to the ground. Finally, the victim was injured while lying helpless on the ground from the attacker’s continued strikes.

Hardening the target for wheelchair users means learning to eliminate or reduce injury from these and other situations.

It means learning how to redirect an initial attack away from your vital areas such as your head.

It means learning how to fall from your wheelchair without injury.

It means learning how to redirect, deflect, and attack the attacker once dislodged from your wheelchair.



ADVICE FROM MARTIAL ARTIST JEMAL MFUNDSHI

Jemal Mfundshi practiced martial arts up until the motorcycle accident that left him in a wheelchair.

On Awareness: “Now that I have limited mobility, I have to apply more of the lessons I learned, especially about being aware.”

“I’m more careful about where I park, who’s around me, and I avoid any ‘shady people’.”

On Toughness:

“I also used to think toughness revolved around physicality, but now I know that’s not true.”



Rear attack. Demonstration of an escape and counter from a rear attack.



Side mount. Demonstration of a figure 4 lock from side mount.

MY STORY: STABBED IN AMSTERDAM OVER A TELEPHONE BOOTH

While my brother and I were making a phone call inside a sidewalk telephone booth in a large public square Amsterdam, a street thug rapped on the door. He knocked on the glass with a small knife. He clearly wanted to use the phone booth.

Filled with adolescent fearlessness I opened the door. Our verbal exchange turned violent when he struck me in the face. When I lunged at him out of the booth, he stabbed me in the neck with his knife. We grappled and punched each other on the sidewalk.

Surrounded by his companions, I held him in a standing headlock. But upon remembering the knife, I released my hold on his neck. The man’s immediate response was to punch me in the mouth. “Let’s get out of here,” I yelled to my brother as blood dripped down my neck. It was not an incident of self-defense, but it was a memorable moment.

MY STORY: JUMPED WHILE WORKING AT BURGER KING

“That’s the one who attacked me along with his friends,” I told the police officer. I had a swollen eye, and had just been stomped and kicked by a group of teenagers while working my high school job at Burger King. I had bumped into the leader as I cleaned the tables in the dining room late on a Friday night.

The incident brought me one hundred dollars in restitution from the lead attacker. It was a tremendous sum for a \$3.35 per hour employee.

CHAPTER 5: THE FIVE STAGES OF PHYSICAL ASSAULT

The 5 Stages of Physical Assault represents a model for understanding the criminal predatory mind in assault situations. The model is used to make the steps of assault easier to understand and thus defend against it.

Every situation of assault is different. Therefore the model is merely a flexible guide for providing insight into the criminal mind and behavior. The five stages occur in the following order: *Motivation to Commit*, *Selection of Victim*, *Physical Attack*, *Completion of the Crime*, and *After-effects*. The five stages describe the complete time line of the assault from the point of view of the attacker.

1. Motivation to Commit

The predator decides to commit a particular crime. The amount of the aggressor's motivation to commit the crime will determine the level of response necessary for self-defense.

2. Selection of Victim

The predator actively chooses a victim for his crime. Part of this stage is the "interview process". The predator interacts with a potential victim to determine suitability for attack.

3. Physical Attack

The predator initiates a physical attack on the victim. The physical attack requires the opportunity to attack in the form of close proximity to the intended victim.

4. Completion of the Crime

The physical attack enables the predator to complete the crime originally planned and/or commit additional crimes of opportunity.

5. After-effects

The negative consequences and after-effects of aggression on the victim.

The following story was e-mailed to me by a young woman who described an attack that occurred to her brother. Her brother is a wheelchair-using paraplegic.

Paraplegic Attacked at the Bus Stop

He was waiting at a bus stop to get to the doctor, and from what he told me a group of teenage boys started making jokes and hassling him (*Selection of Victim*).

He just ignored it, because ya know, why bother with those kinds of people? One of the boys must have gotten mad or something that my brother wasn't responding, so he walked up to him and pushed him out of his wheelchair from behind (*Physical Attack*).

He almost landed in the street. The boy started kicking him and grabbed his wallet, calling him an "F-ing ..." and much worse things. My brother was trying to grab his feet, but he couldn't because he had landed face first. That's when the old lady started screaming and whacking the mugger with her purse.

The group of boys and mugger took off running (*Completion of the Crime*) because she had attracted a lot of attention. My brother gave a police report and was taken to the hospital for 3 broken ribs (*After effects*).

This story illustrates the *Four Stages of Physical Assault*. In this situation the victim was clearly out numbered and was at a physical disadvantage. But what this attack clearly demonstrates is that the attackers were looking for someone to victimize. The attackers were also driven away by the disrupting actions of an old woman. These actions were nothing more than screaming and simple striking, but they had the desired effect of causing the attackers to disengage and flee the scene.

CHAPTER 6: LEARNING THROUGH EXAMPLE SCENARIOS

You are waiting for a friend outside a local convenience store. Suddenly you notice a large man walking rapidly toward you. He is looking directly at you and his clothes are in disarray. You start to feel panic, but you force yourself to remain calm.

Unfamiliar with the effects of adrenaline and uncertain what to do, you do nothing. The man steps right up to you. Before you have time to react, he grabs you by the throat, squeezes and demands your wallet. Unable to breathe or speak, you are barely able to comply. After pocketing your wallet the man departs. But not before he gives a final vicious squeeze that permanently damages your vocal cords.

In this situation, your mindset was conscious, your body state was adrenalized, and your emotional mode was calm and controlled. Since you had never decided how you would handle this type of situation, you were completely unprepared. As a result, you did not act to protect yourself and received a serious injury.

The Application of the 5D's of Self-Defense

This time, let's say when the man approaches you look directly at him and state clearly, "What do you want?" Responding to your voice he looks at you with a sinister smile. Immediately your intuition senses danger. You raise your hands forward and forcefully state, "Back off!" (DETER)

The man ignores you and you escalate your verbal intensity and yell, "BACK OFF !!!". The man continues to rapidly move toward you. You have now received confirmation of the man's bad intention. (DETER)

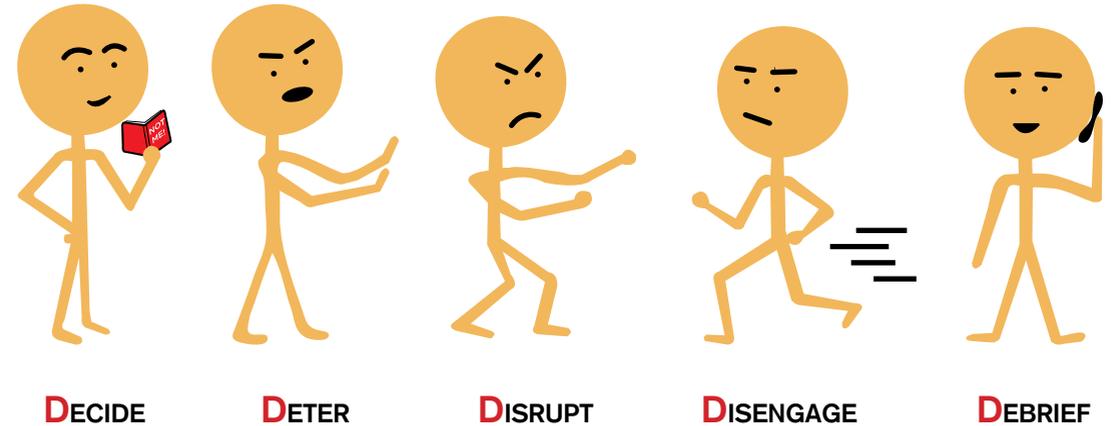
Your mind becomes more instinctual and your body is filled with a surge of fear and energy as it is charged with adrenaline invoked by your yelling. You are filled with an overwhelming urge to protect yourself. (DETER)

As the man reaches out to grab you, you are instinctively triggered to act. Your hand instantly shoots forward into his face, two fingers striking his eye. (DISRUPT) Filled with the motivation to stop him

from harming you, you strike him repeatedly with the heel of your palm in the bridge of his nose while continuing to yell. (DISRUPT)

The man, filled with pain and unable to see through teary eyes, hesitates (you have now created the opportunity to escape). Sensing this opportunity, you flee into the safety of the store (DISENGAGE).

Once in the store, you immediately call the police. (DEBRIEF)



THE EFFECTS OF ADRENALINE

Advice From T9 Paraplegic Derek Mortland

Feeling fairly confident in my skills to defend myself with no weapons or any weapon put in my hands, I choose to remain weaponless in most situations and on a day-to-day basis. I do not have a concealed carry permit or even own my own firearm. I do sometimes carry a knife or a club type weapon concealed on my body or chair somewhere.

The reasons to carry a gun: 1. A gun is the best defense against another gun. 2. Pulling a gun is an Oh SHIT! factor for the attacker. 3. Guns are potentially lethal and can inflict massive injury very rapidly given the right caliber and bullet combination, and hitting the right target.

The reasons for not carrying a gun...

1. Many real life attacks can happen instantly where there is not time to draw the weapon let alone fire it. (I have seen videos with police officers who knew they were going to be attacked by a knife from over 17' away and the attacker was able to close the gap and inflict a stab wound on them before they drew from their side holster. These were mock attacks for training purposes, but real life would potentially be even worse, plus you have the potential for a freeze response in an adrenal rush).

2. Because of the adrenal rush you will almost certainly experience, the likelihood of you hitting your target is minimal. This means you may hit innocent bystanders and also further anger your attacker. Statistics show that in police shoot outs, the police are only 34% proficient in hitting their target, the bad guys are around 7% (I think). So, even with lots of training, fatalities from guns are not as high of a percentage as what we perceive them to be.

3. The dead man's five seconds... If you do inflict a fatal wound to the heart by a round in the chest area, you will have another 5-8 seconds before the person dies. If someone can close a 17' gap before a firearm is drawn how much damage can someone do in 5-8 seconds? If you are lucky and get a round into the brain stem you probably will not have to worry about this, but that would be a very lucky shot. If you hit other parts of the body it may or may not be a deterrent to your attacker and may further adrenalize him or her.

Over and over again it has been shown that the predators of the world go after the weak—the more helpless. That makes people with disabilities targets, unless we are able to demonstrate that we will not be victims through non-verbal communication.

Now it can be possible that this positive assertive communication can be addressed and shown by packing. If you pack and feel more assured and confident in any situation, then packing is serving a purpose if nothing else than giving you the attitude that you will not be victimized. You have made a personal choice as to how you will address your safety and are confident in that choice. This is a powerful decision and will show in your confident demeanor.

Can this confident demeanor be achieved by others means also? Yes. It's all about choices. The choice not to be a victim will ultimately be your strongest ally, no matter how you choose to defend yourself. There may even be times when it's best not to defend yourself and give up your stuff if someone is simply robbing you. Stuff can be replaced, lives cannot. The quality of our choices determines the quality of our lives, but ultimately we make choices on a moment to moment basis and we may not know what choice we will make until that moment arrives.

CHAPTER 7: MAKING SENSE OF THE “SOUND BITES” OF SELF-DEFENSE

The 5D’s of Self-Defense can be used to make sense of the commonly known and repeated “sound bites” of self-defense. These sound bites come to us through all types of sources. They come from the T.V., news, the police, self-defense experts, books and articles on self-defense, and from our friends and family. All of the advice is well intentioned and valuable in some way.

Using the framework of the 5D’s allows the “sound bites” to be ordered in a manner that creates understanding. All tips, techniques, tactics, and strategies of self-defense can be organized and categorized in this manner.

1. DECIDE

Never be taken to a secondary location
Carry a mobile phone
Take a self-defense class
Never give up

2. DETER

Be assertive
Be aware of your surroundings
Use your intuition
Travel in groups at night

3. DISRUPT

Strike to the groin
Use anything available as a weapon
Fight with everything you have
Yell as loud as you can

4. DISENGAGE

Escape at first opportunity
Get away as fast as you can
Never corner the attacker
Have an exit strategy

5. AFTER-EFFECTS

Call the police
Don’t take a shower
Talk to someone you trust
Write down what happened

A DECADE LONG STALKING NIGHTMARE

By Tiffany Carlson

I have been hesitant about sharing my story regarding my stalker, scared he’ll read this. Why do I care? Because that’s the power that a stalker has over you: Fear. But since it’s been a year since he came to my home unannounced, I’m a bit less scared than I once was.

I first made my presence known to my stalker back in the mid ’90s. At that time, I had no idea who Devotees (wheelchair fetishists) or Pretenders (people who pretend to use a wheelchair, on or offline) were. Of course, now I know that online rooms are full of them. The creepiest of them all was a guy by the name of D.T. At the time he was pretending to be a pretty, brunette from L.A. who was a graphic designer for Pixar.



Stalking Facts

- ▶ 1 in 12 women and 1 in 45 men will be stalked in their lifetimes.
- ▶ 52% of stalking victims are 18-29 yrs.
- ▶ 87% of stalkers are male.
- ▶ On average, the stalking continues for 1.8 years; 2.2 years if the stalking involves an intimate partner.

Source: Stalking in America - National Violence Against Women Survey 1998

His persona privately massaged me, and from there on out, we carried on a one year long online friendship. We chatted every day and shared our paralyzed war stories. It was pretty intense.

One day, I was bored and popped into the AOL disability chat room. I was talking about my friend, and instantly, people in the room were telling me that she was a Pretender and actually a crazy forty-something white male from California. I was shocked and appalled. I felt sickened and betrayed.

D.T. figured out that I now knew his game. He wrote me a long e-mail apologizing for his transgressions, saying he'd take me to Disney World to make it up to me. His assumptions freaked me out even more, so I blocked his e-mail. Years went past and he continued to use dozens of fake personas to try to trick me again. He used Yahoo IM, e-mails under new addresses, everything. His main goal was to know intimate details about me so he could masturbate to them.

He would visit my personal website every day. I figured out that the California IP that came to my site each morning was him. He would post comments on my blog under a few different pseudonyms, but he never varied his grammar or speech patterns so I always knew it was him. But since the guy seemed "sorta" harmless at the time, I decided to stop deleting his comments and let them stay. That proved to be a bad idea. He took that action by me as a sign that I was actually receptive towards him.

After reading in a blog somewhere that I was single again, he decided to pack-up and move to Minnesota to find me in person. I'm unlisted. He didn't have my address. He printed out some pictures of my neighborhood that I had put in one of my blogs. He walked around downtown Minneapolis until he found the buildings that were in the pictures. He visited all of those

buildings until he found the one that had my name in the foyer. That was August 7th, 2008.

He rang my unit, telling me that he was some guy that was here to "warn me" about this crazy guy from California who's been stalking me. He was just lying again. It was he who was the crazy guy. I told him to go away, that I was busy, and to e-mail me whatever his story was.

He did. I read his e-mail later in the day and realized it was HIM, even though he never said so. His grammar though, as I said before, never wavered. It was easy to figure out. He was also seen frequently in my neighborhood wandering around the next few days.

I obtained a restraining order the afternoon of the day he first came to my house. Not only was it quite easy to get the restraining order, the police found the hotel he was staying at to serve him. They went there, served him and demanded he leave me alone. They told him to leave the state.

The police said D.T. was shaking in his boots when they served him. It seemed to work. He ended up not being able to find a job and moved to Arizona. It's been a year since all of this went down. He has only tried to comment on my blog twice.

Even through, I haven't heard from him now in awhile. I still get scared when I'm in bed at night and hear noises. I'm worried in the back of my mind that he might come back to Minneapolis, desperate to finally meet me in-person, and break into my place.

Because of this decade-long ill journey with this stalker, I RARELY if ever talk to people I don't know in-person online anymore. It's the only way I can protect myself from this happening again. I hope my story helps people to be more vigilant about who they trust online, and to show them that Devotees and Pretenders are NOTHING to take lightly.

CHAPTER 8: CONTINUING YOUR STUDY OF SELF-DEFENSE

Continue learning about self-defense by enrolling in a self-defense class. There are three widely practiced forms of self-defense instruction. The “Traditional” method involves continuous repetition of technique. The “You Can Do It” method uses self-defense as a vehicle for improving self-esteem and confidence. The “High Stress Scenario” method uses adrenaline-inducing situations to “condition the body to recall the trained response.” A close examination of these methods reveals that despite the different approaches, **their main focus is teaching DISRUPT as the main focus of the self-defense instruction.**

Due to the large number of people involved in the martial arts, the “Traditional Method” is probably the most widely instructed method of self-defense. It is epitomized, and has been made famous by the phrase “Wax on, Wax off” from the movie *The Karate Kid*. The idea is that by repeating the proper technique over and over, it will in time become instinctive. In the event of an assault, you will respond appropriately and instantly with the correct technique.

According to this theory, size does not matter, strength does not matter, what matters is your willingness and determination to train in order to execute the “perfect technique” when the time comes. **Unfortunately, the “traditional method” makes no allowance for the differences in your mindset and emotional state.**

Whether you are executing a DISRUPT technique with a compliant training partner in a controlled setting, or responding to a brutal street attack from someone who is intent in causing you immediate harm, the assumption is that you will respond in the same trained manner.

While it may not be stated outright as such, the “You Can Do It” method is based upon the idea that the common response to an assault is to “freeze” because you believe that there is nothing you can do, therefore, you will do nothing.

The instruction is intended to prove to you that you can indeed defend yourself by applying a few simple devastating DISRUPT techniques. The techniques usually involve an eye strike, elbow to the head, kick to the groin, etc. As a result, your attacker will be immediately overwhelmed or incapacitated by these effective strikes, leaving you the victor.

The problem is that all this emphasis on how you can defeat your attacker fails to get across to the student that the goal of self-defense is to DISENGAGE and minimize the after-effects. The student’s thought process becomes “I can defeat my attacker, why should I worry about escaping?” or the most dangerous thought of all, “no way I am going to run away, I’ll kick his ass first.”

The “High Stress Scenario” method evolved as an improvement upon traditional training. This method, while never actually defining it, recognizes the role of the mindset and emotional mode during an assault. The thinking is that full power physical techniques executed during stressful self-defense scenarios in a highly adrenalized state will be “remembered by the student’s body.” The effect of adrenaline will greatly improve the power and efficiency of the actions.

Therefore, in a future assault situation, the student’s body will automatically flashback and execute the remembered technique with devastating effect.

The mind and emotions have the ability to maximize the effectiveness of physical actions. There is undeniable power in the adrenalized body. But, the inherent flaw in the remembered technique method is that it leads the student to believe that just because the high stress scenario produced fear, and adrenaline, it actually duplicated a realistic assault.

Since the student’s body must remember the correct technique, the attack scenario must be highly controlled. Otherwise, the student may fail and remember an incorrect action. What about attackers who are repeat offenders? According to this theory, their previous assaults have dramatically increased the power and efficiency of their actions, making them even more dangerous.

These three previously described methods for instructing self-defense are one way or another based around the physical actions of DISRUPT. The 5D's are designed to minimize the need for DISRUPT by emphasizing the importance of DECIDE, DETER, DISENGAGE, and DEBRIEF during self-defense. When you take a self-defense class, you should be able to see that the tips, techniques, and advice presented to you are not limited to absolute actions or responses as taught. They are nothing more than examples of actions or responses that can be categorized under the blueprint of the 5D's - DECIDE DETER DISRUPT DISENGAGE DEBRIEF.

Once you are able to understand and interpret these concepts into your own terms and lifestyle, you will know what it takes to survive aggression and truly be able to make sense of self-defense.



Front attack. Demonstration of a guillotine choke from a frontal attack.

FOUR STEPS TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE

By Erika Bogan

I am a survivor of domestic violence. I know how difficult it can be to get out of an abusive situation. On 1/20/02, I was the passenger in a motor-vehicle accident caused by domestic violence. I was 21. I had a 2 year old, and I was a nursing student in college. The driver of the car was driving in anger at 75 mph in a 35 mph zone when he lost control. I was thrown from the car 75 feet and my body hit a tree. The impact caused an incomplete spinal-cord injury at T11- T12 . I was in a coma for 2 1/2 months.

Even after the accident, I stayed in the relationship. Part of the reason I stayed was that I was too scared to leave. What would I do without him? How would I make it financially? Who would want me? What will he do if I leave? Many of these questions were caused by the psychological abuse that he had inflicted. Others came from my lack of knowledge of the resources available for people in my situation.

I knew I had to find the determination and motivation to start my life over, not only from my injury, but from the abusive relationship too.

Finding my motivation to leave was my first step, educating myself on available resources came next, then I had to take action, and finally I had to forgive.

My motivation to leave was my desire to be able to live without fear, and take care of my children.

I had to move forward day by day, for as long as it took, and not look back. It was important for me to educate myself on resources available for me. There are many resources available at little or no cost, for people dealing with domestic violence,



and for people with low-income.

Because I was a disabled single-mother, and I had limited means of transportation, I thought I was trapped. But by using the computer, I found transportation, counseling, and welfare services. All of which are designed to help people start over to build their lives towards being independent.

Most importantly, I had to take action using the resources and knowledge that I gained. Taking action also took help and support from my friends and family. It is very important for friends and family of these victims to remember without their supportive, one too many times, the victims will not leave.

Finally, I needed to forgive the perpetrator of the abuse. I knew I could not move past my tragedy without forgiving. This took support from family, friends, and professional counseling.

Following these four steps helped me to build an independent life. These steps can be applied to almost all abusive situations. The most important rule is to protect yourself by getting out of the abusive situation, no matter what. Everyone has so much worth to bring to society. Staying in an abusive situation never has a good outcome. It is crucial to get out.



CHAPTER 9: A LOOK AT ACTUALITY

Paralegic Sentenced to 5-15 Year in Prison for Manslaughter

Keith Currie, a 21 year old paraplegic, was sentenced to prison for 5-15 years for voluntary manslaughter and discharging a firearm from a vehicle.

According to authorities, Keith Currie had a verbal dispute with 20 year old Andrew Taylor. After the argument, Currie followed Taylor in his motor vehicle. Currie then shot Tyler outside Tyler's home. Currie claimed that Taylor and a friend had bullied him and were coming towards his car when he fired a fatal shot in self-defense.

While it is very possible that Currie feared for his life at the time he shot Taylor. He clearly violated the goal of self-defense. The goal of self-defense is to minimize the negative consequences of violence. In this case, Currie went against the concept of DETER by following Taylor in his vehicle.

He also could have denied Taylor the opportunity to attack by simply driving away as he was approached.

The sad consequence is that one young man is dead, and another is in prison all because of an argument.

Paralegic Tackles Man Accused of Molesting a Child

Cameron Aulner was on his first day at his new job at the Comcast table in Walmart. He heard a man yell "Stop that man, he grabbed a girl!" Aulner quickly blocked the fleeing man's escape and grabbed the man's shirt, tackling him as the man tried to race by.

They fell into a soda machine then both hit the floor. Cameron, along with another man, held the suspect until police arrived. The suspect, 34 year old Kevin Salyers, is accused of sexually assaulting a 10 year old girl while she was shopping with her mother.

This incident illustrates three important points. The first point is that the person who preys upon someone he knows to be more vulnerable tends not to be a highly motivated attacker. This type of person may be stopped despite the fact he or she has a physical advantage. This kind of predator is not looking for a fight; he is looking for a victim.

The second point is that the most likely event of a physical altercation between a wheelchair user and an able-bodied person is a fall to the ground. Therefore, it is important for the wheelchair user to fall in such a manner that he or she is able to successfully defend him or herself from the ground.

The final point is that there is always the possibility of receiving assistance from people in the immediate area. Therefore, it is important to always use your voice to call for help and let the people around you know what is happening.

Know Your Enemy

“Know Your Enemy” is a saying credited to Sun Tzu in the 6th century BC, from his book on military strategy, “The Art of War.”

The idea is that to defeat or successfully defend against your opponent you need to understand his methods and tactics. In terms of self-defense for SCI/D, this idea translates to understanding the most common method an aggressor may use to attack a wheelchair user.



One wing. Demonstration of a one wing choke from the ground.

The following section was taken from an internet Q & A posting. It provides insight into the mind of potential aggressors. The people who responded are most likely not extremists or premeditated predators. But they clearly encourage and have the potential to use violence against a person with a disability.

Internet Post: “On the notorious blind corner to London Bridge station at the Tooley Street side entrance, some guy [in a wheelchair] was going quite rapidly. I moved out of the way, but he was moving with much gusto and had his head down. He hit me—not knocking me over but quite firmly.” [He] “Didn’t utter a word of apology. I really was incensed. Part of me wanted to give chase and tip him out of it.”

Question: “*What should I have done?*”

Out of twenty responses to this question, seven people suggested using violence. The most common suggestion was to knock the man out of his wheelchair.

1. “You should have taken after him and with a surge of strength, lifted him and his chair up on to the back of one of those bin lorries [trash cans].”
2. “I would have honestly threw a stone at him and ignored his response!”
3. “There are people in this world that wouldn’t mind flipping a person in a wheelchair, or tipping it over and trying to watch them get up.”
4. “I’d have him out of the chair then trash the thing so he couldn’t do it again. And if he complained I’d put the boot in to him too.”
5. “Get your copy of [a magazine], roll it up and for every word administer a smack on the head.”
6. “Get him and wheel him down a hill.”
7. “I think you should have tipped him out of it!!!”

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

I wrote this book in order to help people with SCI/D make sense of self-defense. I make sense of self-defense by interpreting **all personal safety concepts, tactics, and techniques in terms of the 5D's of Self-Defense**. I use the 5D's to create my own personal plan of action. I keep in mind that my goal for self-defense is to minimize the negative consequences of aggression by any means available. And finally, I focus on studying, practicing, and talking about self-defense in terms of the brutality of actual attacks and natural human responses.

Other people make sense of self-defense in different ways. Jules used fitness and her voice when she was attacked. Derek concentrates on the “adrenal rush” and studies criminal behavior. Bob focuses on awareness and owns a dog. Michelle conveys a strong attitude and takes a martial art. Kristina likes to carry a gun and relies on her “fighting attitude.” Kris doesn't carry a gun, but uses preparation and strategy. Duane trains to be brutally effective and has a plan. Jemal is careful and avoids certain types of people. Tiffany limits her online relationships and keeps her home address private. Erika uses forgiveness and tells her story to reduce the after-effects of violence.

What all of these people have in common is that they have SCI/D and they have made personal safety a priority in their lives. Their individual methods may vary, but they all have made sense of self-defense in their own way.

Part II

Profiles of Martial Artists with SCI/D

ERIK KONDO

I do two things that are considered counter to the stereotype of people with disabilities: I participate in martial arts and I study violence.

It has taken me over a decade to come to my own understanding of the martial arts. My view on the martial arts is not about my belt rank, particular style, or what techniques I know. It is about using the martial arts as a means to achieve my personal goals.

Making the martial arts benefit me is more than simply modifying existing techniques into ones that I can execute effectively from my wheelchair or the ground. It means determining what I want to achieve from life and using the martial arts as a vehicle to bring me to my chosen destination.

While there are dozens of well known martial arts styles such as Karate, Judo, Jujitsu, Taekwondo, Aikido, there are hundreds of lesser known styles. Kung Fu and the founders of these styles created systems based upon their personal preferences, skills, and philosophies. The founders made the martial arts work for them.

I have closely examined my own abilities and limitations in a supportive and experimental environment. I have been able to expand upon my creative and adaptive skills and focus intently on strategic and tactical thinking.

Participating in the martial arts provides me with the opportunity to socialize with a unique group of people that have the same interest in self-improvement.



It also gives meaning to my gym workouts, which I use to develop strength and flexibility while improving my skills and techniques. Studying the martial arts has enabled me to see firsthand how my mental and emotional states directly affect my physical actions.

It is through this study on the importance of the mental and emotional states of martial arts and self-defense that I came to develop the 5D's of Self-Defense. The 5D's are the result of multiple years of trial and error on how to best create a model that describes the multiple stages of self-defense and their unique mental, emotional, and physical states.

My focus on these mental and emotional states is a direct result of my disability.

Participating in mock fights against able-bodied students highlighted my specific physical weaknesses. I also learned what my advantages are. While many martial arts students don't understand the depth of meaning behind techniques, my advantage is my deeper understanding of the psychology involved in attack scenarios, and how that affects fighting techniques. Therefore, I am able to maximize my own particular physical strengths while minimizing my weaknesses.

The martial arts have taught me a great deal about myself and my abilities. Because of this, I strongly promote the martial arts for all people, especially those with disabilities.

It has taken me over a decade to come to my own understanding of the martial arts. My view on the martial arts is not about my belt rank, particular style, or what techniques I know. It is about using the martial arts as a means to achieve my personal goals.



MICHELE COLVARD

Michelle says she looks like a girly girl. But that doesn't mean that she always acts like one. She likes to race autocross, works out regularly, and is training in Taekwondo alongside her husband.

The fact that she was Ms. Wheelchair America in 2009 and has a M.A. in Public Health doesn't mean she is afraid to practice and discuss the realistic and unpleasant aspects of self-defense.

Michelle was born with Spina bifida and is paralyzed from the lumbar region down. She was introduced to the martial arts while in high school at the encouragement of her mother.

Michelle's instructor was not only happy to teach her, but as Michelle describes it "he considered it his personal challenge to modify techniques to suit her situation."

Despite not having taught a wheelchair user before, Michelle's instructor was able to apply various principles in order to create a set of techniques that worked for her. Michelle says he likes to focus on "using her wheelchair as a weapon" and that he immediately recognized that her wheelchair could actually be "an extension of her body."

Michelle received personalized training for about two years. She credits the training for increasing her fitness level and confidence. She also feels that the training taught her focus, discipline, and improved her coordination. In fact, whenever she would leave her training session she would be "on top of world." It was right after a particularly good class that she met her husband. As he describes it, Michelle was practically glowing as she proceeded down the



sidewalk. He spotted her while driving by and immediately stopped to chat and get her phone number. Michelle continued her training until half-way through her freshman year in college. At that point she needed to focus all her resources and time on her studies. During both her undergraduate and graduate years, Michelle kept herself active with a variety of different sports. But she still missed her martial arts training.

It was not until recently that she decided to join an ATA Taekwondo school in her area. As luck would have it, the school was newly opened and the owners were happy to teach her and her husband in their regular adult class. Right now she is training once a week.

She plans to train more when time allows. She loves her training and is excited about learning new skills and techniques. Taekwondo has a substantial amount of kicking, so Michelle substitutes kicking and kneeing with upper body moves such as punches and hammer fists.

Michelle strongly encourages anyone with or without a disability to participate in all that life has to offer, and to make the effort to try new activities and experiences. She believes her martial arts training has been instrumental in fostering this attitude.



STEVE PENTO

“Martial arts has taught me to overcome obstacles. The chair is just the biggest one,” says Steve Pento, mixed martial arts coach and competitor.

“When I was twelve I was crazy about Bruce Lee,” the 38 year-old Massachusetts native explains, “and I wanted to be able to kick ass just like him, but my family didn’t have the money for me to study martial arts. So I collected bottles and cans and did odd jobs and paid for it myself.”

After six months Steve started studying at a Kenpo school and at 15, he added Judo and Jujitsu to his curriculum. “That’s when I started wanting to do MMA (mixed martial arts) fights,” he said. “My friends and I would stage practice rounds in my backyard.”



Steve’s training briefly paused when he was 19. That summer he fell asleep at the wheel, crashed into a pole, and ended up with a L1 level spinal cord injury. Nevertheless, he kept fighting. “I was sad for a while and didn’t want to try, but it passed,” he said. “I realized being disabled doesn’t mean you can’t kick ass. Being in a chair doesn’t mean you’re weak. It’s all how you look at it.”

He is as harsh with others as he is with himself, “Lazy people in wheelchairs piss me off. They make me look bad because I don’t want people to feel bad for me. I want to tell them to get off their asses, that some people can’t get even out their doors, and that if you can, you should do it.

Steve created his own eight hour per day rehab plan, “I found four guys who were still willing to

train with me. I taught them and I taught myself how to use my new body. Instead of bitching, I learned being in a wheelchair has its advantages—I have a better sense of gravity and a stronger upper body than able-bodied guys.”

Ten years later, Steve was teaching mixed martial arts to about 20 able-bodied students. He’s not afraid to spar with them, or anyone else. “I like getting hit, actually. It reminds me that I’m still able to be out there and do what I love,” he said.

In 2003 Steve brought his students to a jujitsu tournament where someone asked him why he didn’t compete. “Because I didn’t know they’d let me!” he replied as he signed up moments before the competition began. Without time to warm up, he ended up placing third in the 145lb class while weighing in at 118lbs. “In the ring some of my competitors were afraid to hurt me, but once they realized I was there to win, they picked it up,” he said with an upward jerk of his chin. “I had five students entered in that tournament and they took twelve trophies between them.”



At the Northern Classic tournament in 2004, Steve ended taking the top title in black belt weapons while his one of his students won the grand championship fight. Since then, it’s been fight after fight— “we’ve gone to Foxwoods [the largest Casino in the United States] and the Tropicana in Atlantic City. People all around know me.”

BILL AUVENSHIRE

Most people with spinal cord injuries vastly improve their lives by studying the martial arts, but Bill Auvenshires improved as a martial artist, and person, because of his spinal cord injury.

“I grew up in the ghetto and I thought I was a good fighter,” Bill said, “until I went to a Tae Kwon Do demonstration when I was 22. That’s when I started studying the martial arts.” Bill signed up for class in his native Illinois in 1975.

“It was a different atmosphere back then,” he said, “we were mostly just into beating each other up. I didn’t learn any morality right off the bat; my instructor, although he could teach fighting, was sexist and racist.”

Bill began to get more out of the martial arts when he, his wife and son signed up at a Tae Kwon Do school in 1991. “I had just gotten remarried and we decided to do it as a family. In 1995 we earned our black belts together.

I was beginning to be more community minded and my wife and I were working as assistant instructors. That was six months before my accident.”

One icy day Bill was driving a friend’s truck to his dry-walling job when he slid off the road, rolled the truck, and ended up suspended inside the car for two hours, with a T12 spinal cord injury, waiting for someone to drive by.

“If I wasn’t as fit as I was, I would have died,” he said. His conditioning helped his amazingly fast recovery, “I was in acute care for a week and out of rehab after another month. I got back to Tae Kwon Do almost immediately.”



Bill’s role in the community changed almost immediately. “After the accident there was an outpouring from all the students,” he said. “They felt I inspired them, but at that time I didn’t see myself as a role model at all. I was a wild and crazy guy who jumped off of cliffs and who downright refused to get a desk job.

“It took me two years after my accident to accept that I was an inspiration to my students.” His wife Patty saw his potential immediately, though, and while Bill felt he was destined for the dreaded desk job, she encouraged him to start up a Tae Kwon Do school.

“She said that I would regret not having tried more than having tried and failed, so in 1997 we opened up ‘Auvenshires’s Tae Kwon Do’ and in the first three months, with huge support from the community, we had grown to 50 students.”

Now Bill’s life revolves around his students. “I have one student who’s a Navy Seal, another who’s a minister, and a teenage student who was born in Korea and adopted by a local couple,” he said, “we’ve set up a fund to send him to Korea to find his biological parents once he’s 18.



Bill’s lessons extend to his students’ lives, “I give them advice about whatever. I see them from very young up until adulthood, and propel them to do well.” His name has spread outside the martial arts arena– “people call me ‘Karate Guy’ even though I teach Tae Kwon Do.” I told him he’d better start learning some basic Korean!

Bill has also dedicated himself to helping the disabled community. “Whenever I’m out and see a person in a wheelchair, I go over and introduce myself and invite that person to my school. I tell them that anyone with a disability can study for free.

“Over the years I’ve had blind students, deaf students and over twenty students with spinal cord injuries,” Bill said. He has incorporated a larger variety of techniques into his personal repertoire.

“Tae Kwon Do is a kicking martial art, so I’ve had to branch out a lot since my injury. I’ve studied Hapkido, Jeet Kun Do, Aikido and Jujitsu.” Bill has brought his new experiences into the mix. “I don’t teach people in chairs how to kick,” he said, “but they need to be able to identify the different kicks and to protect themselves from them.

“I teach them things I’ve figured out, and if that doesn’t work for them, I think of something that does work. I have this one student who has no hand strength, but who had to learn how to grab, so I taught her how to do it with her arms instead of her fingers.”

Bill Auvenshine and his wife have about 100 Tae Kwon Do students and complement each other’s teaching style; Bill explains while Pat demonstrates any techniques that Bill can’t do. They have just opened up a second school, and their goal is to have five schools running by 2014.

“It’s funny,” Bill said, “In 2007 at the Martial Arts Hall of Fame Induction ceremony, Bill “Superfoot” Wallace was presented with a lifetime achievement award. During his acceptance speech he mentioned a man who inspired him, a ‘Bill Auvenshine’. I thought I heard him wrong. I thought the people at my table heard him wrong. Then Wallace said, ‘Bill! Get your chair up here!’ and I realized he really was talking about me.”

ROCCY POCHY

“I sat in my wheelchair and watched a Jung Su Won class for two years before joining in. Twenty years later, I’m a third degree black belt,” said Rocco Pochy, a California native who was rendered a T-12 paraplegic at age 11 from a gun accident.

“When I was in my 20’s I had a lot of stress from relationship issues and wanted to unwind and meditate. Before the meditation class, there was a Jung Su Won class, which has a lot of kicking and breaking, but it wasn’t my thing. The instructor kept on chewing on me until I joined that class too.”

Pochy spent the next few years practicing Jung Su Won for hours each day. He taught children’s and adult classes and went through three rigorous black belt tests. “I didn’t have a teacher in a wheelchair and clearly I can’t do things the same as other students, so I figured out how to make it my own,” he said. The students and instructors at the school didn’t cut him any slack either. “I wasn’t considered handicapped or special – it was just that I had a different way of doing things. I was still expected to break boards and do forms. This changed me. Now I don’t get down on myself. I deal with situations and move forward.”

Rocco applied the lessons he learned in the dojo to all aspects of his life. He has risen to become the Vice President of Engineering of Lighthouse Worldwide Solutions, a firm selling high-tech instruments to microchip factories.



JERRY RYAN

Jerry Ryan, by any standard, is an incredibly active man, even though he's been a quadriplegic for over 20 years. Martial arts have played a major role in his recovery from two near-death experiences and in the development of his life's goals.

One night in 1987, Jerry was setting up an operating room at the Oregon Health and Science University Hospital when he was hit in the head with a blunt object, in what became his first near-death experience. The attacker's identity and motive were never discovered and Jerry, then 31, was left with a brain injury. "There was a lot of memory loss. I'd have laughing and crying jags, or get angry and break furniture," Jerry said in a 2002 interview for The Oregonian. Instead of losing touch with reality, Jerry got the mental health care he needed and recovered. He continued to study martial arts, a passion of his since childhood, and graduated from college with a 3.8 GPA and a degree in computer aided design. "Not bad for someone with brain damage," he said.

On what should have been another happy family Easter in 1994, Jerry had his second brush with death. Jerry and his sons had taken a recently purchased car for a ride on a desert road. While going 70mph, the tire separated and the car rolled, collapsing on Jerry's head. Although he doesn't remember the incident, "both my sons told me that I was completely alert and knew I had broken my neck," he said. "This was extremely important because the engine compartment had begun to catch on fire. I instructed my oldest son on how to safely remove me from the burning vehicle by cradling my head." Jerry suffered a C7 level spinal cord injury, but neither of his sons was seriously hurt. On what should have been another happy family Easter in 1994, Jerry had his second brush with death. Jerry and his sons had taken a recently purchased car for a ride on a desert road. While going 70mph, the tire separated and the car rolled, collapsing on Jerry's head. Although he doesn't remember the incident, "both my

sons told me that I was completely alert and knew I had broken my neck," he said. "This was extremely important because the engine compartment had begun to catch on fire. I instructed my oldest son on how to safely remove me from the burning vehicle by cradling my head." Jerry suffered a C7 level spinal cord injury, but neither of his sons was seriously hurt.

By that time Jerry had studied at a number of martial schools in his childhood, in the military and after his release. The lessons he learned helped pull him through acute care and rehab.

"My training in martial arts helped me deal with the nerve pain in my arm. Martial arts also helped me deal with the depression. I decided to focus on a goal, something outside of myself and I channeled anger I felt at not being able to do something into motivation to finding another way." Jerry moved with his family to Oregon and sought out world famous kung fu instructor Al DaCascos, who worked with him on arm and shoulder movements and strengthening arms.

His message to people with spinal cord injuries is to get out into the world, "People in wheelchairs are worried about their body image and poor treatment. Of course it happens. There is a stigma against those with disabilities, but able-bodied people need to learn to get past it. There is no better way to help them learn about people with spinal cord injuries than to be out there in your chair."



DANNY HICKS

“I had wanted to try martial arts for years as a kid,” said Danny Hicks, likely the only martial artist with a spinal cord injury to have earned a black belt under a disabled instructor. “So I was so very excited when, ten years after my spinal cord injury, Bill Auvenshine’s son told me about the Tae Kwon Do school.”

“At first I was intimidated,” said Danny, 36, describing Bill’s high-pressure teaching style, “because I didn’t know what to do. But Bill knows what he wants to get across and his wife assists. They are very knowledgeable and determined, and above all patient. I have a brain injury that affected my short term memory as well as a T3/4 spinal cord injury,” continued Danny in a slow, mumbling voice, “but Bill worked with me, having me repeat movements over and over until it sank in.”



“I’m much better off because of the martial arts,” Danny said, “it strengthened my weak areas, especially my trunk and diaphragm.” He found Bill’s demanding conditioning routine “not easy” but was motivated by Bill’s demanding teaching style and the class focus on physical conditioning. “Twelve of my disabled friends and I took up Bill’s offer of free classes, but I’m the only one who stuck with it and earned my black belt,” Danny said. His effort paid off when he gained enough experience to train with and hold his own against able-bodied students, and when he finally won a black belt of his own.

Danny’s improvement wasn’t purely physical. “I’m much more motivated and confident,” he said, “Bill really helped me become the person I am today.” Danny was working as a volunteer when he started studying Tae Kwon Do, and his career soon took off. A year after he started studying Tae Kwon Do, Danny was hired as a full time employee by the “Think First” initiative, a non-profit organization aimed at preventing brain and spinal cord injuries in young people, where. This was the same organization where he had been working part time as a “victim speakers”, sharing his story and setting himself as an example young people can learn from. “I tell them that one stupid mistake can last a lifetime, like the mistake I made when I drove drunk one month after graduation. I really think the message is getting through,” said Danny, “but now that the school year is over I can spend more time in Tae Kwon Do, helping Bill develop others like he helped develop me.”



MOLLY HALE

“I am relearning how to move every day,” said Molly Hale, a walking quadriplegic, “I do yoga, go to the pool, practice martial arts and my body keeps on responding. Fourteen years post-injury and I’m still getting nerve return.”

While in the hospital in 1995 after the car crash that rendered her a C5-6 quadriplegic, Molly realized that “every experience that came before I broke my neck was preparing me to respond to such an occurrence. The question ‘why me?’ didn’t get much of my attention. It was more ‘Why not me?’” The key was that she didn’t see herself as a victim.

The medical community didn’t agree with Molly’s approach, however, “After my accident, the doctors told me not to be overly optimistic. They assumed I was another 45-year-old woman couch potato and told me I’d never move intentionally below the shoulders,” she said. Molly didn’t take their advice and has now regained control of her bowels and bladder; she can stand, walk in water, dress, cook and feed herself.

That car crash was the second time Molly broke a vertebra; it was her first accident that brought her into the community that has since helped her heal. In 1981, the California native broke her L5 and was warned that she may never walk again, so she began studying alternative healing methods.

She was first introduced to Aikido, the martial art she’s practiced until now, at a physical therapy retreat, “I loved the athleticism and the peaceful way it taught people how to resolve



conflicts,” she explained, “and I found out I wasn’t able to dodge a very simple strike, so I wanted to fix that.”

Molly used Aikido conditioning, both mental and physical, to recover from her first spinal cord injury. “It taught me how to deal with things as they come. Rather than resisting, I’d go with the flow. Instead of being reactive, I learned to take a deep breath, examine my options, and respond instead of having a knee-jerk reaction.”

Her access to alternative healing had broadened significantly by her second accident. By then she said she “had access to a network of acupuncturists, massage therapists and a number of martial artists, all of whom proved to be much better healers than physical therapists.” She was discharged from rehab a mere nine weeks after her injury.

Molly was also in excellent physical shape to begin with. “The people in my Aikido class called me ‘Gumby’ because I could wrap my feet around my head. I had such fine control over my body that I could move each of my ribs individually,” she said. “In fact, it was a new breathing pattern that I learned just two weeks prior my accident that enabled me to survive for hours, upside down and doing a yoga headstand, while I was cut out of the car.”

Her biggest suggestion for those with spinal cord injuries, though, is to do pool therapy. Long



before Molly was able to stand on land, she was walking under water. Molly also got back to her Aikido after her spasticity died down and six years later she tested for and was awarded her third degree black belt.

Another big part of mind-body connections is visualization. Using this technique, spinal cord injury patients visualize their bones and tissues healing in hopes that their imaginations spur on their bodies. Although research suggests visualization is more effective in individuals with vivid imaginations, but Molly believes anyone can use it. “As children we all have wonderful imaginations and play imaginative games, but somehow that ability is lost in the majority of adults. Because it’s innate in everyone, we can all relearn it,” she said. “It takes effort, though. It means visualizing healthy, pink tissue, your blood flowing and healthy bones for hours each day. But it’s not rocket science.”

Molly’s continual healing and outlook on life got the attention of Emmy-winning independent filmmaker Dorothy Fadiman, who produced *Moment by Moment, the Healing Journey of Molly Hale*, released in 2003.



Molly and her husband of 20 years, Jeremy Hale, have also started Ability Productions, a non-profit organization aimed at bringing films about alternative healing to those with spinal cord injuries. As far as martial arts, Molly travels throughout the United States and to Europe giving seminars and performing at Aikido exhibitions where she teaches Aikido techniques she modified for use from a seated position.

Is such healing possible for those without access to former Olympic coaches, heated pools, horseback riding lessons, massage and acupuncture? When asked if people without such innovative, high quality care can see levels of nerve return comparable to hers, Molly’s frustration at the traditional medical community becomes apparent. “If rehabs did their jobs and addressed mind-body issues, yes,” she said.

“I participated in a study for the V.A. and was found to have lung capacity at 125% more than expected. Instead of asking me, ‘what are you doing right?’ they threw out my data.”

Even though there is a lack of access to alternate healing methods within the traditional medical community, Molly believes “anyone can still do alternative therapies because the information on movement methods is online. People can find pools in their areas, and I’m going to release a series of videos detailing my water therapy so people can watch them instead of hiring a physical therapist.”



Molly not only hopes to bring alternative healing methods to mainstream spinal cord injury rehabilitation, she also continues to develop herself through her martial art. “Aikido teaches me to touch without harm,” she explained, “I have learned to honor and love the divinity in each person and I am polishing myself to bring gentle love, not harmful love, to the world.”

SARAH TRUE

Sarah True was a 16-year old varsity basketball, volleyball and Junior Olympics track athlete when her life was abruptly overturned. In 1992 an auto accident left her with spinal cord injuries at two levels: one at T-9/10 leaving her a paraplegic and one at C7 limiting her trunk control and giving her tingly, yet usable, fingers. Before her injury, “art was for my brother,” she said, but “when I went back to high school, I needed an outlet for my energy.” That outlet became photography and eventually film production.

True Rose Productions, Sarah’s video production company, became her side project while she worked towards a degree in Fine Arts. Then her life took yet another drastic turn.

“My doctors told me that the first ten years post-injury are the most critical,” Sarah said, “After eight years, your needs change. I needed a new cushion, but my insurance company wouldn’t cover it and I got a pressure sore that ruptured. I spent the next two years in the hospital fighting infection after infection, having surgery after surgery.” Sarah had moved from her native Arizona to live in San Francisco, where she sought alternative care after organ failure following her eventual release from the hospital. “My body responded much better to Chinese medicine,” she said, “and my alternative medicine doctor suggested a whole body routine.”

Sarah found that routine by chance at a walk-in recreation center that offered free Karate in a neighborhood where “people get mugged monthly.” After watching a class, she asked instructor Anne Lundbom “Can you help me? Can I be part of this?” Anne responded: “Of course!” and “What’s your level of functionality?” in that order. Sarah had found a supportive instructor to



guide her through the routine that brought her back to health and got her life back on track.

“Martial arts impacted my life in so many ways,” Sarah explained excitedly, “each class was more than kicking, punching and blocking. We did meditation and learned life skills, such as role playing in attack situations, where we had to talk down an attacker without touching. We would learn Tae Kwon Do forms and work on personal goals. For each belt test, students had to do volunteer work in the community based on one of the martial art’s codes: modesty, integrity, perseverance, self-control and indomitable spirit.” After a while, Sarah gained physical strength by doing floor exercises and hitting paddles.

“I could keep up with my able-bodied classmates, and I developed the confidence as I learned I wasn’t a victim anymore. I knew if someone came at me that I could handle it. I carried myself differently. I also learned how my life affects others and I started to plan my future.”

Sarah has returned to Arizona, where she is pursuing a degree in micro-biology with a minor in chemistry. “I’m shadowing a C5 quad who’s a primary care doctor. If I do well on my MCAT, I want to go to medical school and become a primary care physician too,” she said. She also hopes to tie in her experience with holistic therapies.

Sarah wants to fight competitively and has taken classes in Hapkido and martial arts at Northern Arizona University. “My next martial art will depend on the teacher, not the style,” she said, “and I want my black belt!”

RON SCANLON

“I called the Kung Fu San Soo school as a last resort,” said Ron Scanlon, now a Master of San Soo and career martial arts instructor. Ron, who received a T-10/11 spinal cord injury at age 9 in an auto accident, grew up a disabled kid in the ‘60’s. Now he’s arguably the best known wheelchair martial artist in the United States.

It all began when Ron was a frustrated teenager. At a restless age and at a time when athletics and accessibility were not public issues, 17 year old Ron “had all this pent up energy and no outlet.” Ron said he “called all the martial arts schools near me in southern California. Near the bottom of the list was this Kung Fu San Soo school, and when instructor Bill Lasiter said I could come down, I figured he was starving for students. I couldn’t have been more wrong. He was running a thriving school! Plus San Soo already had techniques to fight from the ground and from a sitting position, so it wasn’t a stretch for a guy in a chair to fit in.” In 1973, when Ron started studying San Soo, the art had only been in America for 11 years. Ron was able to get in at the cutting edge of the American martial arts world before the great expansion in the 1980’s.

“From then on, I ate, drank, and slept San Soo. In the summer the school ran three classes a day, five days a week and I would try to make them all,” he said. Ron’s life began to change almost immediately. “Training in anything that develops skill promotes confidence. Back then I didn’t have a lot of friends, but martial arts opened me up and my confidence grew,” he explained. “I was welcomed as a student in the San Soo community and developed lifelong relationships there. We practiced together, got injured together and healed together.” Even though he was the first student in a wheelchair to study San Soo, he wasn’t cut any slack. “Nothing was given to me. I had to achieve it on my own; no one treated me like a disabled guy,” Ron said. He tested for and won his black belt in 1977, four years after starting his training, and got his Masters degree ten years later.

Ron’s commitment to his art and passion as a teacher led him to a career as a San Soo instructor, a profession he’s enjoyed for over 30 years. He has run a number of schools, including ones in West Los Angeles, Marina del Rey, the Casa Colina rehabilitation center in Pomona (where he recovered as a child), and most recently a San Soo school in Rancho Cucamonga. “We just had our first class on Monday [June 1st, 2009] in giving demonstrations and holding seminars on fighting and self-defense from a wheelchair.”

Above all, Ron is a teacher. “I want my students to grow and I enjoy taking the journey with them,” he said. “It’s great to have a someone walk in with no idea what they’re getting into, with no fitness and very fearful, and then see that change. I enjoy even the smallest of my students’ achievements, both the natural learners and the ones who struggle.” But he is no easier on them than Grandmaster Bill Lasiter was on him. “They have to toughen up, mentally, physically and emotionally, but it’s not just tough guys who can do it. Anyone can, but everyone has to sweat. It’s not like you see in the movies – you are preparing for a fight and you gotta be ready for it.”

“Martial arts makes you confident so fewer people would mess with you. You’re not immune to being attacked; it just cuts down on it a lot.”

Ron’s goal is to grow his new school in Rancho Cucamonga while also giving other martial arts instructors the tools they need to teach students with disabilities. He hopes that in the future people in wheelchairs don’t have to go through a list of martial arts centers before finding one that will accept them. He is currently putting together a set of videos to provide online training to fighters in wheelchairs and their instructors. He also hopes to network with other martial artists with disabilities to share their knowledge and spread the message that anyone can study the martial arts.

JENNIFER LONGDON

Why are you so different from the other patients?” Jen Longdon’s physical therapist asked her one spring afternoon in 2009. After studying the others in the clinic, Jen replied, “It’s my martial arts training. I’m an expert at pushing myself and at working towards goals until I get there.”

Jen, a Chicago native, became enamored with the martial arts after taking a Chimera women’s self defense class. “I was not as impressed by the fighting techniques as I was by the street smarts and awareness that we were taught. I realized how limited I had let my life become. I would make sure I came home early so I wouldn’t have to catch the late train and I wouldn’t go out alone at night. These are things men take for granted, but what we women often don’t realize is very limiting.” After the Chimera class, Jen “not only wanted to learn, but to teach and advocate this mindset,” so she dedicated herself to winning a Kenpo black belt. She got it in 1987 at the age of 27. She then began studying Jujitsu and won a jujitsu black belt in 1990. She did not participate in martial arts competitions until later, when she started studying Tae Kwon Do.

Involved with her then-fiancé David, “I moved to Arizona and became Jennifer Ruecker, as well as a Tae Kwon Do instructor and four-time world champion,” she explains. “In 2004 I got my third black belt, this time in Tae Kwon Do. At that time our lives revolved around the martial arts.” Their training was cut short when they were coming home from the dojo on a typical Monday night in November, 2004, after Jen finished teaching a kickboxing class. “I woke up the next morning in intensive care,” she told Penzeys One magazine in 2007. “My son was



holding my hand and the doctor came in and told me I was paralyzed.” She and David had been the victims of a drive-by shooting, just like thousands of Americans every year. Jen suffered a complete spinal cord injury at the T4 level and David was shot three times, leaving him blind. The police have yet to solve the crime.

“I spent a notoriously short three months in rehab and went to live with friends while continuing outpatient physical therapy. I did fitness training, but didn’t return to the martial arts.” During this time neither she nor David were working, so they lost their house, their furniture, their car and even their dogs. Jen was used to starting from scratch and methodically working towards long term goals. Eight months after they were injured, she and David were able to move back in together. One blind, the other in a wheelchair, they would workout and cook together. David often did the muscle work and while Jen did the fine tuning.

Their lives continued as such until, in March of 2008, a complication of her spinal cord injury forced Jen to reevaluate her life. “I was in the hospital. A doctor, a social worker and a chaplain were all there. They had given me 12 hours to live.”

Again, martial arts training helped her pull through, “I realized that I needed a big goal to strive for in order to stay alive,” and Jen latched onto spinal cord injury research. “There, dying in the hospital, I started talking incessantly about raising money for research. The staff and my friends thought I had gone crazy!”

Jen followed through on her goal by attempting to raise \$1,000 for the Reeve-Irvine Research Center to find a cure for spinal cord injuries.

After she left the hospital, Jen could not sit in her chair for more than 20 minutes at a time, but she was determined to get sponsors and push through a half-marathon just four months

away. “It was like going from white to black belt all over again,” she says. “Sitting in my chair for a few minutes was like being a white belt. Going to the mail box was like getting a yellow belt, and pushing around the block was like getting an orange belt. The half marathon: that was my black belt.”

She got pledges, she got sponsors and she got back into shape. She even recruited her Tae Kwon Do teacher to race with her in a wheelchair even though he is able-bodied. Once again, Jen met her goal and finished the half marathon.

Jen also knows that one major goal at a time is enough. Since the race, she has been focusing on physical therapy. “I’m not training in the martial arts, but not because I’m lazy!” she says. “My life is hectic. I have a child and a new career as well as a personal life.”

Part of her hectic existence includes being a life coach and moderating an online forum helping people with SCI issues. She also engages in public speaking and works as a consultant, training staff to help people with disabilities vote, and teaching them how to deal with clients with disabilities. “In each case, my message is the same,” she says, “I tell them to see people with disabilities as people above all else.”



THE DIFFERENT STYLES OF MARTIAL ARTS

Choosing between martial arts styles can be bewildering to new students. Many see choosing a martial art as a lifelong commitment, and in traditional martial arts that used to be true. In the modern martial arts world, though, schools are not as driven by loyalty, secrecy and tradition, making it easier to navigate the community and choose the art that’s right for you.

The first thing an aspiring martial arts student should remember is that choosing a school should not be binding. If an instructor makes you feel that way, that school is best avoided. The second thing a student must remember is that even if a particular dojo appears to fit your lifestyle and philosophy, if the instructor is not interested in including disabled students, you should join elsewhere. You should look for an instructor who immediately welcomes you.

Most attempts at classifying martial arts rely on “lineage,” or the origin of a particular art, be it in Japan, China, Korea, Southeast Asia or elsewhere. This is troublesome because it is difficult to prove where ancient fighting forms are rooted, especially those sharing influences between historically opposed countries. Lineage also has little to do with whether or not the style is suitable for someone with a spinal cord injury. Martial arts are also classified as “hard” or “soft” and “close” or “long range” styles. These are qualitative and inexact measures. Another classification system sorts schools by being sports based, tradition based, health based, or self-defense based. Regardless of classification, there is a lot of overlap between styles.

For the purpose explaining martial arts to people with spinal cord injuries, lineage, tradition, hard and soft descriptions will be shelved in favor of a classification system based on the combination of mental versus physical techniques and the art’s mobility requirements. The martial arts covered here are: Tai Chi, Aikido,

Tae Kwon Do, Karate, Judo, Jujitsu, Combat Hapkido and Mixed Martial Arts, listed in rough order from arts stressing mental development to those stressing physical techniques.

Tai Chi is a slow, meditative martial art originating in China—the one you see old people doing in the park in the early morning hours. It is a traditional martial art, with slow movements, although some schools include faster practice routines and two person routines.

Aikido has its roots in Jujitsu, but has been mixed with a pacifist philosophy and the desire to lock and control an opponent rather than injure or kill. Aikido practitioners use large sweeping movements based on sword technique. These big motions can be difficult to execute for those with poor trunk control, but are good for developing core strength. Aikido has a heavy focus on meditation, cooperation, and breathing. It has a huge network of dojos across the United States.

Traditional Tae Kwon Do is a founded Korean martial art. In most schools there is a strong focus on athleticism, physical conditioning, and sometimes meditation. It is a kicking-focused martial art and not necessarily practical for someone in a wheelchair, but a talented teacher can work with any student. There are two major divisions of Tae Kwon Do in the United States, both of which have vast networks of dojangs. Tae Kwon Do is an Olympic sport.

Karate is a blend of native Okinawan and southern Chinese fighting techniques. Karate traditionalists tend to stress the lineage of their styles and may not wish to alter technique for the disabled, but it's all up to the instructor's willingness to adapt. Karate uses punches and kicks in roughly equal measure, and some Karate styles have a meditation period before and after class.

Below are normal practices in martial arts schools that may be unfamiliar or daunting to new students:

- ▶ A system to automatically deduct monthly tuition from a bank account or credit card—this saves your instructor the time it would take to chase down monthly payments.
- ▶ Discounts for students who pay for a year in advance, as long as a monthly payment system is also available.
- ▶ Closed classes for higher ranked students. Most martial arts instructors sagely reserve the more complicated moves for the more experienced students.
- ▶ Junior instructors teaching some classes; *it's part of their learning process and students will benefit from different teaching styles.*
- ▶ Some criticism of other martial arts; most martial arts instructors feel their style is the best and will tell you so, but they should still acknowledge that different students have different needs.
- ▶ People getting slightly injured. Minor accidental injuries are common at all ranks and in all systems.
- ▶ Yelling. This can be very motivating.
- ▶ Pounding of fists, arms and legs aimed at toughening up skin and bones. This is more common in very traditional martial arts.
- ▶ Hard physical workouts. Students should be encouraged to complete the workout, but not be humiliated if unable to do so.
- ▶ A great deal of respect paid to the instructor, including a bowing ritual before and after class and bowing to photographs of deceased instructors. Respect for elders and ancestor worship are normal in Asia.
- ▶ Swearing and simulation of high-stress attack situations in class. This prepares students for the real thing, but in a safe environment.

These are some warning signs of schools to stay away from:

- ▶ High fees. Call around your area and ask for the monthly fee. If the teacher won't tell you over the phone what the fee is, or if the fee is much higher than that at other schools, stay away.
- ▶ Fees due on a yearly basis without the availability of a monthly/quarterly payment plan.
- ▶ Students are expected to take private lessons, attend expensive seminars and/or camps as a sign of commitment. Students are frequently pressured to bring their friends and family to class.
- ▶ No option to try out a class or two before making a financial commitment.
- ▶ No visiting or watching classes allowed.
- ▶ Only adult men or only one race is represented in the class.
- ▶ There is a huge skill gap between the teacher and the students (except in brand new schools).
- ▶ There is no tolerance for criticism of the instructor or there seems to be instructor worship.
- ▶ An unapproachable, aloof instructor.
- ▶ You are told that you could earn a black belt in under two years, especially if the program is more expensive than normal class fees.
- ▶ Classes are only taught by junior instructors while the senior instructor is absent or watches without comment.
- ▶ A great deal of class time is spent criticizing or making fun of other martial arts, and/or “toughening up” or punishing students with pain and/or humiliation.

Finally, the martial arts are not for everyone. Any learning should bring confidence, and if you find practicing the martial arts to not be enjoyable, you should look for another activity.

