

# Martial art expert says women should fight back



Robert Pelletier of Simply Defense teaches Joan Mannal of Georgetown what to do if attacked with a knife. Mr. Pelletier teaches women how to defend themselves against attackers during his four to five-week defense course. (Herald photo)

By DONNA KELL  
Herald Staff

Women in their ivory towers pretending rape or sexual assault could never happen to them should come down to earth, said a local martial arts expert.

Robert Pelletier who runs the Rockwood business Simply Defense, aims to guard women against attackers, who are usually males.

There were 174 reported cases of sexual assault in Halton last year, according to Halton Regional Police statistics. But experts say anywhere from 60 to 90 per cent of rapes and sexual assaults are not reported.

Sexual assault can be defined as any form of unwanted sexual touching or could be as extreme as forced sexual intercourse.

"It's a substantial percentage that are not reported," said Vicky Henderson, chairperson of Sexual Assault Services of Halton (SASH).

"In most cases, people are sexually assaulted by people they know. That's one of the reasons it's difficult for people to report."

Attackers have "the upper hand" Mr. Pelletier said. "Not only with strength and intimidation, but they have the element of surprise."

He said 80 per cent of attacks are by surprise. And 60 per cent of assaults are premeditated.

The attacker could be the boy-next-door, the postman, or the doc-

tor as easily as it could be a stranger.

There are "danger areas" women should avoid, the martial arts expert said. Danger zones include underground parking garages (where a recent rash of rapes took place in Mississauga and Metropolitan Toronto), laundry rooms, bus shelters and buses at night, elevators, stair wells and surprisingly someone's own home in broad daylight.

Women feel safe in their homes during the day and might leave the doors unlocked. This could allow an attacker to rape a woman and ransack her home, Mr. Pelletier said.

And women are often attacked near their homes, he said, so defense is important, even if you don't travel often.

"Women should take the time to learn effective techniques."

"It's like a recipe book. You could have all those ingredients but you don't make the recipe."

There are many passive women who take Mr. Pelletier's month-long course. They begin by thinking the best defense is to submit to an attacker's demands.

"I teach women how to fight back, how to survive," Mr. Pelletier said. "I tell them, you're not a victim. You don't have to be."

Every day there are stories - real and fictitious - of women being attacked. Women are portrayed as victims, attacked by men who have been trained to defend themselves, and be aggressive

since childhood, Mr. Pelletier says.

"When women are confronted with an attacker, they fear the worst. Why? Because the media always focuses on the worst. In movies and in the media women are being mutilated."

This is called "subliminal conditioning," Mr. Pelletier said. It is a concept referred to in his self defense course.

But only a few choice maneuvers are required to stop would-be attackers.

"My techniques are very simple and effective, and they have stopping power. I don't complicate them with all kinds of complicated techniques."

Rape and other forms of sexual assault can happen to females anywhere from six months of age to 90-years of age. "It's a very sick society out there," Mr. Pelletier said.

"If I could help just one woman, that would be worth it, wouldn't it?"

But he hopes to change this society through instruction to groups of 20 women at a time. He wants to change woman's submissive roles as a victim and stop attackers in their tracks.

Groups interested in attending Mr. Pelletier's 'Simply Defense' course in Acton or in Georgetown this fall can write: Simply Defense, P. O. Box 294, Rockwood, Ont. N0B 2K0.

## Rape centre changes name

Sexual Assault Services of Halton will get a new name and a new location in Halton later this year.

SASH will change its name to the Halton Rape Crisis Centre where volunteers will counsel women in person and over the phone.

SASH presently works out of Halton Women's Place. The new home for SASH will be located in Oakville.

SASH deals with hundreds of women who are sexually assaulted in the Region each year, said chairperson Vicky Henderson.

Interested volunteers can call 842-1899. SASH, soon to be the Rape Crisis Centre, needs volunteers for September.

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