

Petro Points



with Maggie Petrushevsky

What do you do when you have to walk past the crowd at the corner of Mill and Willow Streets?

Do you decide to do your business in another part of town? Do you cross the street and avoid them? Do you grit your teeth and march through the bunch figuring you'll have to deck one of them if they get too lippy?

The first of the three nights in d.r. McGregor's EZ Defence course at Classic Karate provided a forum for considering exactly how to handle that situation and others like it.

The course starts pairing participants for an exercise on recognizing your own

Dealing with abusive street toughs

personal boundaries. One person plays the postman, the other the customer. When meeting the postman - a known but not close personal acquaintance - how close will you allow the person to come to exchange greetings and receive the mail? For most, the distance is arm's length, about 18 inches.

My years in the Slavic and Jewish communities - where kissing both cheeks or hugging is considered a normal greeting even between mere acquaintances - has apparently altered my personal space requirements. I am quite comfortable at 10 to 12 inches distance.

Then came an exercise in how to avoid unwanted touching, d.R. and his wife demonstrated suitable and unsuitable techniques by portraying a drunk making

a pass at a fellow party goer with whom he might have a passing acquaintance.

The first reaction - trying to sidestep and turning sideways to the drunk - was submissive and no deterrent. Although she was huddled in an "upright fetal" position he closed in and hugged her anyway.

The appropriate move is to meet the aggressor head on, taking each extended hand in your own hand and bringing them down between you in a crossed position. While you don't seem to be making any overtly aggressive rejection the end result puts two pairs of crossed arms between you and effectively blocks contact without causing pain or an embarrassing scene.

The drunk will probably walk away shaking his head. He might not even realize he didn't get his hug but your dignity is still intact and your self confidence soars because the entire incident passed in moments without any lingering recriminations.

This sort of simple but effective manoeuvre is what the course is all about. Size, strength, physical fitness don't count. This is using your head, knowing what reaction fear will cause, accepting it and knowing how to use the adrenaline surge the fear causes. You won't become some sort of expert in any of the various types of self defence. But neither do you have to be trapped in your home or vehicle because you suspect someone will attack you if you leave it.

The first lesson d.r. stresses is the old adage about using your head. If you're warned about entering a specific area of a city at night, for example, then heed the advice. If you are walking along and suspect an oncoming person may be unsavoury, cross the street to avoid confrontation. Be aware of your surroundings and use them to your advantage.

When you find yourself confronted and can't avoid



WHAT ARE YOU STARING AT?: Halton Regional Police Constable Jason Mathers, left, plays the 'woofer' (antagonist) facing course participant Martin Oskam of Guelph during the recent EZ Defense course offered at Classic Karate. - Maggie Petrushevsky photo

the situation, don't belittle yourself for feeling fear. Just don't show it. Look your antagonist in the eye. Respond to his patter briefly, calmly, authoritatively. Don't antagonize him but don't be afraid to turn up the volume if he does.

"What do you want? Step aside. I don't know you. Leave me alone."

Keep two to three times that comfort distance - probably six to 10 feet - between you. Start with your hands in front of you, palms up, at your waist. If the threat escalates or the predator comes closer, raise your hands, still palms up and open. And so on.

The second half of the training was on how to cope if the oncoming stranger suddenly threatened you with a knife. d.r. equipped course participants with a foam bat and expected each to beat on the assailant's arm until he dropped and provided the opportunity for his victim to run through a "window of safety".

It was an interesting experience.

The three-session course will be offered again this fall.



NO BITES: Garry Fraser of Acton found the fish weren't biting Saturday morning. They were coming to the surface to remind him the big ones are down there in Fairy Lake, but he couldn't coax even a nibble out of them. Adam Pawluch left, was checking for nibbles from shore. - Maggie Petrushevsky photo

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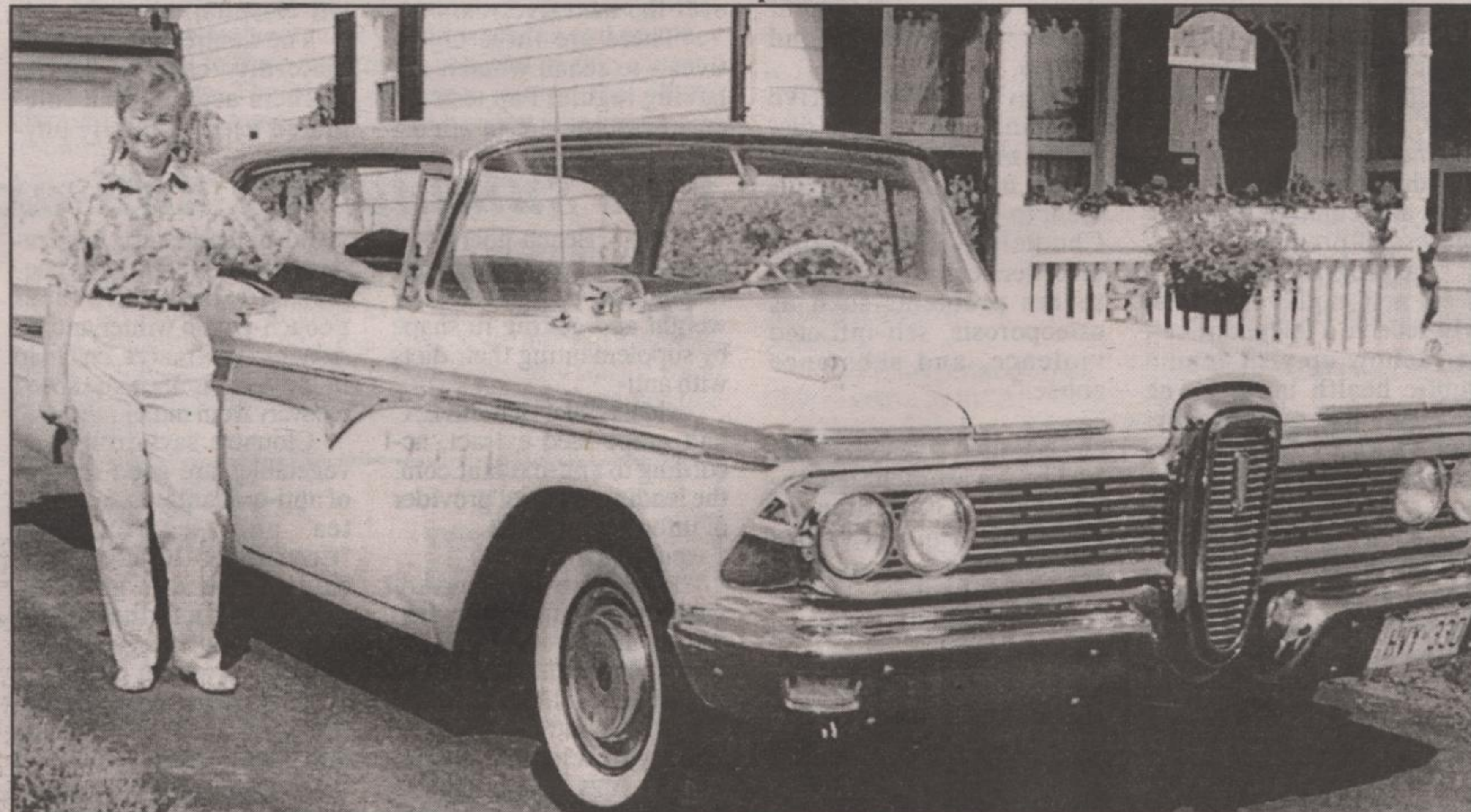
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IT'S A WINNER: Carole Norton poses with her classic 1959 Edsel, deemed first in its class in the Classics Against Cancer show earlier this year. Norton's mint green car, in "mint" condition, will be at the Show 'n' Shine in Prospect Park on Saturday. Participants will help to raise funds for the Acton Agricultural Society's new building. - Maggie Petrushevsky photo