



A WATCHFUL EYE

Staying Alert is the Key to Promoting Personal Safety

BY LISSA POIROT

THE NEWS OF A MISSING 54-YEAR-OLD WOMAN on the Silver Comet Trail caught everyone's attention. On July 25, avid biker Jennifer Ewing, who often rode 50 miles on the trail, did not return home. A day later, Cobb County police found Ewing's body. She had been sexually assaulted and brutally beaten to death.

Ewing was a mother of three who resided in Sandy Springs. She was physically fit and exercising on a popular trail during the daylight hours. When tragedies like these strike, it makes a community more alert to their surroundings. Once the headlines fade away, however, people easily fall prey to a false sense of security.

The crime statistics are chilling. One out of every four women is raped during her lifetime, which is a woman every 5.1 minutes, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. Carjackings are also on the rise, with more than 50,000 annually across the country and 70 percent involving the use of firearms. More than six million break-ins occur — one every 10 seconds — in U.S. residences annually. There is no doubt you have experienced a racing heart when you entered a dimly lit parking garage or heard too many bumps in the night. What, if anything, can be done to ensure you and your family's safety?

After talking with several safety experts it appears there are three basic steps to ward off attacks and potentially save your life: awareness, prevention and preparation.

Awareness is a Powerful Weapon

How often have you driven home, only to find yourself wondering how you got there or bumped into someone on the street because you were so engrossed in your cell phone conversation? Being caught up in our own worlds make us easy targets, which is why safety professionals stress the No. 1 rule of personal safety — be aware of your surroundings.

"As human beings, we naturally had this self-defense tool but we've been conditioned otherwise to always be doing something. It's what I call the list of 500 things, the list of things we have running through our heads that keep us distracted. We need to retrain [ourselves] to shut off the list and concentrate on what's going on in our environment," said Lorne Coleman, founder and director of DeKalb County-based ESCAPE Self-Defense Programs, which teaches self-defense courses across the country.

Survivors of personal attacks share a common story: the person who attacked them seemed to come out of nowhere. But that's not true, said Kathy Lynn, an instructor with Dynamic Self Defense International in Marietta, adding the person attacked may have been too distracted to notice the shady character approaching. The Silver Comet Trail, which begins in Cobb County and stretches into Alabama, is policed daily on foot, bike, motorcycle and car, yet people are often surprised when a police officer comes up behind

more difficultly if he is outnumbered. In many situations of criminal behavior, be it a carjacking, a burglary or a rape, there are some levels of precaution you can take to put yourself out of harm's way. One of the easiest is to trust your instincts.

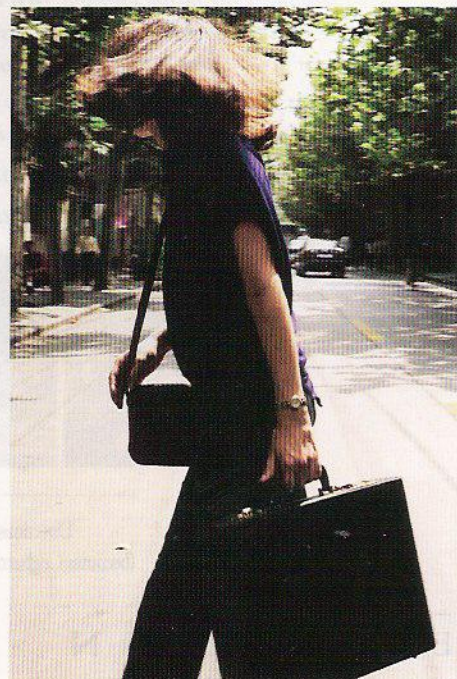
"If you get a bad feeling about a person or a place, it is best to trust your gut and remove yourself. Too many times survivors of attacks say, 'I had a bad feeling, but ...,'" Coleman said.

Reprogramming your social conditioning

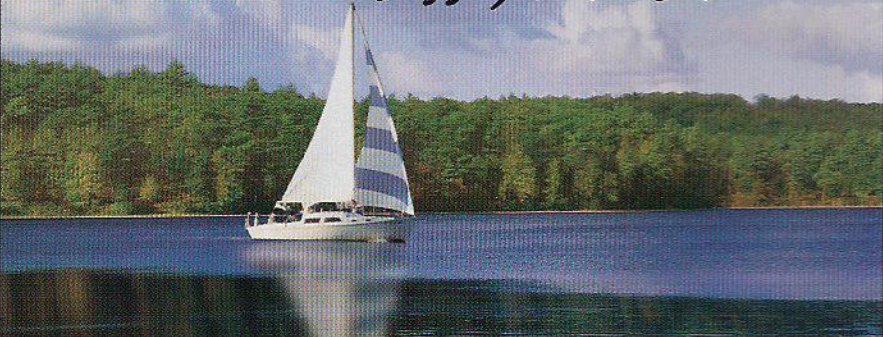
is another precaution necessary in these more violent times. "We're all taught to be polite and non-combative. But no matter how innocent the situation looks, you don't stop. I don't care if they look like someone's grandmother, you need to keep a good distance from a stranger and try to figure out what it is they are after. Look around and make sure they are alone, as well, because there are so many cons that go around these days," Lynn said.

Taking the right precautions to secure yourself is actually quite simple: use common sense when you are in a potentially dangerous situation or area; walk with confidence and appear as though you know where you are going even if you've forgotten where you parked the car; walk with plenty of space between you and a building or bushes where someone could hide; and don't wear expensive jewelry or clothing in unfamiliar areas or while traveling. When driving, park in well-lit and crowded parking areas; look into the backseat before getting in to be sure no one is hiding; lock the doors the moment you get in; and don't leave your purse or wallet on the passenger seat or dashboard, especially when driving with open windows.

A level of preparedness also includes role-playing "what-if" scenarios. When in a




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"You're not trying to get involved in a big fight, you're trying to do enough to get to safety, to get an attacker off of you or away from you so you can run."

STAN PAGEANT
Secured Perimeters

car, think about what you would do if a person came to the window with a gun. While jogging, know where to run for safety. "Always play these 'what-if' games through to victory," Lynn said. "Play them through to where you have left the scene and gotten yourself to help."

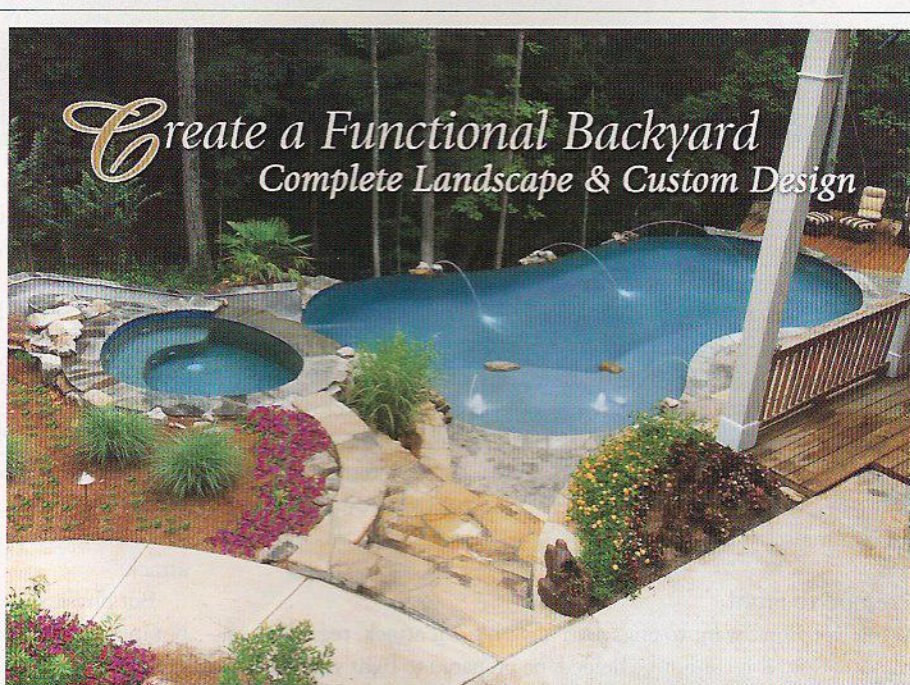
Raise Cain and Run

But what if you've done all you can to avoid danger and still find yourself in a sticky situation? Now what? It's time to let animal instincts take over by doing what is done in nature. A dog will bark, a snake will hiss, a porcupine will raise his quills. These animals aren't gearing up to attack, rather they are making it known that they sense danger and are warning an attacker to stay away. If you find yourself confronting a suspicious stranger, make eye contact, call for help, and let the person know you have no intention of being an easy target.

"The mind of someone who can hurt you, the psychopathic mind, is looking for a victim," Lynn said. "Statistics show that if you just stand up and get loud and aggressive, point your finger and scream, these psychopaths will back off and say, 'This is not the victim I was looking for. This person is ready to fight.' That takes away from what attracted them to you in the first place, that dominating they need to do. They realize they will not dominate you easily."

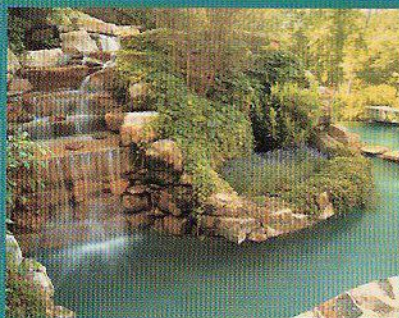
While Corporal Pierce agreed, he strongly urged flight over fight. "Confront them, raise Cain, scream, blow a whistle, use an air horn — whatever you can do to get away. Don't engage in a fight because if they catch you, you have to survive it. The longer an attacker has control over you, the less likely you are to survive, which is why you need to get away."

Removing yourself from danger is the rule of thumb in every criminal situation. For example, attacks that may not be



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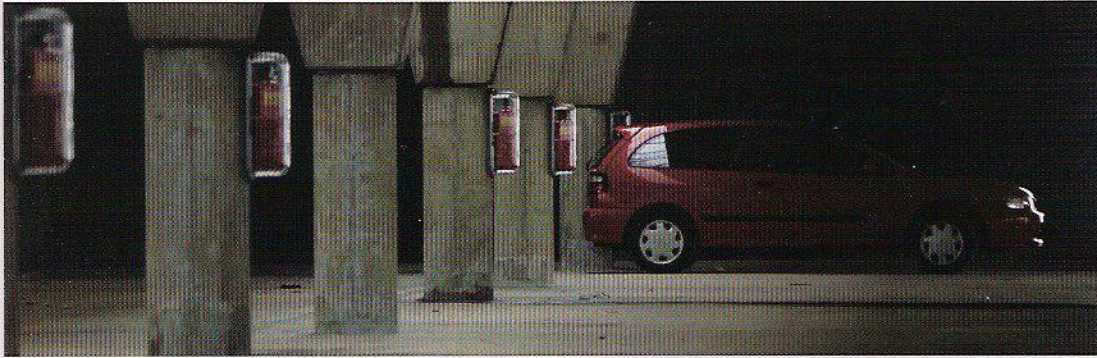
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personal, such as a carjacking, are not worth a confrontation when the gamble is your life. Thieves typically just want the car, and most recorded carjackings do not result in injuries to the victims. The best option is to simply hand over the keys to the car and remove yourself from the scene as quickly as possible. If children are in the car, attempt to reason with the carjacker, offering your purse, wallet and car if you can just have your children. Carjackers do not want to be kidnappers and will most likely not target people with children in the car. In fact, many stories that circulate about carjackings involving children were in situations where a parent left a child in an idling car while they ran into a store or home. Do not make it easy for criminals, Lynn warned.

Prepare to Fight

While you don't want to engage in any physical attack, regardless of the situation, if it cannot be helped, be prepared to fight your way to safety. Negotiate with the attacker, distract him, stall until help can arrive or physically defend yourself. Every attack is different and only you can decide how to survive it, unanimously repeated the safety professionals. Prepare for the day to come where you need to defend yourself by taking self-defense courses. Coleman's ESCAPE program, for example, is unique in that it trains people to fight under adrenaline-based conditions, meaning they recreate attack scenarios to allow your body's own fight-or-flight response to kick in as if you were really under attack.

"Being under attack affects your mental state and raises your heart rate. If you're going to defend yourself in real life, you have to know how to fight under these circumstances. Real fighting isn't perfect

karate kicks, it's tripping and falling; it's messy. You can have all the tools in the world and be a black belt in karate, but if you cannot function under this adrenaline state, you won't survive," Coleman asserted.

Corporal Pierce admitted self-defense training is beneficial, but only if you do it often, as it's the practice that makes it life saving. "As a police officer, I continuously train to the point that if an attacker is coming after me, I immediately grab for my gun. It has become instinctual. If you're properly trained, your body will engage immediately. If not, you will start to question what it is you were suppose to do and that delay is all the time the suspect needs to harm you."

Added Lynn, "You need to train until you start getting that conditioned response. That is when you've done palm strikes and knee strikes so many times that when attacked, even though you will go into some level of shock, your body will take over and fend off the attack."

But physical confrontations with attackers are not meant to be a boxing match in which you are left standing above your knocked-out opponent. Self-defense training, such as the Fight Back and Body Guard programs that Pageant provides, teaches every technique you can use to escape such as gauging eyes, stomping on feet, kicking out knees, and elbow strikes to the face.

"You're not trying to get involved in a big fight, you're trying to do enough to get to safety, to get an attacker off of you or away from you so you can run," Pageant said.

While Ewing lost what evidence at the scene proved to be a fierce fight, the safety professionals all commend her fighting spirit. Corporal Pierce reminded those of us shaken by her death not to become prisoners of our fear or to feel we can't do what we want to do. Just remember these stages of personal safety and you'll remain one step ahead of a potential attack. ♦

SELF-DEFENSE TRAINING

Dynamic Self Defense International

404-661-2740; www.dynamicselfdefense.com

Formerly known as Modern Defense, this reality-based and practical self-defense school also provides women's self-defense courses ranging from two to 12 hours. The movements taught are designed to allow people of any age and size to defend themselves from larger attackers.

ESCAPE Self-Defense Programs

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