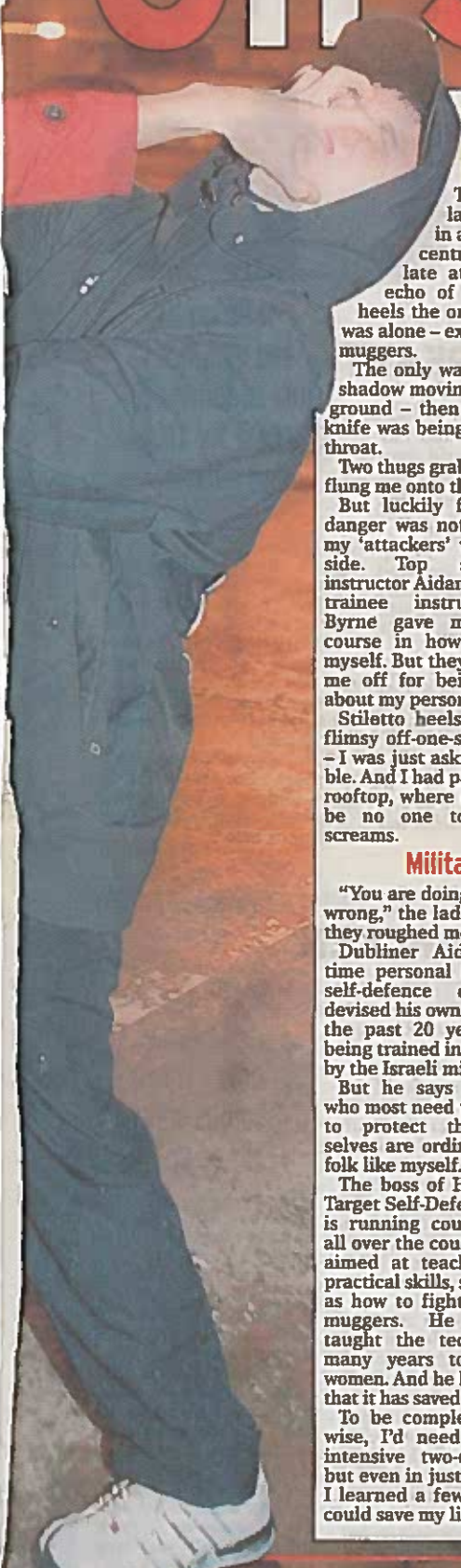


WORLD WOMAN

On Stilettos



It's every girl's nightmare. There I was last weekend, in a Dublin city centre carpark late at night, the echo of my stiletto heels the only sound. I was alone - except for two muggers.

The only warning was a shadow moving across the ground - then suddenly a knife was being held to my throat.

Two thugs grabbed me and flung me onto the floor. But luckily for me, the danger was not real. And my 'attackers' were on my side. Top self-defence instructor Aidan Carroll and trainee instructor Paul Byrne gave me a crash course in how to defend myself. But they also ticked me off for being careless about my personal safety.

Stiletto heels, mini-skirt, flimsy off-one-shoulder top - I was just asking for trouble. And I had parked on the rooftop, where there would be no one to hear my screams.

Military

"You are doing everything wrong," the lads told me as they roughed me up.

Dubliner Aidan, a full-time personal trainer and self-defence coach, has devised his own system over the past 20 years, having been trained in martial arts by the Israeli military.

But he says the people who most need to learn how to protect themselves are ordinary folk like myself.

The boss of Hard Target Self-Defence is running courses all over the country aimed at teaching practical skills, such as how to fight off muggers. He has taught the technique for many years to men and women. And he has no doubt that it has saved lives.

To be completely street-wise, I'd need to do the intensive two-day course, but even in just a few hours I learned a few tricks that could save my life.



It's quiet, nobody is around to help and your attacker is bigger and stronger... but, as **GERALDINE COMISKEY** finds out, there is plenty you can do to fight back and escape

Until then, I had thought I was fairly savvy; on rare occasions when I walk alone at night, I make sure to look as if I know where I'm going - even when I don't. Like most people, I've had a few scary experiences, but have been lucky.

But after a session with Aidan and Paul, I realised I had been putting an unfair burden on my guardian angel and random strangers. If ever anyone needed to learn 'self defence for bimbos', it was yours truly.

During my session with Aidan and Paul on the roof of a car park, I felt real fear as they took turns to 'mug' me.

"If ever there was anyone who needed to learn 'self defence for bimbos', it was yours truly"

The action looked so real that a security guard rushed up to the roof to try and rescue me.

But Aidan pointed out that even the most vigilant security guards might not be able to save me from the real deal - it all happens so quickly.

In just a few hours they swiped my bag, 'strangled' me and even acted out a rape-attempt.

For a man, it is so easy - all he has to do was put his hands around my neck and I am helpless.

Or so I thought, until Aidan showed me how to fling the 'rapist' onto his back and escape.

Instead of clawing at his face, which he kept out of reach, or trying to push his off my neck, all I had to do was flick his hands to either side, keeping my thumbs beside my forefingers to turn my hands into paddles - and then swiftly thrust upwards with my hips to buck him off.

Throw

"I have seen a seven-stone woman throw off a 12-stone man using this technique," Aidan said.

Once I had flung Paul onto the ground, my first instinct was to run away. But first I had to make sure he wouldn't follow me.

"Go on, dig your nails in! And look aggressive!" Aidan urged me as I gently pressed Paul's eyelids, while half-heartedly shoving the heel of my hand against his mouth. I would find it a lot easier to claw the eyes out of a real

rapist, I was sure - though it got easier when he grabbed my hair. Snarling, I shoved Paul's head against the floor.

"Scream!" Aidan yelled. I can shriek like a horror-movie vamp when faced with a spider, but not when I'm in real danger - like most people, I'm too scared!

Aidan told me to run while Paul's eyes were 'bleeding' as they would be if I had really used my nails. "But keep looking back over your shoulder at him while you run," he added.

Aidan added that I should never have parked in a deserted part of the car park anyway. I do it because I'm afraid of scratching my car, but Aidan warned that I could end up in a tight spot. "Always park on the lower



★ Aidan is offering two Sunday World readers a free two-day self-defence course, valued at €150 per person. For details, check out his website www.hardtargetselfdefence.com.

levels where there are lots of cars - to increase the chance of someone seeing you.

Lurking

"But if you must park on the roof, park right beside the ramps so, as you walk back to your car, you can see it from below - and anyone lurking beside it."

I saw what Aidan meant when he 'hid' beside my car. As I walked around to open the door, he pounced.

Another mistake I made was to open the boot to put my bag in, without looking around.

And I should not have parked the nose of the car towards the wall anyway, Aidan added. "Always reverse back into the parking space so you can make a quick getaway."

I find backing-in a bit stressful. Still, I managed it on my driving test, so I reckoned I could do it to save my life.

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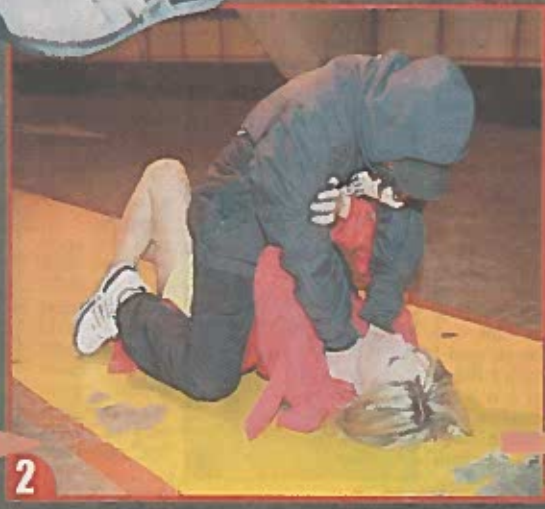
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