

Salem woman fights violent crime by teaching how not to be a victim

By **TERRI CASSELL**
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While congressional representatives wrangle with President Clinton's crime bill package and the question of how to make America a safer place to live, a Salem woman already is doing something to fight crime.

She is Terri Fisher and she has started her own business as a personal security trainer.

A person has a better chance of preventing a criminal attack if they are not easy targets. She's teaching people how to make themselves difficult for criminals to prey upon.

Many crimes don't have to happen, says Fisher, a victim of violent crime herself. She teaches people, mostly women, how not to get into situations where criminals can take advantage of them.

When Fisher was a teen-ager, she dated often until one date was turned into a nightmare by rape. She says it was a crime that wouldn't have happened if she knew then what she does now. The knowledge is primarily the golden rule of safety: If you don't know somebody, don't be alone with them.

Now she advises girls and their mothers at her training classes that if they accept dates with men they don't know to go out with other couples or meet in public places and arrive and leave separately until they get to know them.

After the rape, Fisher says she refused to date other boys and wouldn't go anywhere by herself. While she has gradually recovered her sense of safety, it wasn't until as an adult she went through several personal safety training classes sponsored by the National Rifle Association that she says she felt comfortable leaving her house alone.

"I know I can protect myself," she says now after two years of safety training and instructor courses. "I feel very confident."

She says learning how a criminal thinks is one of the first steps in avoiding an attack.

"Criminals come to areas where they feel they can be effective," she says. "Places that are thought of as a safe place" where people leave doors to homes and automobiles unlocked and go out by themselves at night in isolated areas.

Criminals also are more likely to attack if they think their victim can not or doesn't know how to fight back. She quotes studies done by the National Rifle Association that show violent crime is committed more in areas that have stricter

gun ownership laws.

Fisher is an NRA member and the training she has is through the association's programs. That's something that might surprise people who knew her 13 years ago when she was "really anti-gun," she says.

Her husband, a long-time NRA member, encouraged her to read some of the group's pamphlets on self-protection. In time, she did read the material and eventually got the training.

"There's a real misconception about the NRA," she says. "People think the NRA wants everyone to have a gun. That's not true. But they do want to protect people's constitutional rights to have one if they choose."

Gun safety is high on the group's priorities and that's why members, such as her husband, Rex Fisher, don't want people who are not comfortable with firearms to even handle them, she says.

"It's a personal decision" to own or carry a gun, she says.

And there are many devices on the market besides guns that women can use for personal protection and that families can use to protect homes and automobiles.

For women, pepper spray is now recommended over mace, she says. Pepper spray is more debilitating now that most companies have watered down mace sprays in the wake of personal injury lawsuits. Pepper spray also won't leave permanent physical damage, lessening the likelihood of such lawsuits being filed against the sprayer.

Minibatons, also called kubotans or persuaders, are plastic or aluminum bars that can be used to repel a physical attack by jabbing the bar into an attacker's eye or neck. The batons also are grooved and can be used to temporarily paralyze a hand or arm.

There also are personal alarms that can be used to protect against purse thefts or child snatching.

Fisher says stun guns also can be used for personal protection, but she doesn't recommend them too strongly because the electrical stun doesn't always stop an attacker. That's especially true with attackers who are high on drugs and have a high threshold for pain, she says.

For the home, there are emergency lighting products that can be turned on when electricity is interrupted and lighting timers that automatically turn on lights in different rooms on an alternating schedule.



Safety products

Personal Security Trainer Terri Fisher of Salem dis some of the items people can buy to protect themselves or their possessions from thieves. A victim of violence herself, she says, knowing how to avoid situations could lead to an assault has helped her recover her confidence. She teaches others, especially women to defend themselves against crime by using common sense and learning to out think criminals. Staff photo by Terri Cassell.