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Kick-butt self-defense

LORI HARTMAN GERVASI,
AUTHOR OF 'FIGHT LIKE
A GIRL ... AND WIN'

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BE STRONG, BE PREPARED

By SUZANNE SPROUL

NO MORE VICTIMS. Instead, Lori Hartman Gervasi wants women to be prepared both mentally and physically to keep the “bad guys” away.

The Rancho Cucamonga mother of two knows what she’s talking about. Her father was in law enforcement, and she has a black belt in karate.

The former ABC News and KCAL/Channel 9 journalist is the author of “Fight Like a Girl ... And Win” (St. Martin’s Press), which outlines what wives, mothers, daughters and even grandmothers can do to protect themselves. It can be scary stuff, Gervasi admits, but not talking about it is scarier.

“Self-defense was something I was always interested in,” she says. “My dad earned his black belt in judo in Japan, and I was always trying to get him to teach me. He told my sister and I that we could and should be able to defend ourselves.”

Gervasi grew up wanting to be a spy, until at age 12 she realized she wanted to write. She studied journalism at UCLA and later enjoyed a successful television career until she decided to become a stay-at-home mom for her two sons.

“I found being a mom very fulfilling, but I still wanted to do something for myself,” she says. “I was instantly hooked on karate classes and had an immediate sense of empowerment. It also helped me get back in shape.”

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Gervasi’s love of fiction writing took a back seat when she decided to combine what she had learned through karate with writing a non-fiction book. She also started doing small self-defense presentations. Her first was for a Los Angeles travel agency visited by tragedy. The daughter of one of the employees had been kidnapped, robbed and murdered.

“The mother and all of the women in the agency were traumatized,” Gervasi says. “I told them about being prepared and how they must take control of their personal security. There were decisions they should make before the bad guys come. They had options. And then the light went on. I could share what I’ve learned by writing about it.”

In “Fight Like a Girl,” Gervasi writes about the options — she calls them “defense decisions” — that can help protect women like body armor. The idea isn’t to think that women are invincible, but once seriously threatened, they need to know it’s time to fight and win.

“If women don’t think about what could happen ahead of time, and if, unfortunately, something does happen, it could all be a jumble,” Gervasi says. “I want women to be active, not reactive. Live in the here and now because you

might be in for the fight of your life.”

In the book, Gervasi discusses the four “force levels” of attack — verbal arguments, controlling moves where someone puts his hands on you, a real fight, and a rape, abduction or fatal attack.

Part of the personal protection plan involves creating imaginary boundaries others aren’t allowed to cross. Be aware of the surroundings. Know who you are with.

Gervasi also believes women can arm themselves with simple items that could make a big difference in a fight — hair spray, a sharp nail file, a rat-tail comb, a sharp pen or anything else that could help in a struggle.

Many women feel that having a cell phone provides protection. Sure, it can be used to call for help, but Gervasi says a cell phone makes a practical weapon. If held properly, it can be used to crack someone in the temple, if need be.

“It might sound like a lot of work — this idea of continual preparedness. But the benefits of ‘defense decisions’ are tremendous,” she says. “The choices put women in control of their own lives because decisions are empowering.

“When women are making choices and plans for their personal security in a mental and physical way, they are embracing their own worth and value in this world. They are becoming informed, enlightened and strong. This attitude is then projected to everyone they encounter. It sends a mighty message to others — the bad and the good people, our children, the men in our lives, and to other women — and that message is that we are made of some very powerful stuff.”

