

Fighting Back —The American Way

By Jill Sell

Photos By Paul Tople

The attacker came up silently behind 7-year-old Jimmy Huntington and grabbed him by the waist.

Instantly, Jimmy stomped on the attacker's foot, pivoted, ducked under his arm and pushed the hulking molester away.

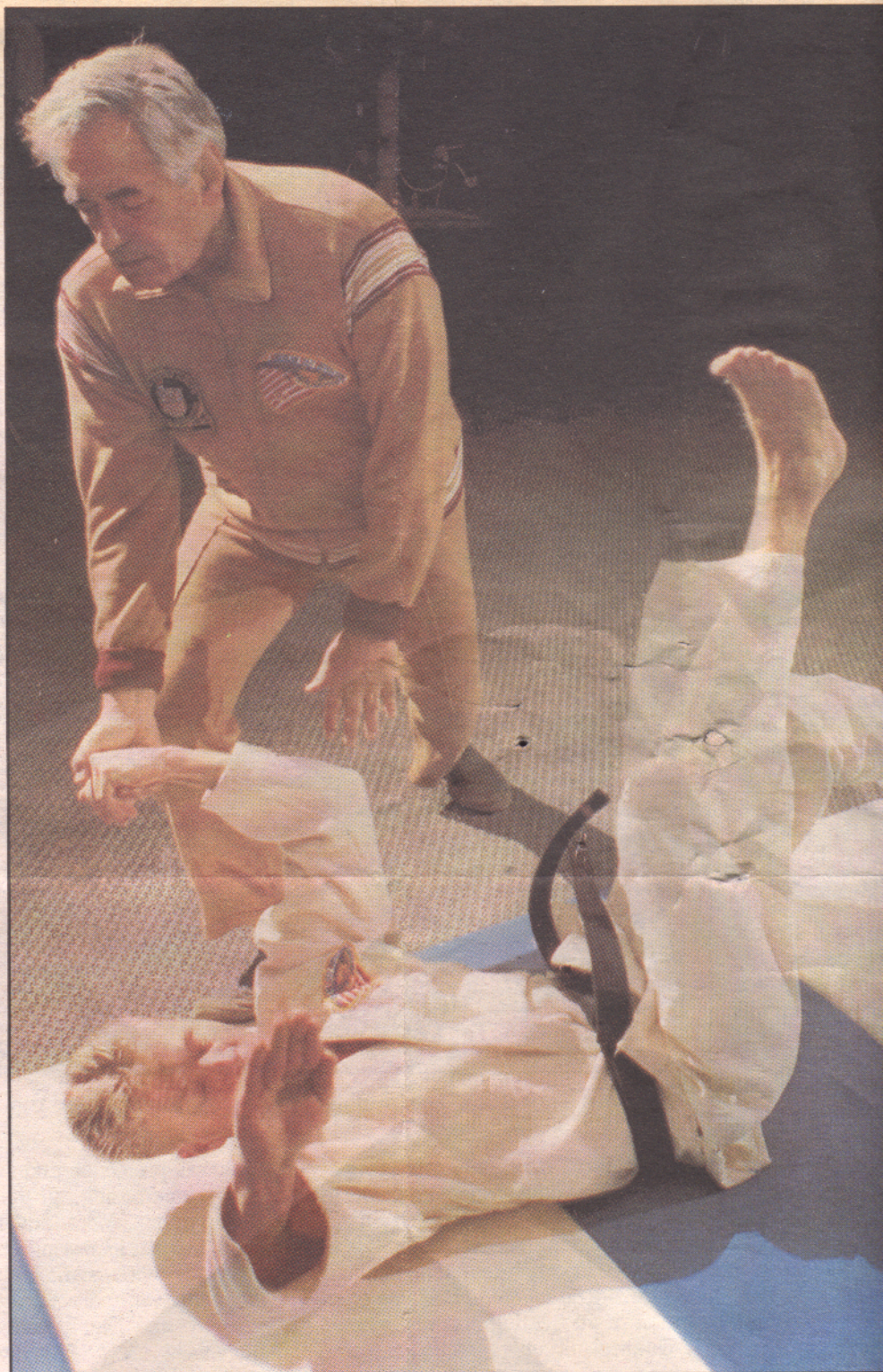
Not bad for a little blond-haired kid from Sagamore Hills whose slight body disappears under baggy clothing.

But Jimmy wasn't in any real danger. He was merely practicing what he had learned in his American Self-Protection classes.

You've probably heard of karate and judo. But American Self-Protection — ASP, for short?

It's been around since 1965. That's when Dr. Evan S. Baltazzi of Sagamore Hills, after 12 years of study, introduced to the public his system of self-defense and motor-skill development.

Thousands of people around the world — men, women and children, the able-bodied and the disabled — have become students of the system. Iceland is the most recent country to open a certified ASP chapter.



Jimmy is one of a number of children and adults taking twice-weekly classes at the Brandywine Ski Resort in the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area. Jim Huntington, Jimmy's father, holds a red belt in ASP, and Jimmy's mother and aunt will soon be taking classes also.

"I'm not sure what Jimmy would do if, say, a bigger kid at school would grab him," Huntington says. "He's really just

Evan S. Baltazzi, creator of the American Self-Protection self-defense system, demonstrates one of his throws on student Steve Schaar during a class at the Brandywine Ski Resort.

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Defense

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started lessons. But what he learns now will eventually become instinctive."

Gary Cook, who holds a fourth-degree black belt in ASP, studied and taught martial arts for 15 years before "giving it all up" to become a dedicated student and assistant of Baltazzi.

"Realistically a 50-pound kid isn't always going to be able to defend himself against a 200-pound man," says Cook, whose three children also take classes. "But ASP will develop his or her confidence and create an awareness of danger."

"If kids are taught at a young age, they'll remember the skills involved. When they get to be about 13, they can put some wallop into that punch."

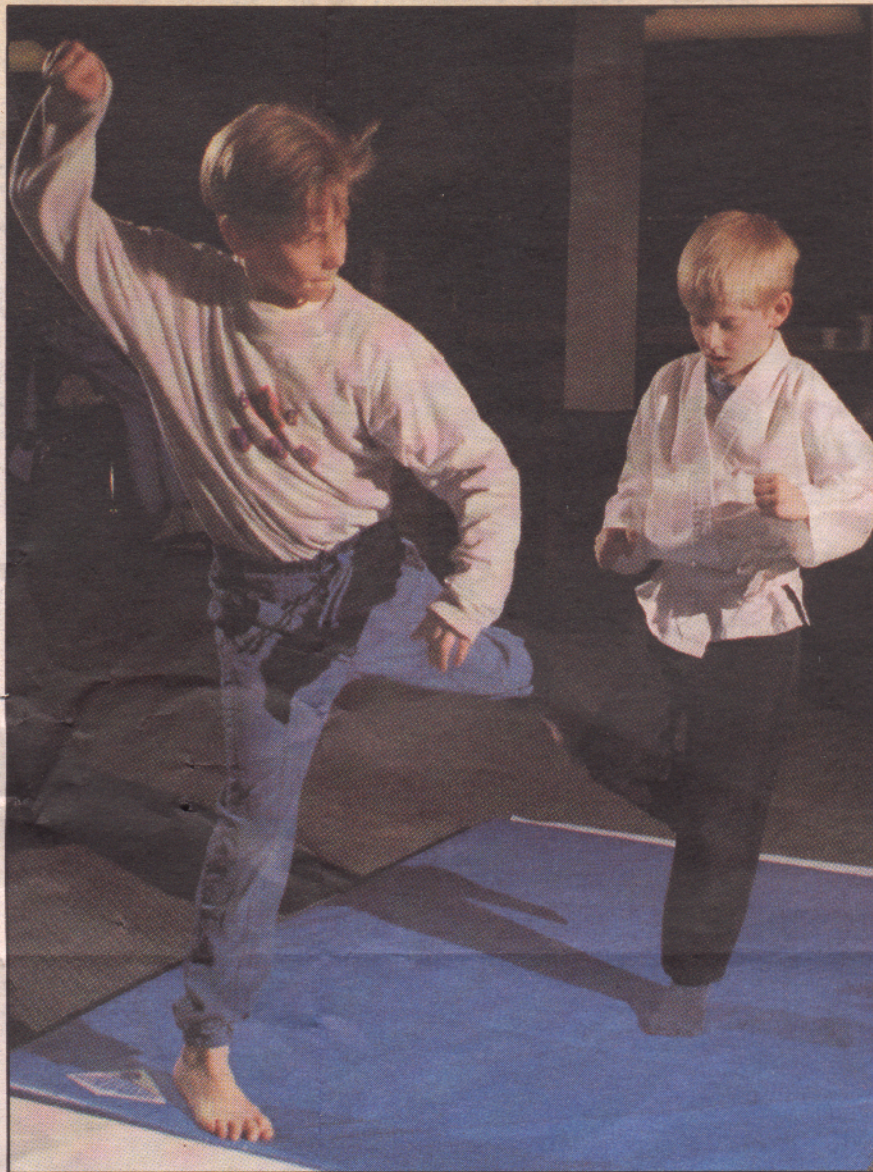
Cook, who lives in North Royalton, particularly recommends ASP for women, saying that statistics show one fourth of all women will be attacked at some time in their lives.

"Attackers will look for the vulnerable," he says. "The strong prey on the weak. All this training does is give you a better chance to defend yourself. It doesn't make you into a superhero, like some martial arts claim they can do."

ASP's creator is a 74-year-old retired engineering consultant. Baltazzi has a doctorate in physical sciences from the Sorbonne in Paris and a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Oxford.

He also has a strong background in sports. He is an internationally known fencer, has a fifth-degree black belt in judo and has served on the U.S. Olympic and National Amateur Athletic Union committees.

Since retiring in 1988, he has dedicated himself to making ASP as accessible to as many people as possible through his non-profit ASP



Students Gary Cook, left, and James Huntington practice their moves.

Association. He claims ASP is superior to any other fitness program in its ability to be retained and adapted to differing needs.

ASP incorporates what Baltazzi considers to be five principles common to all fighting arts and sports: distance, direction, timing, momentum, and leverage. The system is designed so that a student can stop at any level and still have acquired useful knowledge.

"Even if you stop at the first level black belt, you have something very important and useful," says Baltazzi, whose son, James, holds a second-degree black belt. "And you can achieve that in a year by going to classes twice a week for a couple of hours."

ASP beginners concentrate on

basic self-protection and later move on to kick-boxing, grappling, and stick-fighting. More advanced students learn orienteering and wilderness survival, arms safety, first aid, nutrition and water safety.

Steve and Dan Schaar of Sagamore Hills are ASP devotees.

"I looked at karate, but ASP is something I know I'll be able to do when I'm 40 and 60," says Steve, a sophomore at the University of Akron. "This isn't at all like some commercial martial arts centers. You walk into some gyms and the first thing they'll ask you is if you have Mastercard or Visa. Dr. Baltazzi came out of retirement to teach this."

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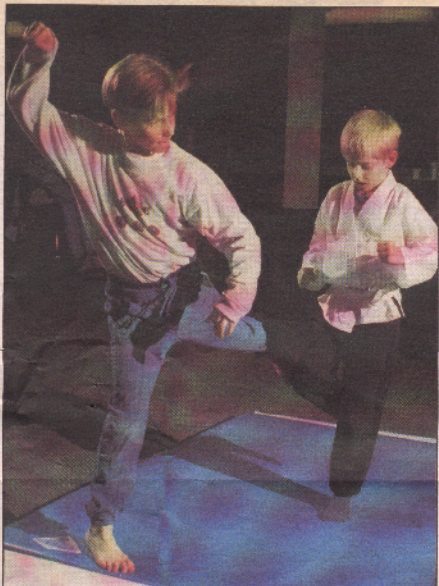
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When students master the top levels in ASP, they may be encour-

aged to start their own schools. But Schaar says he prefers to study with Baltazzi as long as possible.

At a typical class, all students, no matter what level of study, do warm-up exercises and basic drills together. Then the second half of the class is devoted to individual instruction. New students can join the class at any time.

At one recent class, Cook led the group in a series of maneuvers, executing clean, sharp kicks when necessary.

"Step to the right, kick back to the left," he ordered.

Some of the children had a bit of difficulty with balance and also with remembering their right from their left. They bumped into each other on occasion and giggled before doing the move correctly.

"You may not think you know this very well, but don't worry," Baltazzi told the youngsters. "You'll see these motions again and again."

Adult beginners appreciated the value of learning ASP fundamentals, but still had to work hard to master them.

"I was a pretty good tumbler over 20 years ago, so when I started this, my mind said I could do it, but my 40-year-old body said I couldn't," said Mike Evans of Macedonia. "But I want to get those skills back, and this is a way to do it. This isn't like coming in and doing a 100 push-ups or breaking boards with your hand. This makes more sense."

After the session, some of the youngsters wandered down to the ski resort's concession stand in the lodge area. One little girl was approached by a teen-ager who asked her what she was going to do with "all that money."

"I told him to back off," the young ASP student responded, "and if he didn't, he'd be sorry." □

For more information about ASP, send a self-addressed, stamped, business-size envelope to: ASPA, 825 Greengate Oval, Sagamore Hills, Ohio 44067.

Jill Sell is a free-lance writer from Sagamore Hills. Paul Tople is the magazine's photographer.