

A SYMBOL OF HOPE

BY KAREN EDEN

Brittney Richardson is a soft-spoken 14-year-old. The man who accosted her in April as she was walking home from a nearby grocery store must have seen that and mistakenly concluded that she would make a good victim.

It was around 7:30 in the evening when Brittney, a resident of Denver, decided to take a shortcut through a local apartment complex to make it home before dark. "Someone started following me," she said.

He tried to persuade her to go with him, saying she'd have a good time. Her reply was firm: "Leave me alone!" She did just like she'd learned in her taekwondo class.

"Then he grabbed me by the wrist and tried to pull me in his direction," Brittney said. His grip was so tight that

Brittney Richardson (right) works out with instructor Amanda Christensen.

her wrist stayed red for days. She was terrified and nearly froze, but then she got a good look at the creep, a white male in his 30s, and something in her brain clicked.

"It must have been muscle memory; I punched him as hard as I could in the face," she said. "The next thing I heard was a thump as he hit the ground." As the girl sprinted away, she could hear her would-be assailant moaning.

Brittney told her mother, Barbara Richardson, and she called the police and filed a report. Her mom was surprised at how her daughter had orchestrated her escape, but the reaction from the city of Denver and the nation would prove to be a real shocker.

Instructor Amanda Christensen of Mile High Karate said Brittney, a brown belt, came to class that evening extremely rattled. "She wanted to know what she'd done wrong to cause this

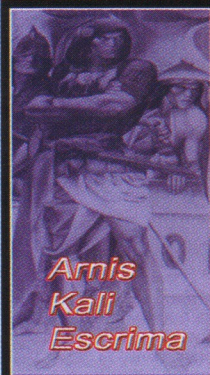


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event to happen," Christensen said. The teacher told Brittney she'd done everything right, and the local media agreed. The harrowing event was soon brought to the public's attention via newspaper, television and radio interviews. The mayor even feted the youth for her bravery.

"I think it's because we're finally hearing about a young girl who actually got away," said Stephen Oliver, owner of Mile High Karate.

"When *Good Morning America* called, I think we were both in shock," Barbara Richardson said. "But then it was the *Today* show and *The Montel Williams Show*. It started to dawn on Brittney what a big deal this actually was. Through it all, she remained mild-mannered—that is, until her favorite magazine, *Seventeen*, called for an interview. Just to let you know that she is every bit a teenage girl, she was so excited she just kept screaming when she got off the phone."

"All this attention is about hope," Christensen said. "If this cute, shy

'girly girl' can defend herself and get away, there's hope that all the young women out there can do the same with a little practice."

Within days of the attempted crime, Christensen organized a free women's self-defense class at her school.

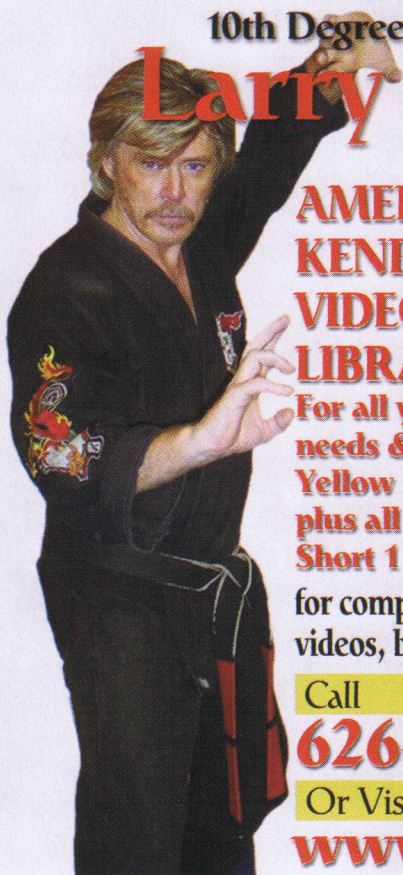
Brittney feels honored to be a national symbol of courage for young people, but the ordeal hasn't been easy for her. "I still can't be alone when I'm walking out in public," she said. "I couldn't stop shaking for quite some time."

"It's a lot to deal with psychologically," Christensen said. "But Brittney's karate training is helping her deal with that part of it, too, just as it helped her have the confidence that possibly saved her life." ✕

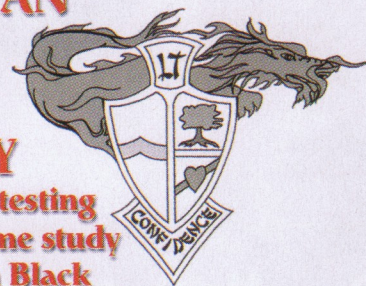
About the author: Karen Eden has a fourth-degree black belt in tang soo do. She works as a broadcast journalist and has appeared on CNN and FOX News.

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