

Play to your STRENGTHS

Devised by special forces, Krav Maga is where martial arts meet self-defence. **Hazel Davis** flexes her muscles at a class with Saddleworth WI

Photography CLARE WOOD

I'm trying to throttle a pensioner. It's OK, she's totally flooring me. She's got my hands behind my back and has bent my fingers into an extremely awkward angle with nary a hair out of place. I'm not even kidding.

I don't make a habit of this, by the way, I'm at Saddleworth WI, Lancashire Federation where, from one month to the next, you might be doing anything from adopting a donkey and petting a search-and-rescue dog to looking at mental health awareness. We're here tonight to learn the martial art of Krav Maga.

Jess Moreland is the irrepressible WI president. She'd been beaming from ear to ear since she regaled me earlier with tales of the injuries she's sustained since she took up 'krav' a year ago at the age of 43. 'I've had stitches, a sling, I've had my shin ripped open and a broken finger...'

She started doing it, Jess says, partly because of a friend who was in an abusive relationship and whose partner she felt threatened by – but also because, she laughs, 'as a holistic therapist I am freakishly strong and I wanted to learn how to use my powers properly'. She got the bug almost immediately, so she now goes twice a week and attained her first belt in April this year.

In between telling me about her various fractures Jess is happily showing me pictures of her children and her rescued kitten, but Krav Maga has changed her. 'I feel much more confident and safe. My husband says it's like being married to Jason Bourne from *The Bourne Identity*', Jess says, 'and he won't let me anywhere near him.'

This week she's persuaded her trainer, the impossibly large Karl McVety, owner of Manchester-based martial arts group KMMA, to come along to the



RIGHT Adele Hunt, a visitor to Saddleworth WI, Lancashire Federation, gets the better of expert, Karl McVety, during his self-defence Krav Maga training session

Self-defence



CLOCKWISE
FROM FAR LEFT
Jess Moreland,
President of
Saddleworth
WI, gets ready
for action; Karl
McVety teaches
tactics; members
raise their middle
knuckles, forming
instant 'weapons'

•With just a few easy moves, you can quite possibly extricate yourself from a life-threatening situation•

Pennine hotel where the WI meets, to teach us a few moves.

Karl, who's been teaching the art for 15 years but has more than 30 years' martial arts experience, cheerfully prefacing the whole evening by telling us how much danger there is in our daily lives. He reminds us that anyone can be attacked, anytime and anywhere, but that there are some simple steps that we can all take to be forearmed.

Krav Maga, he tells us, was developed in the 1950s for the Israeli special forces as a way to fight with limited weapons. Karl trained in the UK but went to Israel to take his exams and train with the 'real force'. The art he's teaching today is a watered-down version of this but is nonetheless effective. He's also devised a programme for children (which includes ways to avoid being kidnapped).

The demo starts while we're still sitting down. Karl asks us to make a fist and then raise our middle knuckles. Hey presto, a ready-made weapon. 'If you hit someone hard enough with this you can penetrate skin,' he says, menacingly, asking us to try it on each other. It hurts.

Then he runs through some potentially threatening situations. 'Imagine for a second somebody grabbing you and dragging you somewhere you don't want to go,' he says, grabbing Jess, who yelps and springs into action – digging him with her 'knuckle-knife' in the back of the hands, causing him to release his grip. 'Trust me, this hurts,' he laughs. We learn how to move with our assailant instead of away from, and repeat the mantra 'elbows, elbows, groin, face'.

Next Karl calls for volunteers to try and strangle him. A few hands shoot up, keen to get themselves around his (rather warm) veiny neck. He quickly shows us an incredibly neat trick to get out of

a stranglehold (I can't reveal it here or I'd have to kill you), then he shows us how to deflect a knife with a simple flick of the hands.

It's impressively simple stuff. He runs through some likely scenarios, not beating around the bush at all, calling for a woman to lie on the floor as though being attacked, while he lies on top of her. After just a few moves, he's (genuinely) flattened and his victim is over the other side of the room.

Then he stuns everyone by pulling out some (fake) guns. A few minutes later and we're all learning exactly where to put ourselves if we come face-to-face with a firearm. It's exhilarating, slightly terrifying, and yet – in these unsettling times – it feels like another empowering step in the process of self-defence.

We learn other tricks too: if you're wearing high heels and if you can take them off, then do so. Bingo, two weapons already. Always go for the groin. Lean into a hair pull. And there are a few other neat things I won't divulge here as they need to be demonstrated.

I leave the evening seeing danger around every corner but the thing I can't get over is that with just a few easy moves, you can quite possibly extricate yourself from a life-threatening situation. As Karl says, 'Jess has gone from a nice likeable person to a nice likeable person who could hurt you in an instant.'

When I get home I make my partner try and strangle me three times until he gets bored and goes off to bed. Three weeks later, almost instinctively, I use a move on him while he's tickling me and we both agree I should go to classes and learn to do it properly. Frankly, I just can't wait. **WI**