



# Veneto Views

U. S. Department of State Tri-Mission Rome



## PROTECT YOURSELF! By Mandy Downs, Editor

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### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Community Calendar</i>	2
<i>Upcoming Events</i>	3
<i>FLO Weekly</i>	4
<i>CSC Winks</i>	6
<i>School News</i>	7
<i>Employment Opportunities</i>	11
<i>Classifieds</i>	12

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**It was during my first month in Rome that I had a wakeup call. Thankfully, it turned out to be nothing, but the thought of what could have happened haunted me for days.**

Allow me to start from the beginning. It was 10pm on a September evening and I was inside our apartment near the Embassy, in the heart of Rome. My dog needed to go out and I could tell by his persistent whining that it was important. The closest park was Villa Borghese, 4 minutes away.

My husband was on a trip and so I walked alone. I walked with a purpose. I was alert and aware of my surroundings. I saw a man on the same side of the street, so I crossed to the other side. I passed through the stone wall that surrounds the city of Rome onto Corso d'Italia. As I made a sharp turn to the left I ran directly into a man discarding a purse. All of my senses were on alert as I jumped back and he ran. No harm done.

As my heart slowed to a steady beat, I asked myself what I would do if he had been waiting there for my purse or maybe something worse. The obvious reactions came to my head: *Scream for "help"—no wait, am I supposed to scream "fire?" What is the word for fire in Italian? I could run ...but what if he runs faster? I could do an excellent round-kick to his private area—if only I knew how.*

**I was certain that I could have gotten away—or was I? A nagging voice in my head told me that I wasn't prepared and that scared me.**

In February, I took matters into my own hands. I attended a 2-day, weekend, Krav Maga seminar in Dublin, Ireland taught by my friend Patrick Cumiskey. Patrick is a qualified practicing psychotherapist who has spent many years studying criminals, victims, and various hand to hand combat systems. In 2001, Patrick brought Krav Maga to Dublin. Since then, he has trained over 20,000 people in Ireland. Even though Patrick has trained a wide range of regular military, Gardai and special forces units, his passion is empowering every day normal people to be safe.



Krav Maga is known for focusing on real world situations and encourages students to avoid confrontation. If this is not possible, as it was in my situation, it promotes defending oneself quickly with instinctive body reactions. The course that I attended had an almost equal percentage of men and women from various backgrounds and physical fitness levels. From bartenders, pilots and business people, we had one goal in common and that was safety. The people there were you and me—normal people who just felt they wanted to know what to do if something happened.

Together, we worked toward turning our fears into positive responses in a controlled environment. We watched demonstrations and practiced pad work, technique drills, aggression simulation and as we took time to catch our breath, Patrick spoke about the psychology of crime, aggression and how to defuse it. The amazing thing about the course was how fast normal everyday people learned to protect themselves. The course built on a simple set of concepts, the moves were taught step by step (easy to learn). We practiced the moves over and over again under increasing levels of pressure, making sure if we ever had to use a move in real life we would.

The two days that I spent in Ireland may have been two of the most important days of my life. I hope that I will never find out but, if I ever do, I have a plan. I know how I would respond if my situation was different and I would encourage you to do the same.

You can learn more about Krav Maga and sign up for Patrick's weekend Krav Maga course in Ireland by visiting <http://www.kravmagaireland.com/>. If you are interested in bringing Patrick to Rome, please e-mail me at [Venetoviews@gmail.com](mailto:Venetoviews@gmail.com).