



**TUFF LOVE**  
SELF DEFENSE

## Jenn's Story

I learned to put on a facade growing up in an abusive household. For many years, I struggled to accept reality and blamed myself for the way things would again and again turn chaotic and violent. I felt like an attack might always be coming without warning. I didn't understand that having strength was not toughness and a hard heart.

During the first few years of the pandemic, the problems repeated themselves and once again, I felt I couldn't trust the people I thought had my back. Hyper-vigilance and fear was running down my adrenals, causing deep exhaustion. I started carrying pepper spray, but it didn't do much to help me feel safe. I gave up alcohol and drugs so I could stay alert to the risks in my environment. I sought medical help and was diagnosed with PTSD.

It was this diagnosis that helped me to begin to recognize the trauma and violence in my background, and I started taking different steps to learn how to find a healthier way to live. They say when the student is ready, the teacher appears.



I started studying Qi gong and learning about the power of energetics to help calm my nervous system that felt completely fried. This was my first introduction to the idea that having safe relationships begins with cultivating safety from within.

My Qi gong instructor advised me to seek training that would improve my confidence, martial competence and healthy energy. Long-term practice would help to cultivate calm, self-knowing, and clear observation of circumstances, she said, and referred me to teachings by Mollii Khangensung.

I reached out to Tuff Love Fitness just in time to sign up for an eight-week women's and girls self-defense series that they offer a few times a year. After a couple of months, I started one-on-one Jiu-Jitsu self-defense training with Mollii and the process of cultivating calm preparation awareness began.

Bruce Lee had a saying that you show up for conflict at the level of your training. I can now see many past occasions when the training would have changed outcomes and I regret my unpreparedness.



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I used to think I knew a bit about how to defend myself, and I would put my fists up under attack. But I was untrained and often my attempts at self defense only made things worse. I had no training whatsoever.

I understand now that strength is not about trying to appear tough or flailing out in anger. I am beginning to understand that strength is about shifting internal consciousness away from victimization toward mastery and confidence. It's about discipline, patience and spending time on the mat.

While the one-on-one sessions focus on physical technique and practicing fundamentals (must have good base!), Molliii always starts our sessions with warm ups when we have a casual check-in chat. Honestly, these chats feel therapeutic. Survivors have a way of understanding each other that creates trust, and she holds space for us to talk about what caused me to feel trapped in dark places.

Confronting my demons is never fun, and training days are not warm and fuzzy. Sometimes I wish I could go back to the facade that everything is fine and go spend some time writing quietly at a coffee shop instead. But as we practice several ways to get out of a choke hold, I go back to what Bruce Lee said.

By the time we practiced a submission, Jiu-Jitsu principles had started sifting into other areas. Showing up with the energy of patience and humility opens the possibility for building inner strength in all the areas of this precious life.

The practice is helping me untangle myself from old patterns and to take back what was stolen through violence and trauma. This is what my body and soul needs to grow. Today I am shedding the shame of being unskilled in past conflicts. I am daring to invest in a sense of greater safety.