

HEROINE

SANETTE SMIT

This award-winning athlete with a social conscience teaches women to protect themselves with self-defence.



WITH A KARATE CAREER spanning nearly four decades, Sanette Smit, 57, has earned dozens of medals and trophies, making her the highest-ranked woman in karate in Africa. But the victories closest to her heart don't relate to competitions. Her greatest triumph is helping to instil a fighting spirit in women through her self-defence workshops and books.

SANETTE ON...

Crime in South Africa: "My heart breaks whenever I hear stories of abuse against women and children. It saddens me when those most vulnerable are taken advantage of."

Her role model: "A go-getter and born leader, my mother had her own hairdressing salon in the 1960s. At a time when many wives relied on their husbands for income, she showed how independent and entrepreneurial a woman could be. Because of her example, I grew up knowing I could do anything I wished."

Being a karate kid: "On my way home from a hockey match in Pretoria one afternoon, I passed a karate studio and peeked inside. There was a guy training by himself; he looked so centred and in control. The disciplined yet artful movements appealed to me and just a few days later I went to my first class."

Building confidence: "As I got more involved in karate, I became more self-assured. Not only was I physically

fitter, but because of the mental stamina required in the sport, I felt better equipped to deal with everyday life challenges – from family conflict to waiting in queues."

Empowering women: "While I was working towards my third dan black belt, I wanted to focus on how karate could be applied to situations outside the studio. Realising that our country had high rape statistics, I figured karate skills could effectively be used to help women defend themselves. What started off as an academic study has evolved into my life's work – teaching women to use their bodies and intuition as weapons when their lives are under threat."

Putting her skills to the test: "I will never forget the story of the woman who fought an attacker a year after taking one of my self-defence workshops. One of the lessons in my course is the importance of being aware of one's surroundings. This woman heard a strange noise behind her as she was unlocking her front door. She turned around, caught the attacker off guard and escaped from the situation by repeatedly hitting his ears – the only part of his body she could reach. His eardrum burst and she was able to run for help. I was humbled when she contacted me to thank me for the course that probably saved her life."

Read: Sanette's book *The South African Woman's Guide to Self-Defence*

Contact: Visit selfdefence.co.za O

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