

HEALTHY WHEN DINING OUT YES YOU CAN!

Woman

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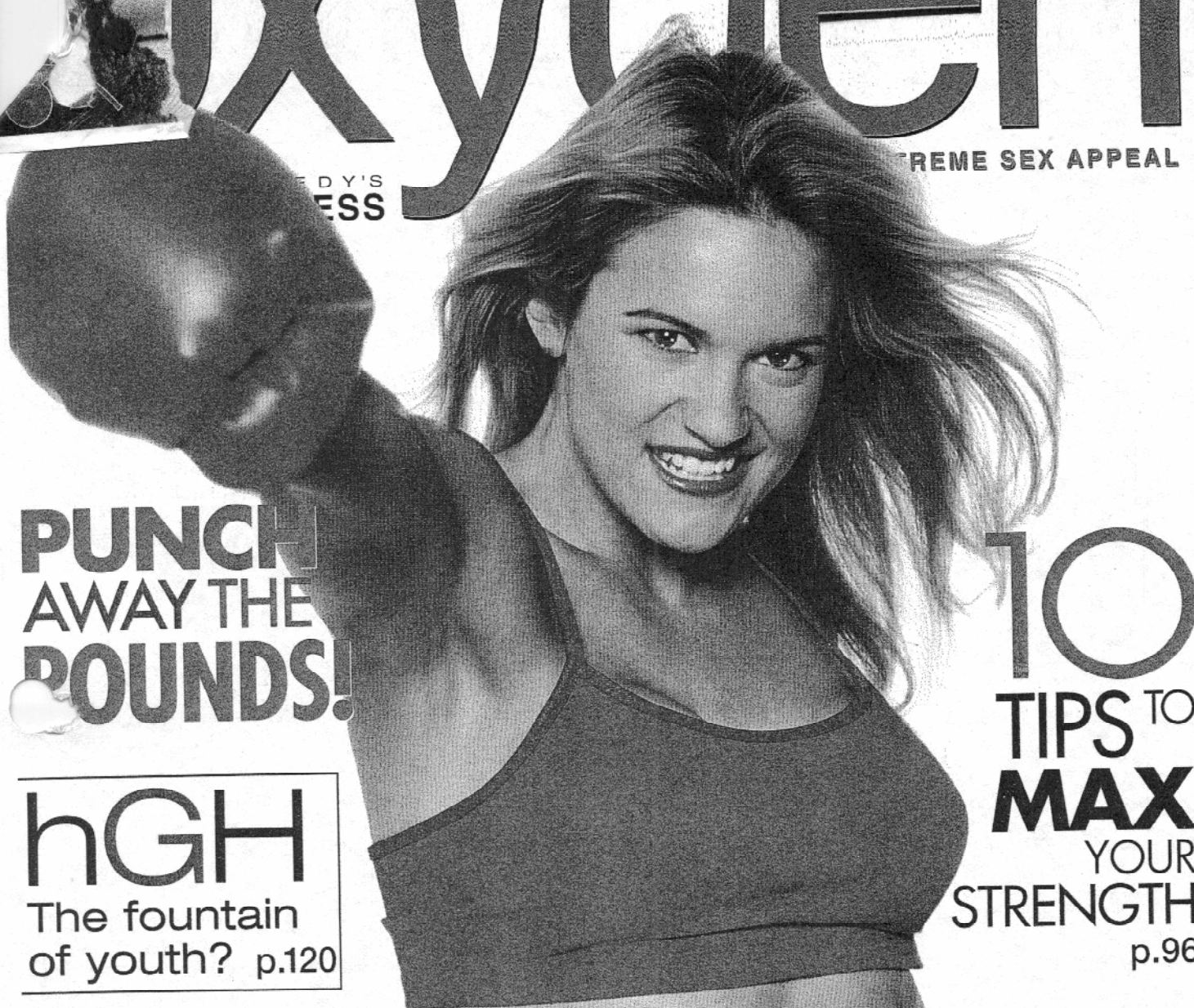
EXTREME SEX APPEAL

**PUNCH
AWAY THE
POUNDS!**

hGH

The fountain
of youth? p.120

**10
TIPS TO
MAX
YOUR
STRENGTH**
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100%

Layout: M. H. H. Photos: Kelly W. Standberg

“Action!”

Ever dream of being an action star on the big screen? Think you could be the next Xena Warrior Princess? There's a place you can go to hone your skills.

Photograph by Ying Lee Photos Keith W. Strandberg

If you can kick, punch, act and have the desire to be the next action star, you can go where *Oxygen* sent fitness model Tara Scotti - The Karate International Action Film Making Weekend.

The weekend seminar is run by three of the action industry's most accomplished professionals: Writer and producer Keith W. Strandberg, producer and actor Keith Vitali, and producer/actor/publisher Michael DePasquale, Jr. These three started the camps five years ago to train people to act in their own movies, and over 75 people who have been through the camps have ended up on the silver screen!

"I was frustrated with the fighters I was hiring to be in my movies," says Keith W. Strandberg, who helped start the careers of Jean Claude Van Damme, Cynthia Rothrock, Billy Blanks and many others. "I'd hire great fighters, but once we got them on the set, they were unable to do what we asked them to do. Martial arts fighters are taught to hide their emotions, and we ask movie fighters to show pain, to show their reactions, to be a little flamboyant, and I wasn't getting what I wanted. So, we started the camps to teach people how to fight for the camera, and now when I hire actors and fighters, I know what I'm getting. I'm hiring professionals who know how to sell a hit, who know how to hit a mark, who know how to comport themselves on a movie set."



Tara's flanked by martial arts movie legends Joe Hess and Joe Lewis.

The three-day seminar offers solid, nuts and bolts information on how to break into the movies, and how to stay there once you are in. "You learn how to take a punch, how to show pain, how to audition, how to fire a gun and throw a knife," says Michael DePasquale, Jr. "It's all designed to give you an edge over the hundreds of other people who are looking to get the same role. If you can act and fight, you are that much more employable."

The three founders don't run the seminar by themselves, they bring in experts in every category of action film production: fighting and stunts, guns and explosives, knives, high falls, acting and more. One of the real benefits of the three-day weekend is that the instructors and the students stay together on the campus of the Storm King School for Boys in Cornwall-on-Hudson, NY. It's a boarding school during the year, but on one weekend in the summer, it's the place where dreams can come true.

"We are all here together for three days," says Shawn Patrick Flanagan, an actor and stuntman who started at one of these camps three years before. Now, he's been featured in five motion pictures, with more on the way. "It's



Practicing head snaps and body hits.

great to be able to ask Keith Strandberg a question over lunch, or pull Joe Hess off to the side and see if I'm doing something right or wrong. The instructors are very approachable, and they tell us that the only dumb question is the one we don't ask."

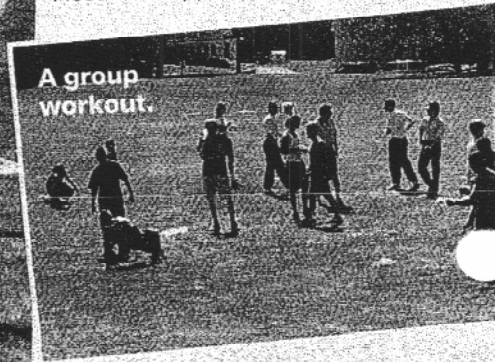
Here, the guy who set himself on fire during the exhibition might just sit down next to you at dinner. Just make sure he's not smoking.

Friday Night

The seminar starts officially at 6:00 with dinner, then introductions. People show up at Storm King throughout the day. One aspiring actor came all the way from Sweden, and he arrived the night before. "They tell me I look like Van Damme," Zoltan Bajkai, the Swede, says as he gets into the dinner line. The mix of students is very interesting - brothers from Alaska, fighters from Florida, stuntmen from Ohio.

"Before I went, I didn't know what to expect," says Tara Scotti. "I was excited, but there was some fear of the unknown. It was wonderful, and I really enjoyed every moment. There were a lot of martial artists, but it wasn't just targeted for fighters. I have aspirations for acting and action movies, and being a fitness professional is a perfect match."

The beginners, about 75 of them, start with the basics. The first and most important basic is learning how to react in a fight, and that's where Joe Hess comes in. Hess is a former heavyweight world champion in karate, and he's become quite a force in movie stunts and fighting. Hess has appeared in hundreds of



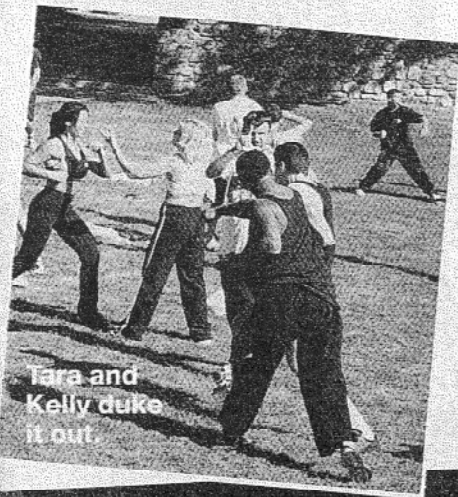
A group workout.

movies – he fought Kevin Costner in *The Bodyguard*, Kurt Russell in *Captain Ron* and Don Johnson in dozens of *Miami Vice* episodes. It's up to Hess to make sure the students know how to sell a punch or a kick.

Remember, this is movie magic. Tara and the others are taught never to make contact. It's the reaction that tells the audience that a punch or kick really hit home.

"If the lead actor throws a punch, and you don't react and make him look good, you're going to be out of a job," Hess says between head snaps and body hits. "It's a total body thing – your head snaps, your shoulders follow, and your entire body, including your facial reactions, sells the punch."

After Hess' hour and a half class, the students collect their information and head off to Packaging and Production Realities class, taught in Storm King's auditorium. This class is designed to show the students what they need – a head shot, a resume and a videotape. Students are shown examples of quality head shots (glossy, black and white, clear, appealing),



Tara and Kelly duke it out.



resumes (accurate information) and videos. After this class, the campers are sent off to sleep, with visions of movie parts dancing in their heads.

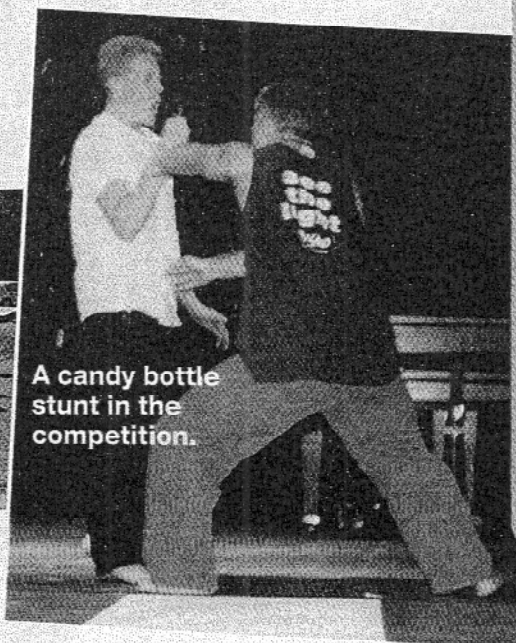
Saturday

Breakfast is at 7:30, and the next action fighting class led by Keith Vitali starts at 8:30. Vitali picks up where Hess left off the night before. He drills the group on head snaps and body hits, because reactions are so critical when trying to get a job. Chances are you aren't going to be hired to be the star, to be the one doing the hitting, so you have to be ready to take a hit.

Vitali introduces the theory of "hitting your mark," and combinations are put together. On a movie set, Vitali points out, you'll be given a complicated routine to do, and you might only have a couple of minutes to get it down. "Making a mistake can mean injury," Vitali stresses. "If you get the moves out of sequence, you might punch when your partner doesn't expect it, and you might really hurt him or her."

The students listen. Vitali is not just another pretty face. He is a three-time karate world champion, one of the top 10 fighters of all time, and has fought on screen with some of the best – including Jackie Chan.

You have to be in great shape, says Vitali who recalls throwing one particular kicking combination 49 times in order to get it right. "In a competitive



A candy bottle stunt in the competition.

WOMAN IN ACTION

by Kelly Mason

My ride, Anthony, picks me up at the Croton train station. He holds no cardboard sign to signal who he is. I know it by the faint purple bruise over his left eye. He's a fighter.

At the Storm King School, all the participants converge on the student center. As I'm receiving my name tag and a copy of the schedule, I notice a life-like human hand clenched in a fist, stuck on a pole. Being curious, I ask what it is. I'm told movie makers use it to get a close up shot of a hit, then experience the fleshy rubber make contact with my jaw. Just arrived and already I'm learning how action films are made.



Saturday dawns early. I shower before the rush. Rested and refreshed, I step into the early morning sunshine to do my daily yoga practice. I'm not alone. I stop to watch the kata, a series of karate drills, of a young martial artist. I'm impressed by his precision and form. Many of my fellow attendees have years of experience in the martial arts. I'm a beginner, a white belt. Later, I learn that being a black belt won't automatically make you a success as a stunt fighter. What makes you good is how well you sell the fight.

After breakfast, we assemble for action fighting. I started to practice head snaps on Friday night, so I work to perfect them before moving on to kicks, falls and fight sequences with a partner. It's no small task to make a fight look real. It's all about timing, and reacting. Actor Keith Vitali suggests ways to make it more aesthetically pleasing for the audience. Make your kicks long and clean. Make 'em pretty.

All these pretty fight sequences have me sweating hard, but it's fun and I'm really trying. To emphasize the reality that on the set, time is money, we are cau-

fight, you might be able to take a break, but when filming, you have to do it with full speed and power every single time," Vitali says. "If you're not in great shape, that will take its toll."

Next up after action fighting is the cold readings session, taught by acting and dialogue coach Alan Weeks. Cold readings are auditions where you are handed a part to play, and you have to perform without having the time to rehearse. It's one of the hardest things to do in acting, but there is a technique to it.

Weeks presents that technique, then calls everyone up onto the stage, one by one, for a trial by fire. "It's important to get everyone up onstage and

performing," DePasquale says. "It's hard, but it's also an experience that brings everyone together. We are the only place that will give you feedback about your performance. In the real world, if you audition for a role, after you are done, you'll get a 'Thank you' and that's all. Here, we'll tell you what we think, how you might improve things next time, and that feedback is invaluable." The comments and criticism may be worthwhile, but the actual cold reading is very hard to do. It takes guts and there's little glory.

Right after lunch, the explosives guys go to work. Seems they had some bombs left over from the last movie they did, *The Cut Off*, and they decide to blow them up for the group. The first two are gasoline bombs that send flames and dark smoke up 40 feet into the air. The last bomb is set underneath a 50-gallon steel barrel, which is tethered to the ground by a cable.

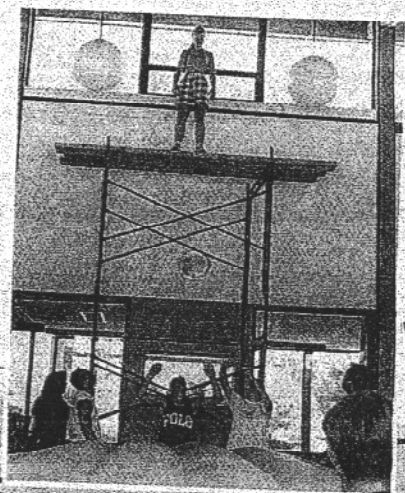
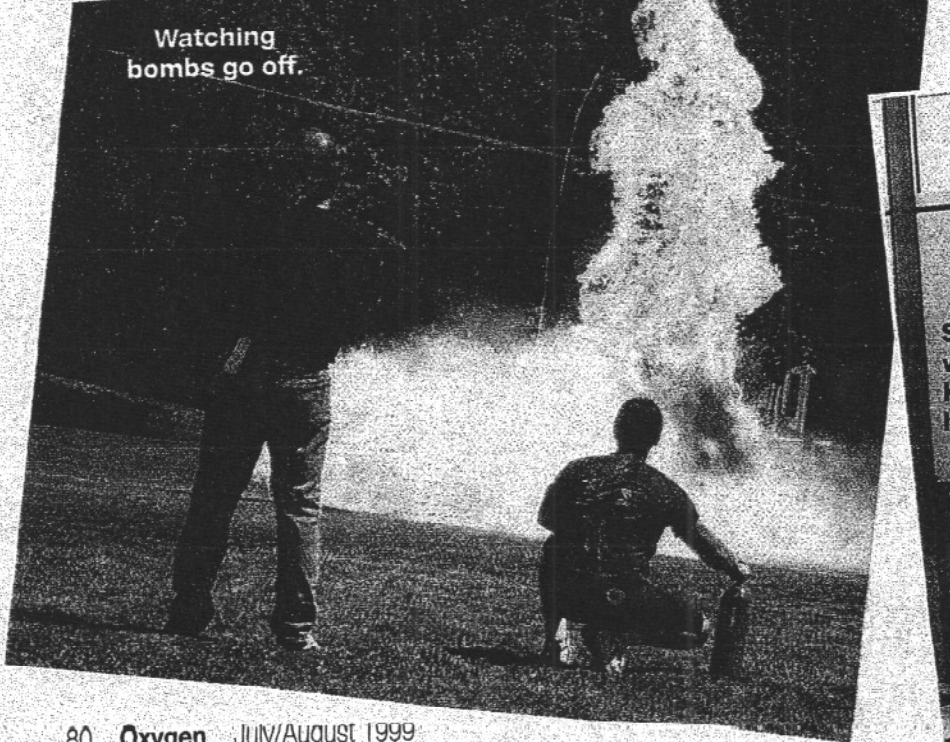
"Effects is hot! Fire in the hole!" shouts Tom Wright, explosives expert. The explosion goes off, and the barrel goes up into the air in flames and smoke. And keeps going up, breaking the cable and soaring almost a hundred feet into the air! It's exciting and cool, and underscores the message of this session. Anything can happen, so be prepared.

Round robin stunts are next on the agenda, and are one of the most popular sessions of the weekend. It's a round robin rotation between high falls into an air bag, gun safety and shooting, and knife throwing. High falls are a chance to face your fears, and fly through the air. Beginners start at a one story fall, while the advanced group climbs up to two or three stories.

"I have a tremendous fear of heights," explains Tara Scotti. "I try not to let it rule my life, I try to battle my fears. I was terrified of the high falls, but I'm glad that I did it. Once it was over, I



Watching bombs go off.



Stunt woman Kathy Kidd high falls



loved the adrenaline rush. It was still scary. The instructors were so amazing and so on point with everyone. They were very aware of our weaknesses and strong points, and constructive in their comments. I felt that I was getting a lot of personal attention."

Gun safety starts Vince DeNiro's (yes, he is related to Robert – a cousin) talk, but the students want to know when they start shooting. It's easy for even the simplest gun situation to go south in a hurry, so Vince ignores the impatience from his students and stresses safety, checking and double-checking, and proper firearm procedure. He tells the story about Brandon Lee's death as a cautionary tale – it was improper gun handling that resulted in the actor's demise, and the actors should know enough about gun safety to make sure all the checks and balances are in place.

"I've been on a movie set when the fighters were asked who has handled and fired a weapon before," says Ron Succarotte an actor and fight choreographer who's also a camp veteran with six films under his belt. "I had done it at the camps, so I knew how to handle myself. I got the job, and got even more work when the director and producer saw what I could do."

Billy Shovan runs the knife rotation. Mild mannered and polite, Billy is deadly with a knife. He teaches the students to handle a knife convincingly, and shows them how to throw knives at a target so they imbed deeply – no mean feat.

"I felt very powerful with the knife, because it is so much technique, and it's more primitive," Tara says. "You have to pay attention to the technique, and it requires more thinking than just pointing a gun and pulling the trigger. Our instructor, Billy, was amazing – he made it so easy. I was even able to stick the knife!"

After all that physical work, the students sit down and work their brain a bit. Strandberg, who wrote the textbook for the weekend, *Action Filmmaking Master Class*, and is also on the film faculty at Towson University, explains how to break down a movie scene. The class watches the classic opening scene from *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, then discusses motivation, conflict and the rules of screenwriting (enter a scene at the last possible moment, leave at the earliest possible moment and more).

After dinner, Weeks leads the students into the auditorium again for rehearsed auditions. Using scenes from Strandberg's movies, the students take turns coming up in pairs to perform in front of the entire population. It's a daunting challenge, but almost everyone is up for the task. "There's a tremendous amount of talent in this group," says Keith Vitali, a

tioned to listen for our cue . . . "Action!" . . . before going into our sequence. We're tricked more than once by our instructors. The penalty for wasting the director's valuable time and money is a set of pushups. All of us. We bleed together. That's a phrase I'll hear a lot during this weekend.

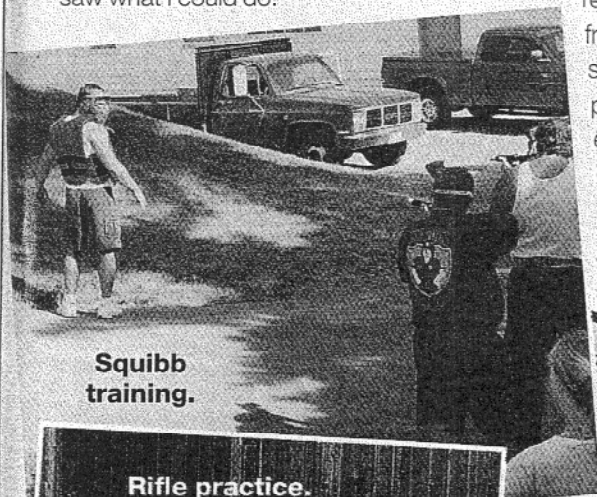
I am required to do a rehearsed scene from samples of the *Action Film Making Manual*. I hope to benefit from professional, reliable feedback. My partner and I study our lines over lunch, but my concentration is off. I'm dreading the high fall marked on the schedule as my next class.

I can't fathom why the rest of my classmates push and elbow their way into line. I reluctantly take my place at the back and watch them happily throw themselves from the eight-foot platform to the airbag below. My turn comes. My stomach flutters. What looked possible from the ground now looks impossible from the platform. I command my feet to jump, but they ignore me. My instructor says he knows I can do it. His confidence in me gives me confidence in myself. I make the jump and I'm fine! I roll off the bag and pop back into line. I want to do it again!

After the high fall, I believe I can do anything! I fire a machine gun. I throw a knife. Nothing can stop me. That is, until I climb onstage to do my love scene. My partner agrees to honor my request to hug instead of kiss. I don't think my ego could take it if the director said my kissing technique needs work. The same butterflies that I felt before the high fall sail back as I take my place. The director gives us our cue, "Action!" I know my lines and forget the audience is watching until I hear the applause. It's over! I can't believe it. They liked us. They really liked us!

After competition on Sunday, everybody exchanges addresses and phone numbers. I felt the best part of the weekend was being surrounded by people who dream big dreams, and are willing to do what it takes to make them come true. I remember the words of the high fall instructor. Our perception from the ground is different from our perception from the sky.

Riding home on the train, I'm sore and tired, but satisfied. I watch the development of a purple bruise blossoming on one elbow from my last breakfall. I am proud of the bruise. It tells the world I'm a fighter. ☺



Squibb training.



Rifle practice.



Knife throwing.

little amazed. "I'd be able to cast a movie just from this camp." In an atmosphere of support and friendship, everyone takes their turn up onstage as the session lasts long into the night.

Sunday

The last day of the three-day seminar starts early, with yet another action fighting class, this one focusing on falling, rolling and other, more advanced skills. After brunch, the students have some time to drill their routines for the upcoming action fighting competition. They are assigned to come up with a scene that showcases their acting ability, their fighting ability, and their creative talents. These scenes are performed onstage and judged by all the instructors in front of everyone.

Winning the competition can be quite a feather in an actor/actress's cap, and many winners have gone on to film roles right away. In fact, after one camp in Los Angeles, four students got hired as soon as the seminar was over!

The competition starts promptly at one, and groups of five or less move onstage. The judges use scoring sheets to keep track of hits and misses, mistakes, creativity and originality.

"I love the final competition, because it's like all these ugly ducklings, who came to us knowing nothing, have now become beautiful swans," says Keith Vitali. "We see exactly what they have learned, and sometimes these guys really amaze us."

The scenes are great – some funny, some poignant, some remarkable for their complexity and difficulty. Some just plain bad. The winner? A fight scene based on *The Jerry Springer Show*. This one had the audience rolling in the aisles, and the fight choreography was almost flawless.

It's a wrap. After the competition, everyone says goodbye. No tears are shed, but this group of over 100 talented people has become something of a family. Shared experiences forge a bond that is hard to sever. "You form a bond with the other people," says Tara. "You are all pushing for each other, and it's a really supportive environment. You come in as strangers, and you feel like you know them when you leave. It's a nice feeling."

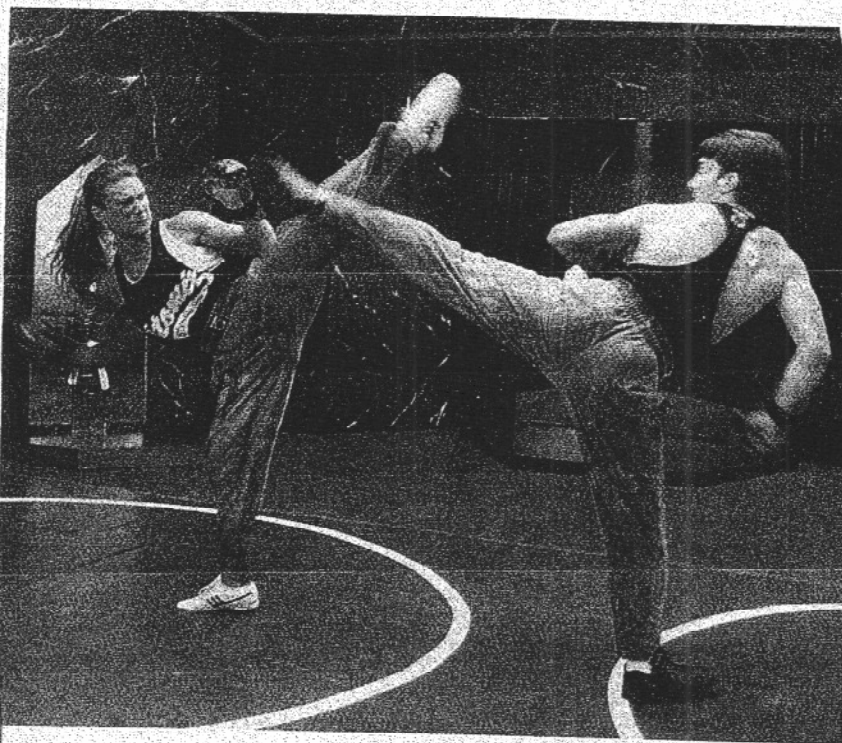
But it's not really goodbye, just farewell for now, because these students are expected to do something with the skills they've just learned. They are encouraged to send headshots,

resumes and videos to Strandberg to critique, and he truly expects to use some of the new talent in his next project.

And what about Tara Scotti? She's made a bunch of contacts, and several of the producers were talking amongst themselves about her possibilities. "Tara's got a great deal of talent," Vitali says. "I was very impressed by her presence and her acting ability. She needs some work on the fighting end of it, but this is a step in the right direction. I think she could be very successful. She's got the look, the talent and the physicality to be an action star."

Now, Tara's got to find her big break. "After learning about the fight sequences and the technical training, I really have more of an appreciation for the work that goes into action films," she says. "I don't think I'll ever look at an action film in the same way again. I want to take more acting classes, do new head shots, and break into films. I have been doing the prints and modeling, and the fitness competitions. Now I am looking at action films as a real future for me." ☐

For more information on the next Action Fighting camp, or on hosting your own camp, call 1-800-573-8050.



Kelly Gallant, an action camp graduate, puts her training to use in the movie *Super Fights*.

