

LOUISE NICHOLAS

I WON'T LIVE IN FEAR

The rape survivor is urging women to learn the skills to defend themselves

The flashback for rape survivor Louise Nicholas was real and frightening. At first she froze – then she fought back.

Her eyes widen instinctively as she recalls the moment she was set upon by a trained Protect Self Defence instructor – the organisation Louise is supporting this month in association with Rape Prevention Education.

'Even though I knew it was Phil [the instructor] I couldn't see him because of the mask, and as a survivor it all came flooding back! But then I thought, "No. You're not going to do this to me again," and I lost it,' says Louise, 42, a survivor advocate for Rape Prevention Education.

The survivor of a police 'pack rape' was taking part in one of the Protect Self Defence courses in the lead-up to the organisation's Women's Personal Safety Seminar on June 30, where Louise will be guest speaker.

'The instructors try their hardest to fight us. But I got him

off me and got away. I looked back and saw him on the floor in pain because I'd punched him in the throat, then I went back and booted him again! It felt good.'

The Rotorua-based mother of four, who works tirelessly to highlight the plight of sexual assault survivors, says the course was empowering. Louise believes all women should arm themselves with the skills she learnt to avoid her same fate. It's this message

'It's important to know how to talk your way out of a situation.'

Louise will push at the upcoming women-only seminar.

'Speaking as somebody who has been a victim, to learn these strategies to not to be a victim again – it's vital for every single woman to equip themselves with these skills,' the former New Zealander of the Year explains.

Although there is no physical component to the two and half

hour Auckland-based seminar, it aims to enlighten participants on how to better identify and avoid potential violence. They'll learn to pinpoint manipulation strategies used against women, examine the stages of self-defence, and understand the psychology of an attacker and how they choose their targets.

'There's a myth you need a black belt in karate to defend yourself as a woman. You don't. You actually have the tools within yourself – your fingernails, your hands, legs and your high heels,' Louise explains. 'It's important to know how to talk your way out

of a situation, or if it happens to know how to defend yourself.

'I've gone on to take the physical component of the course, which I'll be encouraging all women to enroll in.'

And the first to attend will be Louise's three daughters, Jessica, 21, Kerriann, 18, and McKaela, 15.

'Having teenage daughters who go out, one of the things

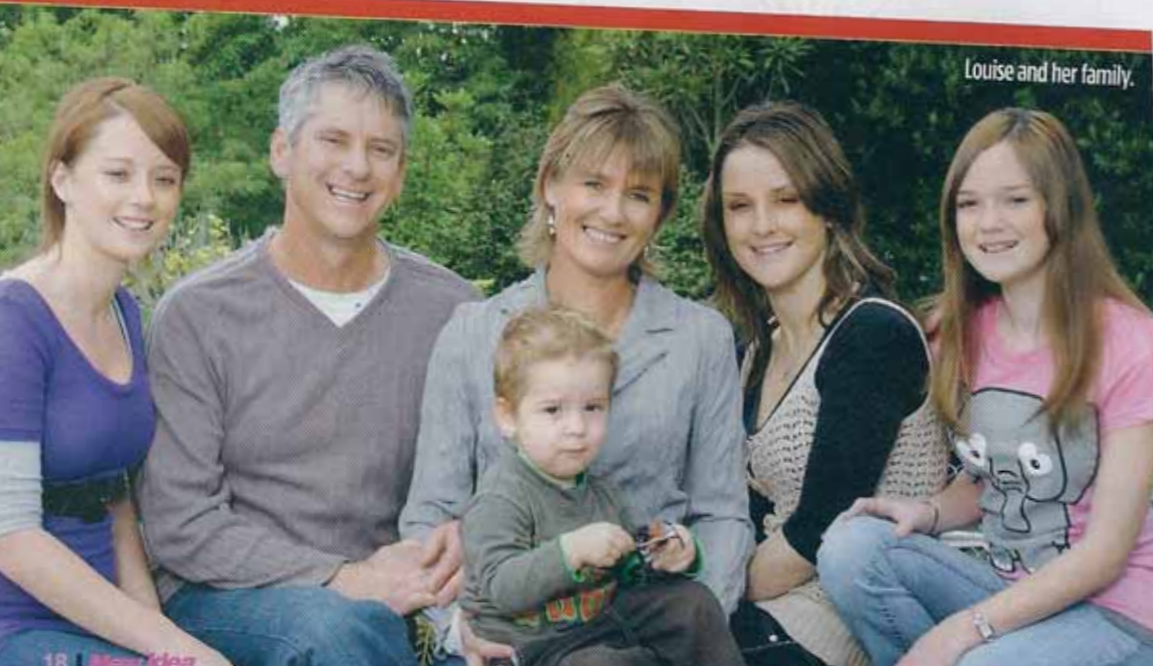
I think about is "How do they defend themselves?" says Louise, who also has a son Luke, three, with her husband of 22 years, forestry worker Ross, 46. 'But knowing what's been done to me, I don't think there's any way they'll become victims. They're pretty tough cookies.'

It's six years since Louise decided to go public with her historic rape allegations against police officers Brad Shipton, Bob Schollum and Clint Rickards. Although all three were acquitted, it was later revealed that Shipton and Schollum had been convicted of raping another woman in Mt Maunganui in 1989, and they were imprisoned. Clint Rickards resigned from his post as assistant Police Commissioner, and is now a qualified lawyer.

Louise, who regularly supports rape and sexual abuse survivors in court, tries not to think about the day the two will come face-to-face in court.

'Thinking back to the day at the course where I froze and then I fought, I guess if that day comes at the courthouse I hope I end up doing neither – I just want to do my job,' she says. **NI**

By Caroline Botting



Louise and her family.



CLINT RICKARDS



SEMINAR

The Women's Personal Safety Seminar is a charity event for Rape Prevention Education and will be held in Auckland on June 30 at 6.30pm. To book your tickets for the seminar see www.protectselfdefence.co.nz.