



Mike

Chapter 14

How to Throw a Punch

Summer, 1964

Boys, Sooner or later you will find yourself in a fistfight. It's inevitable. When you do, you better know how to throw a punch. Here's what happened.

I was innocently playing Ping-Pong when it started. As I pulled my arm back to return a slam shot, I felt the paddle hit something soft. I turned to find Mike glaring at me, the side of his face reddening. "Sorry, Mike," I offered. Mike and I were friends. We had been in the same class and played on the same sports teams since first grade.

He was furious. "You jerk! What do you think you're doing?" He screamed as he pushed me.

Backing up, I told him, "Relax, it was an accident!"

But Mike would hear nothing of it. He pushed me again and put up his fists. "I'm going to kick your ass!"

My heart was pounding. Still backing up, I put up my fists. Like it or not, I was in a fight. I wasn't known as a fighter. Mike, on the other hand, enjoyed a reputation as a tough kid. This was not his first fight and he never lost.

Mike took a wild swing with his right fist, not a good move. I blocked his swing with my left forearm then, stepping forward, punched with my right. My fist made solid contact with Mike's nose and mouth. Blood sprayed as his nose erupted and his lip split. He staggered backwards, then fell on his butt. With blood pouring from his nose, he regained his feet and staggered to the restroom. Fight over.

Years before, I had come home crying after Mark, a childhood friend, hit me in a fight over a toy. I wanted Dad to settle the score for me, but he would have none of it. "You need to learn to defend yourself."

With tears drying on my cheeks, he had me stand with my left foot forward and with my arms up and bent at the elbow. He put my left hand slightly higher and in front of my right. "This is how to throw a punch," he said as he stood behind me and took my hands in his. "Never lead with your right. Lead with your left. Throw quick punches, then follow with a right," he instructed as he pushed my left fist and then my right fist forward. "Block with your forearms, then counter-punch."

These lessons went on for several weeks until Dad was convinced I could stand on my own. Refresher courses were offered regularly over the years. "Never pick a fight," he admonished. "But don't run away from one either."

I walked into the restroom to find Mike standing over a sink. Blood discolored the porcelain. His nose was packed with red-stained toilet paper. “Where did you learn to punch like that?” he asked.

“My Dad taught me,” I replied.