

A MUST FOR COLLEGE: safety

By Charlotte Sutton

If you are sending a child off to college, you no doubt are filling his or her head with lots of good advice. I know my parents did.

The precollege tip that I remember most clearly (and the one that may have been the most valuable), however, came from my brother:

"Never drink the punch at parties."

This really stuck with me. Partly because I had never before known him to counsel against anything involving a party.

But mostly because he was already in college and therefore in a far better position to dispense wisdom than our well-meaning but ancient parents.

It's tough to beat advice from smart peers.

If you don't have a big brother handy, you might consider listening to a Vanderbilt University senior named Dallas Jessup.

Dallas was just 14 when she saw the story of Carlie Brucia, the 11-year-old girl whose abduction from a Sarasota car wash was captured on video.

“Fear is not what Dallas' project is all about. Her video shows how good situations can go bad, so that — ideally — you can stay out of harm's way.”



Dallas Jessup, a senior at Vanderbilt University with a black belt in taekwondo, wants young people to learn to be safe.

Dallas thought girls ought to know how to defend themselves, so she started a movement.

Just Yell Fire! was her first project, a video that delivered a powerful message to young girls: Don't let anybody mess with you. Kick, punch, scream, run, make a scene, and yes, just yell fire.

Watch the video (it's free to view at www.justyellfire.com), and you'll see why Dallas won lots of national

Continued on next page

Tampa Bay Times

Continued from previous page

attention and a Teen Choice Award.

Now she's back with a new edition: Just Yell Fire: Campus Life, at the same website. Dallas and a group of actors and martial arts experts (she's a black belt in tae kwon do) depict a series of situations that will be familiar to anyone who has gone to college, even us ancients.

We see a harmless-looking guy persuade a girl to let him into a dorm building. He gets into another girl's room and attacks her.

I nearly stopped watching, thinking back on how many times I would let harmless looking people into my dorm, just because I thought that was what polite girls did. Sheesh.

Then the video shows the "victim" fighting back and escaping, followed by step-by-step instructions from Dallas and a martial arts instructor showing how she did it — and how you can too.

More scenarios follow: A date rape, an attack in a deserted part of campus and another in a parking garage. And yes, a party where somebody slips drugs into a girl's drink.

Just the kind of thing my brother warned me about.

I'd be the last person to suggest you send your kids off to school in a state of terror. I loved college, and I hope your kids do too.

Fear is not what Dallas' project is all about. Her video shows how good situations can go bad, so that — ideally — you can stay out of harm's way.

You're walking through the parking garage and get a creepy feeling? Trust it. Ask a security guard to walk you to your car.

You're on a date that gets too hot for comfort? No means no, and if your date can't grasp that, kick, claw, scream and run. Call the police. Rape is rape, no matter what some dim politician says. It's not your fault.

One in five women will be the victim of a rape or attempted rape during their college years, the Justice Department estimates. Less than 5 percent of those crimes are reported.

Just Yell Fire: Campus Life is not going to turn you into a martial arts master, though it may prompt you to sign up for classes.

But it could inspire thoughtful reflection, planning and action regarding safety, boundaries and self-worth.

Okay, class dismissed. ■