



# AAP Interview: Teena Apeles

Earlier this year, Seal Press released *Women Warriors: Adventures from History's Greatest Female Fighters* by popular freelance writer Teena Apeles.

*Asian American Press* recently caught up with her to hear her side of the story.

**Asian American Press (AAP): First, congratulations on getting *Women Warriors* published. What made you choose this as your subject?**

Teena Apeles (TA): Over the last few years there has been a plethora of female pop culture books published that took a hipper, more upbeat look at women in history, but I didn't see anything on the market for young women that had focused primarily on female fighters.

These women aren't covered in any history books that are used in high schools, but there was a rise of popular female action series and movies, such as *Buffy*, *The Powerpuff Girls* and *Crouching Tiger*, so I felt it was a good time to introduce audiences to real warrior women.

Every girl wishes she had the ability to physically defend herself as well as "put up a fight" if her beliefs or loved ones were being attacked. I really felt it was important for young women to know that our sex has been doing just that for centuries.

**AAP: How long have you been writing?**

TA: Professionally or passionately? If it's the latter, it would be around two decades. I have been keeping journals, which included everything from poetry to fiction (gossip), since I was in junior high. As for when I first started having my work published, it's been about nine years.

Interview by:  
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**AAP: How did you get involved in writing in the first place?**

TA: Growing up, I always kept a journal. In fact, I have a whole library of journals I've filled since I was in grade school. I was never much of a storyteller, but I've always liked to document what was going on in my life. Sometimes it took the form of fragmented thoughts, gossip, pages of questions and often, poetry--not always good. Through high school and college, I really took to essay writing, critical and creative. I eventually went to work for a news agency and independent weekly after I graduated from college and have been working in the magazine and book publishing industries ever since. But apart from the whole business of writing, I always had this desire to get people to see things in a new light. Now, much of the writing I do aims to bring attention to people, memories, dreams, cultures, ideas, accomplishments that (I think) are fascinating and underrepresented in the world.

**AAP: Is there anyplace that readers can go to find more examples of your work?**

TA: I have contributed pieces to the anthologies *Father Poems* (Anvil Press), *Bare Your Soul: The Girl's Guide to Enlightenment* (Seal Press) and *The Geography of Rage: Remembering the Los Angeles Riots of the 1992* (Really Great Books). And hopefully, in the next month, I will have an archive of my magazine clips on my website at [teenaapeles.com](http://teenaapeles.com).

**AAP: Out of all of the women warriors whose lives you researched, whose life resonates the most closely with your own?**

TA: That's an excellent question, and I must admit, I don't feel right even comparing my life to the majority of the women warriors (and a few of the fictional characters) presented in the book.

I'd like to believe that I would put my life on the line to defend my beliefs or have the ability to inspire and organize hundreds or thousands of people to fight for an important cause -- and I certainly have my list of issues/injustices that I want to bring attention to -- but my actions are baby steps compared to the great sacrifices and accomplishments women like the Trung sisters, Lakshmibai or Aung San Suu Kyi have made in their efforts to give a better life to their people.



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**AAP: Whose life was the most difficult for you to research?**

TA: There's no competition here, exploring the life of Boudicca of the Iceni was difficult for many reasons. First off, like a few other women featured in the book, there were many instances of conflicting information on her, even down to how her name was spelled. This is to be expected since she lived during the first century and just like the telephone game we played as kids, as information gets passed down, translated and so on, it gets altered. I did my best to keep with the most widely accepted version of her struggle against Roman rule, which leads me to the other reason Boudicca's history was hard to confront.

This warrior queen's battles were among the most bloody. Thousands of people were killed during Boudicca's revolt against Roman occupation, and it was not just soldiers. Some of the books I read about her gave such graphic and horrifying accounts of how her army destroyed cities and, on an occasion or two, killed thousands of its inhabitants, it was often difficult to stomach.

One interesting fact I learned is that her history rests entirely on accounts written by two Roman men, her enemies. But Boudicca isn't without her admirable qualities as well, which you'll discover in the book. If a foreign force invaded your home, attacked your daughters and stripped you and your people of their property, what would you do?

**AAP: What are some of your future follow-up projects?**

TA: I would like to spend some time writing essays about my extended family whose history is filled with drama, humor and interesting cultural tidbits. They really have inspired my writing since I was young and continue to provide me with moving stories that I feel cross cultures. Other projects in the works include a lifestyle book and sitcom, both of which I am developing with friends. And I have always wanted to write children's books, especially since I like to draw from time to time and have my own unique menagerie of animals at home to use as characters.

**AAP: What was your biggest worry as you were putting *Women Warriors* together?**

TA: I think every author's fear is that your book won't be read. Hundreds of books are published every month, will someone see mine? It's something I think about all the time, with the magazine pieces I write as well. Still, even if *Women Warriors* reaches just one new reader a month, and it inspires her (or him), then that's enough for me.



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**AAP: What do hope that your readers will walk away with after reading about the lives of the women warriors?**

TA: I hope that readers of my book will learn that women warriors are not just a myth and that the female spirit in action can be a very powerful force. But more importantly, I hope young readers (male and female) are inspired by the women featured, their acts of bravery and their ability to face the harshest opposition. None of the women in the book accepted the world as it was, they aimed to change it to what they believed was a better reality, and that is why these warriors should not be forgotten -- they should be celebrated.

**AAP: What's been the best compliment you've received regarding your writing?**

TA: "You make me want to write."