

Sempai Erika Hoffeld's Five Questions... Five Minutes with Kancho Soller



Sempai Hoffeld

What do you feel truly distinguishes Kyokushin from other martial arts?

I think what most folks really think first about Kyokushin is the jissen (contact) nature of the style. They think of the exciting tournaments and the dynamics of the fights that are often captured on the internet and played over and over. That's the public face to an extent, but in actuality a very small part of the art.

The demanding physical part of Kyokushin does put it in a certain category and does help separate it from other styles, but the real separation is in the totality of the style. On the mental and spiritual side, the philosophy of OSU dominates and serves as our cornerstone and benchmark. If we stripped everything else aside, OSU is our goal, our objective, our philosophy all wrapped up.

It is this Spirit of OSU, and the demanding training focus on its implementation, that really moves the style to its potential. I say potential, because a singular style really cannot dominate over another, but through great instruction and dedicated practitioners, the style can come to life!

How does teaching karate today differ from teaching 30 years ago?

I do get asked that a lot. I don't find karate unique in training advancements from other physical endeavors, all having dramatically improved over the years. While many things are taught the same, most things are taught much, much better. This leads to a safer dojo and a better training experience. Teachers are more knowledgeable and developmental than those of the past. This is a direct result of what our teachers before us left as a legacy and we should always be grateful for their gifts.

In our association, as in many others, it is expected that full instructors be certified through a special teaching process, gain credentials, and have karate experiences. They are expected to have good heads on their shoulders and exercise good judgment. Thirty years ago, if you could kick, you could teach! Those days are long gone in good dojo.



Kancho in his office making one of his many points!

What are your hopes for the future of the Association?

Well, like most founders, I am always hopeful that the Association will continue to grow in ways that promote the values that I have promoted for these many years. Chief among these is recognizing the developmental potential of each student

and remaining loyal to the missions of the Association. Growth is certainly desired, but only in the Phoenix Way. That's the reason I started the organization and we should never get too far away from that premise.

I am confident that our Shihan bring these values to their dojo and instructors, making the Phoenix Karate-do Association live through our training. On the short side, we are completing our latest strategic plan that will guide us for the immediate years. We will recognize even more the value of technology, meet our obligations to enhance Karatedo, and of course continue our commitment to always train.

Have the Association's international ties affected your world view?

Oh...absolutely. I am fortunate to have traveled and having students overseas brings me that much closer to the world arena. As I have often stated, traveling is the greatest education! Having international ties allows me to know the world differently than "just a news report" and keeps life in perspective. Love, pursuit of happiness, peace and general well being are great commonalities around the world. International travel makes you a more rounded person and you see those traits in a real way. I always learn when I travel. The culture differences of a country often give you a different approach and challenges you on how things are being done. And I've met some fantastic individuals over the years. Our branch chiefs in the Ukraine, for example, our awesome individuals and live life through their commitment to the way of karate.

How has your training over the years influenced your spirituality?

I think if you train correctly in the art and maintain your art through the decades, you cannot but help to grow your spirituality. You see the beauty of people, you see their desires for good fortune and you truly appreciate the gifts of the universe around you. Karate training brings reflection. It is a vital aspect of karatedo and I believe it is not possible for a karateka to develop without a dedicated commitment to reflect on the wonders around us. Personal reflection is simply a must for improving the character! I'm not sure that meets all the definitions of spirituality, but it sure comes close.

I have students of many religions, beliefs, and customs. I respect all of them and also encourage students to always look within themselves. The magic of karate is that magic that each individual is able to bring to the table by challenging themselves and exceeding what they thought possible.

In this respect for me personally, I have a simple and basic belief that I see God in all things and in all places. This gives me great comfort and brings centeredness to my life. Karate enhances that view for me, everyday, day in and day out.

Sempai Erika Hoffeld is a long time member of the Phoenix Karate-do Association. A frequent host of Phoenix Instructors Program sessions, she holds a doctorate in animal medicine and is a practicing veterinarian.

January 2010