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Face to Face

By Janine Moore, Moore Martial Arts

Q&A with

Bill Owens Sifu

Sifu Bill Owens started training in Wun Hop Kuen Do under Sifu Al Dacascos in 1966 and attained 6th degree Black Belt in Wun Hop Kuen Do, 1st degree in Arnis and 3rd level in Capoeira. In addition to Sifu Al Dacascos, his instructors include Remy Preses and Bira Almeida. He has studied martial arts for over 40 years and has operated a school in Oakland, Calif., for most of that. During his own years of competition he won 107 trophies, was rated 5th in the World and rated #1 in Region 1 for three consecutive years. He was one of 10 Martial Artists invited by the Chinese Wushu Association of Beijing, China to attend the 1985 International Chinese Wushu Championships as a United States Martial Arts Representative. Sifu Bill Owens left Wun Hop Kuen Do in 2004 and continues to teach his own system he has named FaChuen or Blossom Fist.

Sifu Bill Owens how did you began your journey as a martial artist?

I guess in my high school days I was a wrestler. Did pretty good in wrestling. So why do I mention that, it made you really conscious of your body, health and eating right because wrestlers had to be on weight. That was my first introduction to proper eating and letting go of the sugar and pastries. Then shortly after high school, a year or two, you start noticing you're not as in shape, I was losing that so I started looking for a place to work out. I decided to go to the YMCA to join the wrestling team. But I had developed a beard and they didn't want any wrestlers with beards. I was kinda, like 'Nah.' I didn't like being told that I needed to get rid of my beard, so I didn't wrestle. That is when I became aware of Kung Fu.

I saw this show on television called Sugarfoot, an old cowboy movie with a little blonde-headed guy in the show. In one of the episodes he was in a bar and he was there to talk with the owner of the bar. When the owner came out there was another character giving the waitress a little problem, and the owner asked the guy to leave, but the guy swung at him instead and the owner kicked him on the side of the head and knocked him out. Then the owner said, "was there someone here to see me?"

Sugarfoot said "Yeah, me."

Sugarfoot said, "Did I just see you kick that man on side of head?" The bar owner said, "That's from my country and the name of it Savat, French foot-fighting."

I didn't know anything about karate, I had heard it was an art that wasn't judo. Coming out of high school in 62-63, what was karate? That was an art of where they broke things with their hands, the Japanese were known to turn their hands into mallets and beat things, to break boards. We didn't know what karate was.

I went looking for this French foot fighting. I used to kick at my friends all the time, just throwing my foot up imitating this TV show, and I got really good at it. High kicks to the head, that's all I saw Sugarfoot do in the TV show.

So one day I was talking to a group of my friends and I kicked at one of my friends head, and he said why don't you stop doing that. Another friend said why don't you go learn that for real? I asked they teach this somewhere?

They said yah, you know, . . . there is this guy, the karate guy with hands going

through tiles.. that's what karate is, they teach kicking and punching. So I looked in the yellow pages and found all kinds of schools. I began checking these schools out and I wasn't really impressed.

I was brought up in a rough neighborhood, that fought, and fought well.

What I saw in karate, they would have had trouble in them

neighborhoods. I knew if they hit them, the guys in my neighborhood would be in trouble, but if they missed, it was going to be bad cause these guys would stomp them when they are on the ground and hit you with anything, and I couldn't see that karate holding up. So I didn't see any reason to take it. I wasn't impressed.

I was visiting one the the dojos and as I was leaving I saw all of these trophies on the wall. The trophies were about a foot tall, I asked this guy at the desk how did you get those. He said well, doing that, and pointed to the two guys in dojo sparring.

I said they won those for doing that? He said yah.

I said give me an application, now I wanted to sign up

I was so happy going home cause I knew I was going to get a trophy. I had come through high school and had several metals, but I never had a trophy. My friends had little bitty bowling trophies, little bitty football ones too.

So that was my plan.

But then one day, my wife and I were driving, just riding around the city, and we went down this long boulevard and she said Kempo Kung Fu. I turned and look and said where did you see that.

It was on that window.

I said Kung Fu is not taught to

non-Chinese, why would they

write that on the window? So

I turned around and there it

was, Kempo Kung Fu.

It was closed since it was

holiday. I said maybe I'll come

back and see, maybe it's just

for Chinese.



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Q&A with Sifu Bill Owens, continued

I wanted to see what Kung Fu was. At that time, Kato was on TV. At that time it was not accepted to teach Kung Fu to non-Chinese, and you just accepted it. That was just the way it was. As I was looking at the window, I knew I was double parked, so I better leave, but this little Asian woman was running down street, yelling hey, hey....

I turned and pointed at myself, like me?

She caught up to me and said, are you interested in the school. She said my husband was off today and we were just passing by and saw you standing there. He wanted me to tell you to wait.

I said sure, ok.

I waited, and here comes this guy, he was so young looking.

This is when I met the young, Al Dacascos. He was telling me the schpeel, and the pictures on the wall looked really authentic. I said I'm about to join this karate school in Alameda.

That is when he explained the difference between Karate and Kung Fu. He explained that Karate needs a lot of space for movement. Then he sat down next to me and went crazy explaining to me that Karate is just repetition, just throwing all kinds of knees and elbows. He explained to me that with Kung Fu you can fight in a phone booth.

Al was so into his explanation that he went totally ballistic, I could see he was so excited. He said Karate just needs more space. I said that I thought Kung Fu wasn't taught to non-Chinese. Al told me that he was from Hawaii, and they've been teaching it over there for a long time. But since I've been on the mainland the old Chinese tried to stop me, but there are a lot of young Chinese that are teaching it now on the mainland because they want to make money.

I said OK, I had one more question. Last night on television, this guy Kato was fighting a Praying Mantis style, and they went into a salutation, this long salutation of ritual movement and they went into the fight, .. I said what was that ritual movement?

He said, 'Oh, you mean this?'

And Al performed the movement, he went so low his butt almost scraped the ground.. he said that?

I said give me an application.

I knew it was real Kung Fu then. I never did join the karate school. I was learning from Al a mixture of Karate and Kung Fu. He was Kajukenbo, but also did a derivative style called Chun Fa. Al's teacher in Hawaii, was Buck Sam Kong. They had been studying Kajukenbo, which was a mixture of Kempo, Karate, Judo and Chinese boxing.

Sifu Al was more influenced by Kung Fu. We were the only Kajukenbo school doing Si-Lum form. We became a part his school and started doing tournaments. The Professional Karate Magazine used to follow it real close. The magazine began rating fights and I was rated 5th in the world for about a year. Later I was rated #1 in Region One out of 10 regions. For three

straight years. I really enjoyed fighting and tournaments. I never thought I would become an instructor one day. I had my own job. But Dacascos moved away to Denver Colorado. He turned to me to help keep everybody together from the school that we could. We had no building. But we managed to keep everyone together at a recreation center. Which grew to a point where I thought if the students paid me \$18 each, we could get a building of our own.

That was 42 years ago and we are still in that location.

When did the other influences with different styles such as Escrima and Capoeira begin?

In 1974, I met Remy Presas at the end of nationals. He was selling sticks at a table, and I didn't know what size to buy. He let me buy one of each size. I didn't know anything. He told me to come to a seminar, so I studied and followed him and got my black belt under Remy Presas. It was Modern Arnis when I got into it in 1974.

In 1979, maybe 80, I was looking for Capoeira. In 1980, I was at a show.. Some kind of dancing, it was in San Francisco. It was a Brazilian group, so I went in with my wife, looked around, but wasn't really impressed with Brazilian music, but as I was leaving a foot went up in the air and down, then I heard the words. Capoeira.

They just did Capoeira, they were finishing flipping up, so I waited 'til end of show to talk to the group. He said they were from Brazil. I began to follow them to several other shows and every time I picked up a new move.

They invited me up on stage, cause they heard I was a percussionist. They saw me at every show so they began to recognize me. The group decided to go back to Brazil, because they were not making money. I found out he was a master at Capoeira. I said I have a school, come over and check it out, and look at it, if you want to stay in America, you can teach out of my school, just teach me Capoeira.

The master came, he liked the school and started teaching, and that's how I got into Capoeira.

What was your experience with Grandmaster Ming Lum? Being in the arts and doing kung fu or Capoeira I would practice a lot. I would be invited to events, but after I would get their the people who invited me would start talking in Chinese to try to make me feel bad or left out. The same thing would happen when I attended the other Capoeira events as well. They would say that was nice because we were doing the real thing. That is the politics of the arts back then. I'd just rather not come. But Ming Lum, he took care of me. He always made sure I was alright with things, that I was welcomed. He was always there for sure, always calling me and inviting me. Ming really took care of me, and that's why I stayed closer to the Chinese arts.

How did the talking sticks begin?

The stick art evolved into what it is, Kusema Vijiti. That's a whole story on what I want to share. The talking sticks.

I began teaching talking sticks and not having anyone to work with and not having anyone show up for class, so I began to tie my sticks on the wall. I began to recognize that almost any move had an answer. Almost any move has an answer, and it has a sound. I don't make up them rhythms. Boom, boom boom. You're going to get that same rhythm. I'm just looking for an answer.

He swung at me, I swing back, ... cling cling.. It's not a big secret. You're putting a sound to every meeting, so it's what you'd do if you'd say, you guys do a form and I'm going to try to get some music to match it.

Or I'm going to clap my hands every time you strike or kick.

That's normal. But when you find out it actually is making an enjoyable sound, that was something that I almost couldn't believe, because at first I didn't hear it. Then when I began to hear it, I was like I don't believe this. All I was doing was hitting, blocking, striking, moving back, and they all had their own rhythm. ... you could close your eyes.. that's the unique part and I'm sure it's going to evolve.

That's the talking stick part. In talking about my art, the talking stick that evolved off Remy Presas sticks I was learning and Capoeira I just got culturally interested in and all of those together, the Capoeira in my Kung Fu. I was freed up. My instructor who left me, .. by doing so he freed me up. Otherwise I probably never would have found the rhythm in martial arts that I do, because I was a true student, and I was there, a respectful and honorable student. That's what everybody should be. But because this happened, and what I found was just gold, and I would have never found it under my instructors. I found it cause of the rhythmic background that I had, and the percussion and they all start to make sense, but by me being free, it was such a blessing and I was blessed.

Thoughts about the Gathering?

These people love me here, and I come up here, and it's so respectful. Your teachers sent for me. They're flying me around. And treat us like gold. And the reason that's so exciting. When I first started coming here. I told Hanshi, I just got out of a bad marriage and don't want to be in another. I said I hope you understand. After my first time here, I said I'm so glad I came. I came because Ming Lum told me, you need to go.. Then Mike Young called and told me, "Be there, Bill." Of course I went, but I didn't want to. But Hanshi, and the way these people receive you is just great energy. I found a family, I'm not married, we just affiliate. That's awesome. It ain't about money, rank, or getting this degree. ... I'm really glad about that.



Quit Power

One Last Time - Bruce Juchnik Hanshi on Ming Lum

To the reader, you just read an article we did in previous newsletter about Sifu Ming Lum, who unfortunately, we've lost. Best way to remember Ming Lum, is very simple. He was an open minded man, a great teacher, a great mentor to many of us.

We as practitioners have to remember who these people were, meaning our past pioneers, and who they wish us to be. The things they like us to be are these things: people that lack selfishness; lack greed; lack ego. Ming Lum was an individual that was all sharing and giving. I was privileged to attend his last birthday party. He was a very sick man, not well. I saw him going from table to table, thanking everyone who was there, opening his heart to everyone. He had no ulterior motives, nothing in mind that was negative only positive.

Each year at the Gathering, Sifu Ming Lum was there for everyone. The students who took this opportunity to meet and see him, to talk to him, knew he was a special treasure, and that was an example of how we all would like to be. Unfortunately, many times when great teachers pass, others will have a tendency to gravitate and make claims about their perceived greatness and will only use their connection with those wonderful individuals from a martial standpoint, to self-promote, and to ingratiate themselves on others and represent false claims, and false positions with the wrong things, instead of truth and integrity.

It is unfortunate that last year, at the wall of legends, we had lost greats such as Wally Jay, Bobby Lowe, Teddy Wong, Larry Heartsel, and many others. These people are placed upon the wall of legends for the purpose of us remembering if it wasn't for them and their efforts none of us would be practicing martial arts today.

Since the passing of Sifu Ming Lum, I talked to many people who were all greatly influenced by who he was. Many people coming out to Sacramento for the Gathering would go to San

Francisco, they were greeted and treated as if they were kings and queens by Sifu Lum. Their rank didn't matter, but their hearts did. All individuals I'm talking about, and discussed who Sifu Lum was as a practitioner -- just who he was as an individual. They were all in awe over him, by his demeanor; his person; and his accomplishments in the arts -- he had quiet power.

As you study martial arts, remember Sifu Ming Lum. One as an accomplished martial artist; two as a genuine human being, soul and positive spirit and light for all of use to follow. There will be a huge void with his passing. We should all be thank-full for Sifu Ming Lum in teaching us throughout his life.





The Unspoken Etiquette

Are the martial art systems of today losing control over the unspoken etiquette? Is this something that also has to be taught and outwardly spoken and practiced in and out of the martial art school? Normally you would not have to go over the unspoken, that the regular practice of etiquette would be sufficient, bow to the higher rank, bow to your instructor, lining up according to rank, using correct titles when addressing senior instructors, and the list goes on. Something is happening to the unspoken etiquette. This article will discuss this with some of the questions and topics being answered by Bruce Juchnik Hanshi.

Some years back, say about 15 to 20, when the instructor issued a certificate to a student it was regarded with high respect and appreciation.

Has that changed over the years and why?

First, title and rank. People who accumulate titles, rank and certificates are missing a very important thing pertaining to them. 1. Certificate signed by a teacher is merely a signature on a piece of paper that is not valid unless the work goes with the meaning of the paper and the signature. As an example, the documentation I've received in rank and position were directives. If I did not follow through on those directives, that paper and signature is useless. Another example. The use of kanji, calligraphy, those are pictorials. The pictorial for Gung Fu is two symbols. The first part of the compound is work, the second is power. Gung Fu means work power. If it is not worked, it lacks power. It cannot represent a piece of paper.

There are those that through association, by a picture taken, or a visit to someone's house, will assume they know everything about that person and their art. If they cannot perform it on the floor, and if they cannot demonstrate the work they've put into it, they should not make the claim. But I really feel sorry for their behavior that will affect the behavior of their students these people might represent. Martial arts are about honor, about caring and heart. People who make claims or do these kinds of things, will have to ask yourself. Do they lack

heart, caring? People who want to represent what they perceive as giving power, did they put the heart and caring into what they do to truly represent it.

Martial artists today are always making claims. Those individuals need to respect their elders, and they need to put in the work, and the heart and the caring. The practitioners who came before them did not spend their time bragging. They spent their time working.

What was someone's like Robert Trias' approach to disharmony within his own organization and practitioners' behavior.

On the exterior, Robert Trias was like a pillar, a mountain, a strong man, but inside, he was a bowl of mush. He had nothing but love for all of his students and love for all practitioners. He knew when to crack the whip, and he knew when to allow his heart to be opened. Robert Trias was probably one of the greatest influences on the martial arts within the last 100 years. But he was also a fighter. He would also use his authority, when appropriate, to discipline bad behavior, to protect the greater good.

One more thing, he had knowledge that backed up his behavior. The problem with practitioners today, they lack the knowledge. They just present inappropriate behavior. People today use titles that they know nothing about. Robert Trias would never allow that cause he had respect for the people who represented those titles. Titles such as Hanshi, which is my title, a job description, today is used by everyone. I sometimes wonder if you were to walk around in a shopping mall and someone said Hanshi, that 100 people wouldn't turn around and say yes. Know what you're doing, when you're doing things and have enough respect for the cultures in which you're using these titles to show proper respect to them.

Another miss use of titles is O'Sensei. Great instructors are not referred to as O'Sensei until after their death. But some people today are using that title for themselves. Trias, would have become angered through this miss use.

This is a shame.

Martial arts are losing its integrity because of foolish behavior. Martial arts are earned. Although you must learn to earn a living if you have a school, but you also have the priority and responsibility that the student learns how to earn their rank, not merely pay for it. Remember, trophies break. Competition is supposed to be from within, not for a mother or father to object to a judge, unless they wear a uniform and get in a class.

This is just a small sample of how we, as instructors and school owners need to pay attention to and be diligent in teaching the unspoken etiquette of martial arts. Some discussions could be: when a lower belt is amongst higher ranks, black belts or seniors that they should pay attention, listen and watch how the interaction is taking place. Be aware of how the seniors reflect and treat the others in the room.

Make sure that they understand that they have to work hard and put in time at the school to be ready to test or receive their rank. Teach them commitment and perseverance. Think about the journey that you went through to get where you are today and try to pass that same compassion and heart on to the student. Help them to understand and appreciate the hidden understanding of etiquette.

Bruce Juchnik Hanshi do you have anything else you would like to add to this subject?

Yes.

There are so many things practitioners do not pay attention to that is a very important part of etiquette. My question is, is it because they are stupid or flat out foolish? It's my hope to see all these teachers who have come before us, if they were alive today, would they be proud of what the new generation has done – not disgusted.