

A Tribute to Ed

The year 2000 marks the 10th anniversary of Senior Grandmaster of American Kenpo Ed Parker's passing. The 15th December 1990 was a sad day for thousands of people throughout the globe, whos' lives were richer because of this man - a charismatic Martial Arts legend, taken from us when he was only 59 years of age and in the prime of his life. His death was both unexpected and untimely. After landing at Honolulu International Airport on a trip home with his wife to spend time with his family he suffered a massive heart attack and passed on.

Thousands attended his funeral to pay their last respects to this great innovator of logic and the Martial Arts.

At the time of his passing the undisputed 'father' of American Kenpo Karate, this Karate Grandmaster, businessman, film consultant, actor, writer, publisher, teacher's teacher, student, innovator, father, international leader, talented musician, was still developing and evolving his Art. His lifetime's work, his legacy to us all, is still evolving and progressing today just as he would have wanted.

"When I am gone, I hope that people won't try to traditionalise myself. I want you to always remember that Kenpo will always be the Art of Perpetual Change. If you remember this, then the Art will never become obsolete because it will change with the times".

American Kenpo Karate is a living monument to a man whos' profound knowledge and wisdom is as fresh today as it was back then when he was alive and kicking (so to speak).

Those of us who were extremely fortunate to have been able to work with and be befriended by this remarkable man, continue with his work, carrying the flame (The Art is represented by the flame, beautiful but deadly if touched) into the next millennium.

Ed Parker's story is that of a classic American rags to riches dream, the tale of a selfless individual who gained success while also helping many others along the way. He left his system without a successor and now there are over 75 different Kenpo Organisations with many prominent Kenpoists being able to trace their lineage back to him.

As the years pass by, it is a sad fact

that there are fewer and fewer people in the Art who have seen him move, seen him 'in action'. When he moved there would be an explosion of raw power and energy. That unmistakable sound of Ed Parker at work, he would hit with his whole being. His silver hair shimmering and rippling with the motion.

When he hit you it was like being hit by a train. A lot of video footage exists of Ed Parker demonstrating his art, but it can never convey to those who never met him or attended his seminars the emotions you felt when he executed his Kenpo on you and on others in the class. It provides us only with a glimpse of the real man. I like many others who worked with him, feel that it is a great privilege to have been able to study with him and be befriended by Ed Parker. Off the mat he was a caring and generous individual who lived life to the full. In the mid-fifties he authored a famous creed which many Karate and Kenpo clubs, groups and individuals throughout the world now use:

"I come to you with only Karate, empty hands,

I have no weapons, but should I be forced to defend myself, my principles,

Or my honour, should it be a matter of life or death, of right or wrong,

Then here are my weapons, Karate my empty hands"

Ed Parker

This creed has many messages in its meanings - just as Kenpo does. The most important being that as free men and women we have the right to defend ourselves and our beliefs.

To be able to convey in this tribute to him, some of the 'flavour' that was the genius of the 'Magician of Motion' - Ed Parker.

Edmund Kealoha Parker was born on 10th March 1931 in Honolulu, Hawaii, and was the sixth of seven children born to his parents Arthur Kapewaoko Parker and Eva Margaret Parker (Kealoha means 'loved one'). He was of Royal Hawaiian descent, his great grandfather was the legendary Hawaiian King Kamehameha. One of his cousins inherited the famous 'Parker Ranch', the second largest ranch in the world.

As a child he was an adventurous, industrious, fun-loving, hard-working boy.

Ed Parker's youth in Hawaii was the kind most people dream of - sun, surf and all the other accessories of paradise. However, there was a darker side to his formative years. He grew up in the district of Kalihi where life was tough and survival was a daily activity. Fighting with individuals and gang fights were commonplace events.

"In this environment that I learned to be an adult at a very early age and that contributed later to my innovative creations in Kenpo".

His prowess as a streetfighter was renowned. At the age of 11 he was fighting men in their 20's. He was tall for his age and looked older than he was. Palama district and Wai'ale'ale near the Honolulu waterfront were dangerous places and you had to be able to handle yourself to survive. He had every opportunity to defend himself, his principles and his honour and frequently did so. He once recalled witnessing one fight which lasted about twenty minutes, where one of the individuals had a large part of his nose bitten off by his opponent and he went on to win the fight! This violent grounding was to serve him well all throughout his life. At the age of 17 he became a Judo black belt and was an amateur boxing champion. He competed in many sports and became an accomplished athlete.

Ed Parker was born and raised as a devout Mormon and he got into several fights defending his faith and his beliefs. As a Mormon he did not smoke or drink and those around him often tried to get him to do so.

It was while attending a church meeting that Ed Parker met Frank Chow who became his first instructor in Kenpo Karate. Frank was telling a small group how he had defeated a local bully. Ed Parker knew the bully well and could not believe this lean, small person could have beaten the bully, who was stocky and very strong. He questioned Frank Chow who proceeded to demonstrate how he defeated the bully. This was Ed Parker's first introduction to Kenpo Karate and very soon he was studying with Frank Chow.

In time Frank Chow introduced Ed Parker to his brother William K. S. Chow from whom Ed Parker was to later gain his black belt. Ed Parker started training with William Chow when he was 16 years of age (1947). William Chow was innovative