

Shihan Paul Arel

My Sensei, My Hero

As I sit here and write this, I wish that there would be a single story or memory that I could recount to provide testimony to the extraordinary life that Shihan Arel lead. I can't. Perhaps this is because there are simply too great a number of lasting memories of such a wonderful man to be contained in just a single story or two.

A few years ago on my birthday, Master Howard, gave me a birthday card in which he handwrote the following quote:

Nothing as strong as gentleness; Nothing so gentle as real strength

Since that time I've utilized that quote in many ways and have tried to extract the simple, yet powerful, meaning behind these words – both as a man and as a martial artist. In fact, in many ways, it has shaped my path in Kokondo in a significant way. When I think about Shihan Arel, I can't help but think of these words yet again. He was uniquely the strongest man and the gentleness man I've ever known.

Just three weeks ago, Shihan Arel taught the final seminar & classes of his nearly 59-year devotion to authentic martial arts. I am overcome with emotion and honor to think that this happened in our Florida dojo. To think that at the end of this session, he promoted three of our students to the rank of black belt. The final dans he promoted were students of mine... How can one express the sense of gratitude, obligation, and honor?

This trip was difficult for him and it in my heart I knew it would be his last. However, you wouldn't have known it simply talking to him and receiving his masterful instruction. At this seminar and throughout his life, he showed me real strength – strength through gentleness. At his weakest physically, he was stronger than I had ever seen him. He was the definition of a warrior. His life was an living example of Bushido. We've shared many moments together, but these final days together were of immense significance as he expressed his pride in me personally and in our dojo in such an emphatic way.

Shihan Arel always believed in doing one's best and stressed this simple, yet powerful, theme often. Every time we say "Ossu!" we shall remember him. We loosely translate "Ossu" as any type of **positive** acknowledgment. Ossu is taken from two Japanese Kanji that means to "push through" or to "persevere." The spirit of "Ossu" and the repeating of Ossu is to encourage all to keep doing their best, to keep pushing forward, to persevere despite hard training or hard times. In the spirit of Shihan Arel's mighty "Ossu!" – we must do exactly that. We must

continue to push the growth of his arts and to preserve. He is not here, but his legacy and spirit will live on forever.

There is so much I can say...but nothing seems to be enough. I will conclude with what my most senior student, Rachel Matheney, wrote of Shihan Arel on our dojo's behalf. These words were presented to him, along with a variety of Kokondo photos, in a frame during our final dinner together at the conclusion of our seminar. Although words are not enough, I feel these words are the best we can do:

"The greatness of a man's legacy is determined by the lives he's touched and how those lives touch others. Shihan you have truly touched each and every life you have come in contact with. We are eternally grateful for all you have done. No amount of words could express our gratitude. There is nothing we could do to ever repay what you have done. However, we promise to stay true to Kokondo and your vision and pass on Kokondo as you wish it to be. Thank you Shihan! You are truly an inspiration! We love you!"

Shihan Arel, My Sensei, My Hero.... I miss you so much. I love you sensei. Until we meet again.