

## Anticipation

Please play Carly Simon in the background while reading this essay.

After Carly recorded *Anticipation* (1971), Heinz ketchup used it in a clever ad (1979) suggesting that their ketchup was worth waiting for. Right now, some of you can still hear the song and picture kids waiting for the thick, rich goo.

Martial arts anticipation is not waiting for the red to flow, however; it is preparing one's mind and body so that the red doesn't flow, or if absolutely necessary, only the bad guy's red flows. Rather than keeping you waiting, anticipation should keep you training, hoping that your preparation will never need to be used.

I have written several essays about the difficulty of training for a self-defense encounter. There are so many variants to consider that no style or art can possibly prepare you for every eventuality. However, no matter what type of training you have decided to engage in, at some point and for some part of your training, you must leave the physical techniques for a while and, whether inside or outside the dojo, consider the generic situations that might occur and how you might see them coming.

Funakoshi used to make sure that he walked around city corners at a wide enough arc that no one coming the other way could surprise him. Similarly, giving alleys a wide berth, avoiding rough neighborhoods, questionable establishments, and companions of ill repute are good ideas. But sometimes violence, even if it is not intended for you, can rear its ugly head just short of your nose. I was a kid walking with my parents back to our car after a Red Sox game when seven or so guys burst onto the sidewalk, one big dude literally kicking the butt of a waiter (evident from his apron). My dad quickly shielded my mom and I and shooed us further up the sidewalk before the one-on-one became a melee. No one on the street could have predicted that the fight would have exploded from the inside out, but it did, and luckily no pedestrians were caught in the ruckus. Had my father been hit accidentally, I wonder if he would have had the presence of mind to urge us to safety or if he would have decked the perpetrator first. I will never know, and frankly, I doubt if he could have known. The situation could not have been anticipated.

But the situation could serve to help me anticipate similar situations that may have occurred while I walked on New Orleans streets while vacationing alone one summer. No, nothing developed. No story of spin kicks or chain punches here. Perhaps that was because nothing was going to develop anyway, or perhaps it was because, like Funakoshi, I was hyperaware of what could potentially happen. When the back of one's neck starts feeling a little ill-at-ease, it is better to cross the street, head back to the hotel, or catch a cab.

By no means do I want any martial artists who reads this to live her life worried that every time she gets into her car, some goon, seeking to earn his first points as a full-fledged hoodlum, will accost her at knife-point. On the other hand, a moment of anticipation is worth a decade of training.

Generally, martial arts schools don't do enough anticipation training and you shouldn't anticipate that your dojo is an exception. So be an exception yourself and anticipate.

*The details of anticipation training next time.*