

Not Everyone Can

The title of this article came to me while proofreading and editing some older *Sunday with Sensei's Journal* editions. I jotted it down and then went on proofing, figuring that the title itself would trigger the subject that had occurred to me previously. No such luck.

Okay, said I to myself. I'll figure this out. Not everyone can do...what? Not everyone can do what I do. But wait, not everyone can do what you can do, either. In fact, not everyone can do anything. There are some people that cannot eat by themselves and others who cannot even breath unassisted. You can point to anything and know that not everyone can do it.

Okay, start over. What I really must have been thinking is "Not Just Anyone Can" do what I do. What did I mean by that—martial arts? Although there are millions of us, martial artists comprise a rare breed. Often you are the only martial artist in your family. Even if your entire family signed up for the group rate at Ralph Upchuck's Studio of Fighting Buddhists, yours is still the only family on both mom's and dad's side that practices martial arts. Okay, okay, your 9-year-old cousin Beltran Baggins belts the heavy bag at Boyd's Backstreet Bak Mei kwoon, but that's it. So you can be proud that only 5 of you Bagginses in the whole extended Baggins family, of which there are 100 members, are martial artists. That's only 5%. Thus martial artists rare a rare breed, right? So martial artists are not just anyone, right?

True, but I'm not sure that was my fleeting thought, either. I could have been thinking of something self-congratulatory like "Hey! You have been a martial artist and a teacher of martial arts for more than half a century!" Certainly not everyone can say that. But I don't think I was aiming to write an article that pats myself on the back. No, there was something else going on in my walnut brain when the title occurred to me.

Oh, I know, not everyone can do martial arts *and* write articles about them, right? Well, yeah, but so what? Other martial artists are doctors, lawyers, or Indian chiefs, so that can't.... But it felt like I was getting warmer. I don't think the article was intended to be about me. But that might mean that it was intended to be about...you.

Not every martial artist is comfortable balancing his intelligence with his athleticism, his mind with his might. In other words, in today's world, not every martial artist is a martial artist the way the traditional founders wanted him/her to be. Have we failed the founders of the arts we revere? Or were they just pie-in-the-sky idealists who wanted their arts to benefit humankind, but in reality, could expect little else beyond physical activities that concern themselves with actual physical engagements on one border and sport competition on another.

We can't of course read the founders' minds, but I think we can safely infer a few things.

Not everyone can aspire to be his ideal of what a martial artist should be. Sure, everyone can *try* to aspire to a martial ideal based on what their traditions encourage, but then, like me, they tend to forget what they were about to do, forget what they were all about, and settle for a simple, single emphasis: sport, aesthetics, symbolic-self-defense, etc.

Everyone can *try* to aspire to an older, more holistic ideal. Everyone *can*. Not everyone does.

More on the ideals of our traditions next time.