

Meeting the Masters: Remy Presas (1936-2001)

Over 50 years of training in budo, I have been lucky enough to meet or train under many notable martial artists. This year, I want to share my impressions, some deep set, some fleeting, about the men and women I met on the way.

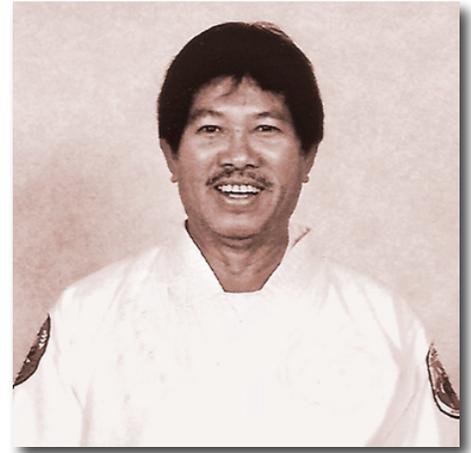
Like many martial artists of the 1980s and '90s, I took a number of seminars under Remy Presas, the founder of Modern Arnis. The fast hands (usually carrying sticks) of Arnis/Escrima/Kali were of interest to me since, although my hands were moderately fast, my arts did not favor rapid hand movements.

Professor Presas was a very engaging and upbeat figure in the martial arts with the goal of spreading his system so that those in other systems could partake of its advantages. To be honest, I had a heck of a time coordinating stick drills like *Sinawali* (To Weave), let alone Reverse Sinawali, but found empty hand drills like *Cadena de Mano* (Chain of Hands) and related Indonesian drills like *Hubud Lubud* (To Tie and Untie) comparatively easy to master (or at least reach competence in). Don't ask me why. You would think that if I had the coordination to do the empty hand partner drills, the stick drills, which begin without a partner, would have been a piece of Filipino pastry. Not so for me.

Often, at the end of a seminar, Remy would go into empty hand techniques, showing how his weapon drills could be applied without a weapon. With a background of karate, aiki, and ju-jutsu, I had no problem there. He showed surprise at my learning ability and said that I should keep coming to his seminars, because I could easily become a brown belt in his system. I was complimented, of course, but realized that he told many people the same thing, perhaps to encourage them, but also to keep the seminar attendance up.

What I enjoyed most about his seminars, was his upbeat attitude, his friendly teaching style, and that he could, with absolutely no effort, partner with you in a two-person drill and adjust to your mistakes so that, after a minute or two, your muscles had learned the pattern and you could do it without his help. I realized that he was doing only fundamental Arnis, but that he was doing it to bring non-Arnis stylists into the fold. If you had the chance to see him work with more experienced players, however, you immediately realized the depth of his skill. Sometimes, working at a level well under your own can be very taxing, but he was tolerant and energetic throughout.

After one seminar, the sponsor was busy returning the mats he had borrowed, and left the Professor alone as the group passed the word about which restaurant to attend for dinner. It would not do to have no official attendant for the head instructor so I volunteered to drive Professor Presas to the restaurant. This way I could have some alone time to ask questions. It was about 5:00 PM and we had been going since 11:00 AM, students maintaining their interest and Remy maintaining his energy. He answered one or two of my inquiries



before nodding off against the passenger window. I don't think people realized how much he put into each seminar.

I learned three important things from Professor Remy Presas: (1) keep positive and high-energy during seminars, (2) develop your skill so that you can advance even the uncoordinated beginners, and (3) understand your art well enough so that you can find ways to integrate it with the arts of others.