

# Filipino Martial Arts

Daughters of Grandmaster Rene Latosa

Digest

Special Issue  
2006

Guro May Williams



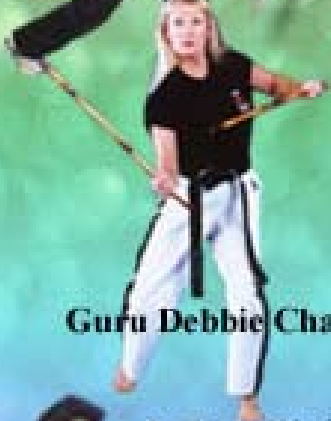
Dayang  
Edessa Ramos



Peachie Saguin



Guru Debbie Chambers



Anne-Marie Wright



Lakan Bini  
Alicia Kossman



*Women  
of the  
Filipino Martial Arts*



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The FMAdigest is published quarterly. Each issue features practitioners of martial arts and other internal arts of the Philippines. Other features include historical, theoretical and technical articles; reflections, Filipino martial arts, healing arts and other related subjects.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this digest are those of the authors or instructors being interviewed and are not necessarily the views of the publisher or editor.

We solicit comments and/or suggestions. Articles are also welcome.

The authors and publisher of this digest are not responsible for any injury, which may result from following the instructions contained in the digest. Before embarking on any of the physical activities described in the digest, the reader should consult his or her physician for advice regarding their individual suitability for performing such activity.

## From the Publishers Desk

Kumusta

The Filipino martial arts, has come a long way. When I began studying the Filipino Martial Arts, it was unheard of that a woman was aloud to train, unless it was commercialized school.

However, I have always believed that in training and studying the Filipino martial arts that size did not matter, which I have had demonstrated to me several times by my instructors and fellow practitioners.

So it is with great admiration and respect that the FMA Digest has put this Special Issue together. Within you will find women of the Filipino martial arts that are just as dedicated and skilled as men.

The FMA Digest would like to thank, Grandmaster Rene Latosa, of **Latosa Escrima Concepts**, Grandmaster Rey Galang of **Bakbakan**, Grandmaster Richard Bustillo of the **IMB Academy** in sharing some of their women practitioners with the FMA Digest. And also the **International Kuntaw Federation** and the **Martial Arts Research Institute**.

Of course the issue would not be complete without the FMA Digest “Woman of the Year”, 2004 - Guro Lynn Newby-Fraser and 2005 – Dayang Edessa Ramos.

Finally Mr. Celestino C. Macachor shared with us Facunda ‘Aling Cunda’ Sabanal Berro.

So with a last word, the FMA Digest hopes that in the future it can bring you another Special Issue of the Women of the Filipino Martial Arts.

Maraming Salamat Po



## **Lakan Bini Alicia Kossmann**

International Kuntaw Federation



For three consecutive years Lakan Bini Alicia Kossmann was undefeated champion in Open International Martial Arts competition held in the Philippines. The Commander of Subic Naval Base, Philippines decorated her martial arts career with numerous awards for her forms demonstrations including “Best Forms Performer”, from 1978 to 1980. As an international martial arts competitor, her record of three consecutive years as undefeated champion of the Fil-Am International Martial Arts Tournaments from 1981 through 1983 remains unmatched still today. In 1993 she earned the title of champion in both weapons and forms competition at the Nationals in Washington, DC.

Alicia is also a recipient of the Presidential Sports Award given by President Clinton. Throughout the martial arts community she is known and respected for her prowess in both forms and sparring competition.

Alicia Kossmann is a 7th Degree Red-White-Red Belt with over thirty-five years of experience in the ancient Filipino martial art known as Kuntaw. She is currently the World Directress of the International Kuntaw Federation (IKF). Alicia also holds the title of “Lakan Bini”, which literally translated from Filipino into English means chief (female) over all regional chiefs. As such, Alicia is currently the highest-ranking female in the history of the art of Kuntaw and in the history of the International Kuntaw Federation. Alicia is currently the Chief Instructor at the Kuntaw Martial Arts School located in Kuntaw Palace Wilson, North Carolina.

Alicia graduated from ECPI in Virginia Beach, VA, earning her degree in Medical Assistant. She enjoys working part-time as a Unit Secretary in the Surgical Department at Wilson Medical Center. Her secretarial skills have been a tremendous asset in managing the day-to-day business of Kuntaw Palace. Alicia continues the family tradition of passing on her knowledge and wisdom to her two daughters Christine and Cassandra. Her youngest child Cassandra has already won three Gold medals in the North Carolina State Games. Her husband William is also a multiple Gold medallist.



William, Alicia, and daughter Cassandra



### **About Kuntaw**

Kuntaw is an ancient art of the Katutubong Filipino, hand and foot fighting in its hard and soft ways. It is the oldest essential art of self-defense devised by the Filipino Muslim royalties before the Spanish regime.

The concept of modern self-defense is based upon historical evolutionary events that can be traced back from past

generations. As was proven by the Katutubong Kapatid (native brothers), when they illustrated their bravery and nationalism in protecting the honor of their native land (the Philippines), which they cherish, and love.

In Kuntaw all parts of the body are used in performing the techniques of striking, blocking, and kicking. This strengthens the internal organs and develops a strong and healthy body.

To adopt the style of Kuntaw the student first takes an intelligent and progressive step, which will provide mental and physical benefits, not only in the immediate future, but also for the rest of the student's life. Kuntaw wipes out the difference of size, weight, and reach. Those trained in the style of Kuntaw gain knowledge, skills that lead to self-confidence that will give the student poise and assurance when affronted by an assailant no matter how strong or vicious. Kuntaw depends not on brute strength, but on psychology, knowledge of the anatomy and the skill that comes with practicing techniques mentally and physically.

Kuntaw Palace, U.S. Headquarters of the International Kuntaw Federation is owned by Alicia L. Kossmann and family operated by Alicia and her husband William W. Kossmann as well as assisted and guided by Martial Arts Hall of Fame Inductee, Grandmaster Carlito A. Lanada (Alicia's father).

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Lakan Bini Alicia Kossmann  
Grandmaster Carlito Lanada

## **Guru Debra Chambers**

By J. Vincent



Sifu Debra Chambers woke up at 5:30 am from a restless night's sleep with a high fever. She had been fighting the flu for a week. It was Saturday and she was supposed to run a kickboxing class in a few hours. She tried to ignore the excuses to stay in bed that lined up for her attention. Then, a strong memory took cuts – she had an appointment with Grand Master Rene Latosa that morning. Swinging her legs over the edge of the bed, she willed herself into the new day.

Will power has been a driving force in Debra Chambers' life. It was will power that had her start training in martial arts back in a time when very few women trained, or were welcomed. It was will power that helped her through the evenings of training. The male students asked for no mercy and certainly didn't give it. "My father was an amateur boxer and taught his four daughters some boxing. He raised us

to stand up for ourselves and be tough,” she says. "But I had big purple lumps up and down my legs for a long time." Finally, the dojo owners' wife, an accomplished black belt herself, took Debra under her wing and began giving her private lessons. The paramount lesson she came away with from this tutoring was that technique is everything. Taking this to heart, she trained five days a week polishing her technique. Soon she was receiving fewer lumps and welts began appearing on the male students.

Debra began teaching at the school and competing in tournaments in the Los Angeles area. In the early 1980's she married and moved to northern California. There were only a couple of martial arts schools near where she lived. She did not feel comfortable at any of them. So she started her own.



Michael, Grandmaster Latosa and Debra

Debra met Grandmaster Rene Latosa, founder of Latosa Escrima Concepts, in 1993. She was already running her own dojo, American Karate Academy, with her son, Michael Mason. She chose the generic name because it was easily understood. They were teaching a blended style of martial arts. While the dojo was full of happy students, she felt frustrated in her own training. She sensed she and her son had gone as far as they could with their present learning. She remembers wishing she could meet a world-class master who could teach her weapons and take her to a higher level. But she realized there was little chance of that

happening with her having a school in the sparsely populated agricultural area of Sonoma County, two hours above San Francisco. Then, while attending a seminar, her son met Grandmaster Latosa. Grandmaster Latosa was impressed enough with Michael's native abilities to start privately training him at their dojo. Soon after he asked Debra if she would also like to train. She quickly answered yes. "I remember him asking me what I know, and, though I was already a third degree black belt, I told him I didn't know anything. We got along great after that." says Debra. It turns out that while Grandmaster Latosa has toured the world for years giving seminars, he lived only 15 minutes from their dojo. She had found her world-class master in the 'wilderness.'



The basic idea Grandmaster Latosa began teaching them is a system of techniques known as the box. The box system consists of five interrelated movements, not blocks, but offensive movements. These movements may seem as if they fall into the definition of blocks, but they actually are interference strikes. The idea is to understand the movements of a technique then relate this to the concept studied in Latosa Escrima Concepts. With only five main movements the approach is simple. However, coupled with the concepts, the combination of structure is endless.



Debra and Michael quickly recognized the effectiveness of the training they were receiving. Naturally the transition was challenging, yet the excitement of being challenged and exploring new horizons minimized the frustration. "We found Grandmaster Latosa's method of teaching concepts instead of focusing on techniques, which we were used to, to be very liberating." comments Debra, "The fluid movement was much more natural for me. I was thrilled. Michael and I were becoming better fighters than we ever dreamed of being."

Michael went on to become a world-class full contact stick fighter. His first world championship tournament was in the Philippines in August of 2000. He won the silver medal for the USA team. His next world championship tournament was in Copenhagen, Denmark. He took the silver medal and earned great respect from all the European fighters.

Debra liked using the Escrima sticks. These were the first weapons they trained on in the Latosa style. She worked hard and long on making them extensions of herself. A couple of years later she gave a demonstration at a local grade school. Afterwards the students drew pictures for her. One boy drew her with lighting bolts in each hand. "What's that?" she asked the student. "Well, your sticks were moving so fast, it looked like electricity!" was his awed reply. "Spinning and using double sticks is part of relaxing for me now." Debra says, "It's lots of fun." Seven years ago that fun was seriously threatened.

What started out as a persistently sore wrist quickly became much more serious. "I had broken my right wrist falling from a running horse when I was thirteen. The doctor wiggled it back into place and put a cast on it. Unfortunately, it was set poorly and the calcium that fused the bones disintegrated and, well, basically my hand fell off my wrist." This was a nightmare period for her. Was she going to loose use of her hand? Was she going to lose her school? "Naturally I had worries. I'm right handed. I had a school to run," she remembers. Once more she drew on her will. "I decided I was going to make it past this obstacle. My students were depending on me and that gave me strength." She had emergency orthopedic surgery. The doctor believed she would have use of her hand, though there was some doubt she would have much movement in her wrist. She used the negative as a positive and worked on her stick technique with her left hand. "I put all my frustration at having my right hand immobilized and being in constant pain into training my left hand." After recovery and physical therapy she astounded her doctor with the flexibility she achieved with her right wrist. "It was kind of like Uma Thurman's character in that Kill Bill movie when she tells her toes to wiggle," she says, "I willed that hand to move and it did."

Happy to be back at training, Debra continued her weapons practice. Grandmaster Latosa has trained her on the Bs, Tonfa, Kama, machete, swords and knives. He also emphasized 'transition,' or the ability to use what was available as a weapon. Keys, books, coffee mugs, pens - all can be translated to the movements learned with traditional



Grandmaster Rene Latosa  
with Micheal in Denmark



Filipino weapons. All the weapons training come from the foundation of his empty hand concepts.



Debra made it to her Saturday morning meeting with Grandmaster Latosa. He reviewed the progress she had made with the forms he had assigned her to design. He was impressed with the progress she had made and the fluid functionality of her forms. He made a decision. She was going to test for her fifth degree right then and there. Though sick, she had been preparing for this event for a long time. "I put being sick out of my mind and gave the test everything I had," she says quietly. "It was the hardest and most satisfying test of my life." On September 24, 2005 Debra Chambers received her guru degree in Latosa Escrima Concepts. "I am so proud to be a guru under my teacher, Grandmaster Latosa. Without him, I wouldn't be me," she says.

Guru Chambers is happy she dedicated her life to the martial arts. Her aim is to pass along what she has learned to her students. It's a fulfilling life style. She also intends to continue her training in Escrima with Grandmaster Latosa and to one day become a Master in his style.

Guru Debra Chambers owns and operates the American Karate Academy at 424 Moore Lane, Healdsburg, California. Their web site is: [www.aka-martialarts.com](http://www.aka-martialarts.com) or telephone them at (707) 433-4717. E-mail can be sent to: [gurudebrachambers@yahoo.com](mailto:gurudebrachambers@yahoo.com)

## Reflections

Bakbakan

By Peachie Baron Saguin



Ever since I was a child I have always dreamed of becoming a good martial artist. I have always imaged myself involved in a fight, fighting and clawing my way to victory, reigning over my vanquished opponents. This deep ambition burned in me for a long, long time.

At first, I was just contented with simply fantasizing and using my imagination. Later on this desire turned into a consuming passion and martial arts became an obsession. This prompted me to watch and observe martial arts and their champions. All of the ones I've observed had their own unique qualities and superior techniques but none had the type of "action" I was looking for. My search finally ended when I chanced upon an old acquaintance who invited me to attend and observe a Korean discipline he was training in. As I watched with keen eyes, I noticed that it was like a combination of different martial arts disciplines all rolled into one. I was fascinated and captured by this martial art and decided to join.

My first day of training was really exciting. For me it was the realization of my dreams. I was oblivious of the time, of the hard training and of the rigid discipline. I was in ecstasy. I was always looking forward to each and every training session. My enthusiasm never waned, instead it seemed to increase more and more as my stamina and skills increased. However, a time came when I felt that the art that I was pursuing was not enough. I needed more and craved for more. I could not identify what was missing and yet knew that I was not fulfilled.

I eventually enrolled in another martial art as well, making sure that the sessions were not in conflict with each other. For a while this arrangement seemed to fill the gap that nagged at me.

One day I arrived early for my scheduled training session. I could hear commands being barked at where the Taekwondo classes were usually held. Curiosity got the best of me since I knew that there were no Taekwondo classes scheduled for that particular hour. I climbed the stairs and sneaked a peek at whatever was going on.

There before my eyes were two guys fully equipped with head gear, body protectors, and boxing gloves sparring at full force. Not a single blow was held back. Kicks and punches were being exchanged with precision and dodged and parried with grace and speed. I looked and asked myself: What discipline is this? I looked around and saw the other people in the training hall, men in black with this curious looking logo on their shirts. I did not see any familiar face. None of them were of the Taekwondo group. I focused my eyes back at the two combatants. I was mesmerized by the intensity and seriousness of their training.

I was thrilled and filled with excitement. Deep within me, my spirit was shouting “This is it, Peachie. This is what you’ve been looking for!”



Peachie undergoing focus mitt training with Chief Instructor Christopher Ricketts

I was to learn later on that I had eavesdropped in on a Bakkaban training session. The group present then was Ramon Tulfo, Miguel Zubiri, Edgar Aristorenas, Benny Litonjua and trainers Dodong Sta. Iglesia, Peter Sescon and Torry Seas. Conducting the classes were Masters Christopher Ricketts and Tony Diego. I stayed and watched and waited until they finished their training. From that time on, I always arrived early and took my position at the stairs to watch, making sure that I was inconspicuous and out of their way. For several sessions I was content to be at what I now

considered my perch, watching and admiring their training sessions.

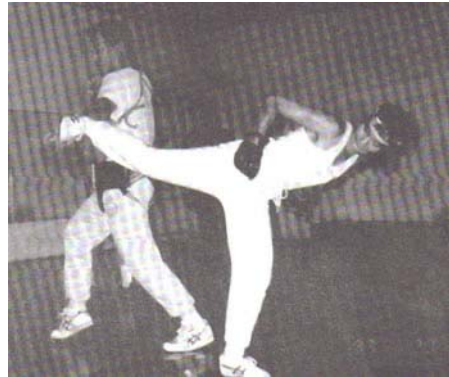
One day their Master Christopher Ricketts approached me and gave me a chair to sit on telling me it was more comfortable than the steps I was sitting on. I realized then that I was talking to the Topher Ricketts whose name was held in high esteem by most serious martial artists in the Philippines. Later during that session he would return and ask me about my interest in the martial arts. I explained to him that I had been taking up two disciplines of martial arts but have recently dropped one and now concentrated only on one.

Summoning my courage, I asked him if he could teach me. His answer only made me admire and respect him more. He said, “I could only help you, but your loyalty should remain in the discipline you are in right now.” And true to his word, he did help me. He assigned Dodong Sta. Iglesia to be my trainer. My training suddenly took an abrupt turn; I was back to the basics. The training was very rigid; I was pushed to the limits. I would finish each session exhausted but fulfilled. The training was very different. It opened up a new dimension for me. I then realized that I no longer had any interest in my one other remaining discipline. All the enthusiasm I had for it was not just waning but gone. The magic was no longer there. I realized that I would only be disillusioning myself and my instructors if I continued training with them.

I made my exit gracefully and with their blessing. They realized something happened to me for my performance improved leaps and bounds since I started training with Bakbakan. They were happy that I found what I was looking for.

From then on, Master Topher Ricketts and trainer Dodong Sta. Iglesia trained me on a regular basis. My stances were corrected, my form checked, my punches and kicks were made more defined. I was taught different styles of offense and defense. I was trained in unarmed combat as well as in weaponry skills, including sticks and knives. I was also taught different katas from several disciplines to develop and improve my intrinsic energy. Because of this intense and rigid training, my skills have improved and my self-confidence bolstered to the point where sparring sessions have become the norm rather than the exception.

Looking back, I know and realize that I have become a different person, a far, far cry from what I was before. I owe it all to my teacher, Master Christopher Ricketts, to whom I have so much faith and reverence. Also to my trainer Dodong Sta. Iglesia who has been very patient and understanding. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the members of Bakbakan who have been very supportive of me, then the only female member of Bakbakan. And most of all to God who answered my fervent prayer and gave me a good mentor and a solid, supportive group. As I look back, I now understand why some of the members when given the traditional advice of “Ingat” after each goodbye reply, instead of acknowledging, with “Pare, Bakbakan tayong. Ingat ... sila!”



Ramon Tulfo, Bakbakan's Public Relations Officer and noted columnist, practices his dodging techniques against Peachie's kicks.



**Note:** More ladies joined Bakkaban after Peachie's pioneering move. Peachie's husband, Dr. Rimando Saguin, is a noted orthopedist in the Philippines and has become Bakkaban's Medical Advisor.



Visit the Website: [www.bakbakan.com](http://www.bakbakan.com)

### **The Daughters of Rene Latosa** The Escrima Concepts

Grandmaster Rene Latosa of Latosa Escrima in which the concepts are very dynamic and logical. Has three daughters, each of his daughters have specialized in various aspects of the Filipino Martial Arts. They are proficient in all weapons because they understand the concepts that make the Filipino Martial Arts work realistically.

They have transitioned what they learned to their sports activities. They have grown up watching and participating in Escrima classes and have watched their father at seminars. They also have had the opportunity to hear some stories from their Escrimadore grandfather Juan Latosa. They are not into flashy and fancy movements, only the directness and the effectiveness of equalizing a situation.



**Rachel:** is 24 years old and lives in North Carolina. She started training with me at 16 while she was playing varsity volleyball. Mainly she trained the Filipino Boxing from my Latosa Escrima system. She started developing a cardio-FMA boxing course using small weights and boxing techniques. Rachel has a 9-month baby who will be the new lineage in the Latosa Escrima system.



Rachel -- Bianca

**Bianca:** is 27 and has played both varsity volleyball and baseball. She lives in San Francisco and started training in Escrima when she was also around 16. She is more proficient in knives and bladed weapons.



**Jessica:** is 18 years old and has played varsity basketball and ran varsity track. She has developed a sense of transition as she displays talent in a multitude of various weapons.

In the world of Filipino martial of Escrima, a woman is a different and distinct breed of student. What is meant by that is the Escrima woman must be realistic enough to realize and understand their weaknesses as well as their attributes. If their opponent or attacker is a male, they will usually have the edge due to the size and strength difference. The Escrima woman must know the concepts of transition, when and how to use their equalizer to obtain the advantage in a bad situation.

In Latosa Escrima, the training always begins with a stick used as a tool to learn the concepts of engagement. Concurrently, the training shifts to different sized weapons including palm sticks, then to empty hand. The weapons are the equalizers. The Latosa Escrima vision is to assure that there is a transparent transition from a large sized weapon to empty hand, including everything in between. There should be no distinguishing difference other than distance, on the movement and motion of the body. Every concept remains the same. The main reason the system is taught this way is because in the situation where the attack is sudden and unsuspecting, concepts of balance, power, speed (timing and distance), focus and transition must engage. For example, when you lose your balance this is an opening for an opponent to take advantage of the situation. The percentages are low that you can recover and effectively use what you know especially if the opponent applies pressure.





Being aware of the environment and people.



Keeping the key as an attack weapon.



Continuing the advantage by not allowing recovery.

Usually, it is not normal to have a stick in hand when an attack occurs however, getting something or anything in your hand is quite possible. And this means knowing that a cell phone, purse, comb, pen or even a sharp nail file is your equalizer. If your life is threatened, you need to equalize the situation. Hitting an opponent with a hard object will definitely get the attackers attention and perhaps allow the time to get out of the situation.



Being aware of the environment.



As you see in the series, the calm is broken up by some aggressive behavior. The initial objective is to take the source of balance away from the opponent and then attack the weak position and to not allow a recovery of position. These techniques are used only to the point where a person can get away.



Escrima is an art of logic, efficiency and reality. An Escrima woman must know their environment as well as focus on the overall picture. Escrima techniques or the physical aspect of the art is only one of many tools a woman must use to protect herself from attacks. For example, if you were shopping and walking towards your car, are you aware of your surroundings, where you are parked, what you have in your hands, and the people nearby? Do you walk looking down, close the parked cars or do you walk in the middle where more space to avoid a situation is available. You can be an expert in 100 different martial arts, but if you are caught in a weak moment or in other words “off-balance” because of a surprise attack, you may not be able to execute anything. This is one of the reasons in Latosa Escrima, the concepts of balance, power, speed (timing and distance), focus and transition formulate the foundation of the system. If you understand the concepts of the Latosa Escrima foundation your reaction will be centered on balance and execution of a movement.



Keeping your weapons available at all times.



May not hurt anyone but can cause disruption of a situation.



The other hand makes the real hit and creates space to get away.

Visit Website: [www.escrima-concepts.com](http://www.escrima-concepts.com)

# How Filipino Martial Arts Changed My Style of Combat

By Cathy Rowlands



Growing up and living in Johannesburg had its challenges and risks, especially for women. Every day there were reports of rape and murder victims and it became very apparent that in order to not become the victim, I had to train some form of martial art. I began with practicing Chinese martial arts for almost 10 years. The training I had been doing at the time was primarily empty hand, and I firmly believed that this would be my complete martial art's training. However, the risks of living in South Africa over the years escalated and I found that I needed more training than what I was getting. This was when I was introduced to the Filipino martial art, known as Bakbakan.

In the past I had dabbled with other martial arts from the Philippines from time to time throughout the years, but had not come across a martial art that was a complete system of training, and more importantly, containing the essence of what

I heard that the Filipino martial arts were suppose to be. I was so excited with the contrast of Bakbakan and Wing Chun, and yet how they complimented each other - I could not wait to learn more.

I was happy to train with the stick and knife, as even a broomstick can help you to defend yourself if you know how to use it effectively, and should somebody break into my home I would like to know that I could use a simple kitchen knife as an instrument of self defense without the fear of it being taken away and used against me. Also, besides the physical application of defending myself, Bakbakan has a large variety of forms which are great for coordination and speed, and also keep me physically fit.

To this day, I really enjoy my training, because each time I train I face an opponent who is bigger and stronger than myself. There is no differentiation between males and females in the class. We train full contact padded stick



Attacker with knife. Attacker thrusts low to Cathy's stomach, knife hand is parried with left and Cathy strikes attackers eyes with right hand. Right hand comes down to control the blade while left strikes attackers head. Left hand collapses the attacker's elbow and right and bends the wrist and pushes the knife hand back into the attacker's throat.

and knife sparring with appropriate protection gear. Although it can be daunting initially, once you have done it a couple of times you realize that there is a very little chance of personal injury. It also takes training as close as it's going to get to the most realistic level a woman can go to outside of class. Even in the safest environments, women are at risk of rape and assault, and training against men. At this level of training it gives me the confidence that I feel I can handle a harmful situation effectively should the situation present itself.



Attacker stands ready to strike.



Cathy strikes outstretched hand of attacker.



Attacker retaliates with strike to Cathy's head and Cathy roof blocks strike.



Cathy turns and strikes attacker across the head.



Attacker loses his stick.

Over the years I have become quite set in my ways with my footwork, and suddenly there was a new dimension which defied all that I had learnt - a small knife that added only an inch or two to my opponent's reach completely threw my footwork out the window. The speed of a punch and block is very different to the speed of a knife and block. The principle of deflect and give back twice as much energy no longer applied when the opponent had a knife in his hand - the only way around this was to move my feet - and that was a whole new lesson in life! The Filipino footwork is incredibly fast and rhythmic, and practicing this new style of combat really gave me a whole new outlook as to my own personal fighting skills. Where I had relied heavily on energy and angles previously, I now had added speed and even more agility.

Practicing the footwork drills has given me a lot more rhythm and speed in my feet, and by extension, more speed in my reflexes and hand actions. What I had learnt in previous years was not lost but actually enhanced by the newfound knowledge of the Filipino martial arts. Trapping skills became very effective once I had learned to close the range on a knife with my footwork, adding a higher element of surprise to the more flat-footed opponent.

In addition, when learning stick sparring, the stakes of the game became a lot higher. The opponents were predominantly bigger, stronger, and if experienced with the use of a stick (or long blade), were much faster than my previous empty hand opponents. The range had changed, and closing the gap with trapping techniques no longer worked. I had to, once again, go back to the drawing board and focus on my footwork. With practicing the sinawali drills along with repeating footwork patterns, my sparring skill suddenly escalated. I was able to get in and out of range much quicker with less physical damage. I found the only way of defeating a bigger and stronger opponent was to be faster and have better angles.

So, after developing speed, I had to look at my angles, the 45 degree angle that I had used in my other martial arts training helped a lot, but I had to change my

weight ratio on my feet to make it work – there is no ways angles in the stick fighting worked by being flat footed!

In selecting opponents, I find it a difficult task as a woman to go up against a man with the same level of skill. I believe that in sparring with men who are bigger, heavier and stronger with the same amount of skill you can only improve your skills because he is going to give you more opportunity to practice your blocking than you give him. In that way, you have more time to examine his line of attack for you block and counter-attack. There is always the risk of being hit harder than you give, but that is what protective gear is for - and I believe you should call the odds of sparring before you begin so each training partner knows their limitations and has respect for their partner's learning curve. Having said that, I think it is important to spar with people of my own size and weight ratio to measure my own progress.

The Filipino martial arts have given me a great opportunity to challenge myself in a lot of ways that I had closed doors to before. I was able to continue with the sinawali drills and footwork patterns while I was pregnant and thus able to maintain a lot of the skill through safe, slow and thorough training techniques. My son, now almost a year old, has picked up the art of holding and twirling a stick and it has had an enormous benefit in his coordination. In teaching him the tiny intricacies of even holding a stick it has become even more apparent to me that the earlier this skill is taught the better the left and right brain work together. My old habits of relying on my left-brain calculating logics and angles need to balance with the right brain working out creative and sneaky ways to defeat the opponent. This, I believe, can be achieved with training the double stick and working the left and right sides of the body, even though one side will most often be dominant.

In a final note, I am grateful to Master Ray Galang and Bakbakan International, also my partner Damian Halforty for introducing me to the Bakbakan system, and the Filipino culture, for giving me the opportunity to study their interesting, and devastating, martial art, and I will continue to train for as long as I am able.

### **Alas Form**







Visit the Website: [www.bakbakan.com](http://www.bakbakan.com)



### **Guro May Williams** Martial Arts Research Institute

May Villamor was born on the 20th of May 1970, in a small village in Negros. With four brothers and one sister she was the youngest in family. She graduated from the University of Negros Occidental Recoletos Philippines with a bachelor degree in secondary education.

At a very young age and being a child like others with a mischievous nature she knew the name baston. She had a clue about baston but no clue that baston is one of a martial arts tool. She had a clue about baston but no clue that baston is one of a martial arts tool.

Professor Porferio owned a part of land in the village and it had a lot of fruit trees. He used to harvest and sell fruit in the market. May and her friends would sneak into the Professor's orchard and liberate the fruit out of a tree. The professor didn't care much for this practice by the children of the area. Sometimes he was able to catch them. It was fun to be chased but not so much fun, if his hand caught you. That baston was going to go right to your bottom. The same baston he used to teach with. Anyway, It's nice to recall those moments of little martial arts and the baston.

May commenced her studies in the martial arts at the age ten. But to be honest she didn't know what she was doing back then, she learned the basics, to kick, punch and to use the baston. As May recalls, she used to train in the back of her house and were all just

young kids. They made a little arena out of coconut palm and were given this task so they would have place to train. She started learning from the late Grandmaster Porferio Ronquillo a veteran of World War II. The style he taught was Espada Y Daga and also his instruction included Judo.

Later, in 1996 while May was waiting for the teachers' board result, she temporarily worked at a tourist spot where she met my husband Michael. He had a martial arts camp when she met him. The following year they got married. They have been married for nine years. From the beginning when May and Michael got married May started training seriously and has accompanied Michael on all his martial arts travels.

In 1998, Mike and May established the Art of Southeast Asia. They teach Silat, which is Harimau Pasaman – Minangkabau style of West Sumatran Pencak Silat. Under Guru Edward Lebe, Arnis-Kali-Eskrima under Grandmaster Jerson Tortal, Grandmaster Remy Presas, Grandmaster Abraham and Grandmaster Sabas Gubaton.



May and Michael continue researching, training and traveling. They have done many seminars at different schools and camps. Martial Arts Research Institute organizes a training trip to Southeast Asia every two years. May and Michael have been hosting these trips for the past 9 years. The trip has always been successful, fun and memorable. It is highly suggested that if the opportunity arises to experience this cultural art you do not miss the next scheduled trip. They just returned from their latest trip to Southeast Asia which was from October 7 through October 24 where they traveled to Negros Occidental and trained with Grand Tuhon Jerson Nene Tortal of Dekiti Tirsia Siradas Kali and with Grandmaster Abraham and Sabas Gubaton of Oido de Caurata Arnis. They continued their trip to the Ifugao Mountain Province to the rice terraces and met with some of the headhunter tribes of the region to see how they live and survive. Continuing to the city of Jakarta in West Java, and stayed at the IPSI (Ikatan Pencak Silat Indonesia) a Pencak Silat school regulated by the Indonesian Government, training with Master Guru Edward Lebe of Baringin Sakti Pencak Silat.

Upon the completion of the martial arts camp, Michael came back with the group and May stayed an extra month to spend time with her family and trains daily, her teachers live nearby, with one living in her village.

It is May's honor and pleasure to be able to continue to learn and gain knowledge so to be able to teach as her teachers and bring their art to people outside of the Philippines. Their way is to teach you humbly and with pride. Training heartily creates good relationships. These professors are true martial artists, not only are they excellent teachers, but also they have good hearts and good attitudes towards the art and their fellowmen. May considers the arts she has studied and learned as part of her life.

As a practitioner, May has noticed that a true martial artist lives peacefully. They explode only if it is necessary. May continually strives to do her best to teach the same





way. Studying and practicing the martial arts has great value in ones life. It contributes in exercising and discipline in many ways that lead to good health.

Currently, Guro May Williams teaches pre-school, and runs the Martial Arts Research Institute with her husband Michael, training children and adults.

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Guro May Williams

Grand Tuhon Jerson Nene Tortal of Dekiti Tirsia Siradas Kali



## The Bakbakan Experience

By Christine Trlifaj



Martial arts training has provided me with an opportunity to strive for perfection, and to learn how to be determined in the face of challenge.

Like many women, I initially became involved in martial arts to learn self-defense and to use it as a fitness program. Being attacked at the age of 17 by a man with a knife, I only know too well how defenseless, vulnerable and scared some women may feel. I wanted to take control of my life and learn how to defend myself.

I joined a karate school that advertised to teach self defense and although it wasn't originally what I had expected I stayed there for 5 years working my way up to a black belt. I realized that even though I thoroughly enjoyed it, I needed to find something that was more practicable & reliable for me to be able to defend myself on the streets. It was a good grounding and a stepping-stone in the right direction that taught me discipline and courage but I stopped karate and started looking for a different form of martial arts.

I started taking boxing lessons in 1999 with Rahneer Fabi. I enjoyed the challenge of boxing, but when Rahneer asked me to join his main martial arts classes I was hesitant because weaponry training sounded too dangerous and intense for what I wanted. My first class, where we learned knife techniques, trapping, sticks, and various other techniques was a revelation to me - I loved it! My perception had changed so I started attending regular classes.

There was one main obstacle I had to overcome and that was the personal closeness/contact while grappling. Being female and grappling with male students at such a close range was very uncomfortable and hard to get over. But over time and with Rahneer's guidance and mentoring I started finding strength inside myself that I didn't know I had. Rahneer has a special gift of teaching and has a way of sharing his knowledge so that everyone can understand and learn from. The training gave me a feeling of power and confidence and brought out my inherent drive for perfection. I was also fortunate enough to have been partnered with Rahneer's most senior and respected student, Adrian Wade, throughout my Bakbakan years. He has always shown patience and willingness to pass on his knowledge & skills.

Over time I worked my way up through the levels and progressed to a senior ranking student and was then asked to take on teaching duties. Although outwardly confident, I was always a fairly shy person, and the idea of teaching made me nervous. This was compounded by the fact that most new students were male, and many joined the classes imagining themselves to be experts in the field. Although I was the teacher, and much more experienced, they usually questioned what I said and always thought their way was better. To gain



their respect I found I had to prove my skills to them, to demonstrate the techniques so they had no illusions about my abilities or strength. Once they saw what I was capable of they seemed to settle down and were easier to teach. I realized that teaching other students also helped me to better understand what I had learned.

My experience with other woman doing training has been mixed. Women often joined the classes, but the majority never seemed to be too interested, once learning what was going to be the levels of hard work they would have to do to learn martial arts they would drop out. Having few women in the classes never worried me because I'd always prefer to train with men as they seem to want to train harder and take the training and instruction more seriously.

One of the best things about being a part of Bakbakan has been the experience of meeting new people, and especially training under different masters. Over the years I have had many memorable experiences, gained lots of knowledge and met many people whom I admire and respect to the highest degree. I have had the privilege to meet and be trained under Master Rey Galang, Master Tony Diego and Master Christopher Ricketts and others. Each Master gave me a new insight into the art of Bakbakan: Master Rey, for example, when he traveled to Sydney in 2000, taught me the true meaning of Bakbakan brotherhood. He trained our class hard with weaponry, drills/combinations, boxing, self-defense moves and much more. Master Rey taught me how to spar confidently with a knife.

The second time he came to Sydney in 2002 I managed to do my first Bakbakan grading and with great excitement I received my 1st degree black belt. I was particularly proud as at the time I was 8 months pregnant, and only performed the non-contact sections. It was an experience I will never forget.

In 2001 I traveled to the Philippines with a group of Australian Bakbakan students to train with Master Tony Diego and Master Christopher Ricketts, to experience the culture there. It was a fantastic and challenging experience. Being one of the first women from Australia to train with the Masters made me feel a bit nervous, as I wanted to make a good impression. Rahneer had a lot of faith in my capabilities and, because of his trust in me; I didn't want to disappoint him with my performance as part of the team. One of the highlights whilst training in the Philippines was when each of the Masters fed a stick drill to me in front of their students. I was really nervous because I didn't know what to expect from them. I had to go on my natural instincts and free flow just like Rahneer had taught me. It was fantastic! When leaving the Philippines I felt within myself a stronger person physically and mentally. I took home an experience I would never forget. With the martial arts I have learned I feel more confident walking around the streets. Like most females I know and my original thoughts on learning self defense was it could be learned by attending a 2-day workshop and you could learn all the tricks and techniques needed. But overtime I realized that to defend yourself properly you have to have natural instincts and reactions, leaving no time to think or to use knowledge. This is something that is learned over a long period of time.

Although I'm currently absent from training due to being pregnant with another baby, I'm always there in spirit, and whenever there is a Bakbakan meeting or grading session I always try to attend. As soon as I can train again I will be back. My husband Joe will be the first to encourage me, as he has always been supportive and understanding

towards my training. Training has taught me the value of having positive influences and support, and having people who encourage you to be the best you can be.

### Set 1



### Set 2



### Set 3







Visit the Website: [www.bakbakan.com](http://www.bakbakan.com)

## **Gura Michelle Bautista**

Kamatuuran Kali

[Kamatuuran] *The word Kamatuuran, a Visayan word meaning "truth".*



Gura Michelle Bautista has been practicing the Filipino Martial Art of Kali for 10 years. She is a teacher in the Arriola School of Kamatuuran Kali under the direction of Tuhan Joseph Arriola. She was a Jedi extra in Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones. She has lectured on stunt work at University of California Berkeley and coordinates stunts on independent short films.

What drew Michelle Bautista to Kali? With a couple of semesters of Judo she found that she didn't like getting pounded into the ground much, so Michelle looked for another school. Michelle knew she had wanted to do something Filipino. Michelle had looked at a few schools but didn't find

anything compelling for me there.

Then she happened across a Kali demo Tuhan and Guro Ira did at Hayward State for a Filipino conference. Guro Ira made such an attractive Blind Princess. Michelle just sat there watching intently. It wasn't like anything she had ever seen before.

What struck her about the school was that it wasn't just a bunch of young 20 something guys, like many of the schools, where the only women were girlfriends of the guys there. There were also 3 other women there including Gura Rosie and Gura Donnalyn. So there were not only women, but also advanced women, and people of all ages. For Michelle, it meant that this was something I could do for a lifetime and not just when I'm young."

Gura Michelle Bautista has been training in the School of Kamatuuran Kali since 1994. She is a teacher in the Arriola School of Kamatuuran Kali under the direction of Tuhan Joseph Arriola. She has done Kali demonstrations and lectures throughout the San Francisco Bay Area including at San Francisco State, Pacific Association of Women Martial Artists Bay



Area Demo, Arkipelago Books, and EBMud Asian Pacific Heritage Celebration. She was a Jedi extra in Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones. She has lectured on stunt work at University of California Berkeley and coordinates stunts on independent short films.

She received 2nd place in the US national women open forms division at the WEKAF (World Escrima Kali Arnis Federation) championships and 3rd place in the international competition held in Cebu City, Philippines in August 2000.

By day she works as a Macintosh Technical Support person at UC Berkeley, her alma mater. Along with being a martial artist she is also a writer. Her work has been published in several anthologies, including "Babaylan: Anthology of Filipina Writers." Visit Website: [Click Here](#)

## **A Modern Boudicea**

By Andy Gibney



Back in the times of the Romans there was a woman of the Iceni tribe that rose up against them and almost brought the mighty Roman army to its knees. Her name was Boudicea (or in the modern parlance Boudicca) – either way she was an amazing warrior and one that many future warriors have compared themselves to. Queen Elizabeth 1 was fond of quoting Boudicea's name. In modern times, Margaret Thatcher was compared to the ancient Iceni queen.

In the world of UK martial arts, one name stands out as a true female warrior in the guise of Boudicea. Her name is Anne-Marie Wright. Anne-Marie has been training in the martial arts for 12 years and in that time has a remarkable record.

In a three year period from 1994 to 1997 Anne-Marie was competing in the WEKAF sanctioned tournaments both at home and abroad. In that time she won the British, European and World Championships; she never placed lower than second in any tournament she entered and was the top rated fighter in each of the three years she competed. In December 1996 she became the first, and to date, the only female Black Belt at my school, Unified Fighting Systems. This was followed in 1998 with her Black Belt in Doce Pares, under no less a luminary than Grandmaster Cacoy Canete. Two years later he promoted her again, to 2nd Grade Black Belt, a feat not managed by any other woman in the UK. In 2002 she scored another first as the only woman from the UK, to date, to be graded under the IKAEF (International Kali-Arnis-Eskrima Federation) at a weeklong training camp that was held in Germany. In 2003 Anne-Marie also became the first woman in the UK to be awarded her Apprentice Instructor certificate in Jeet Kune Do under Richard Bustillo. I'm sure it won't be too long before her Associate certificate follows.

What makes Anne-Marie all the more remarkable is that she has done all of this and raised two boys, Cavan who is 16 and Kristian who is 14 on her own, without any help from the boys' father. A divorce when the children were small was not a happy event. She made the choice to raise the boys until they were old enough to be left alone a



little more after school and returned to full-time work in 2001. She has made an equally astonishing rise here too. Beginning as personal assistant to the Chairman of a UK soccer club her next career move was in the world of construction. There she made her mark as the office manager of a \$150 million project and her latest move is also in construction running the offices of another large company.

Anne-Marie is an amazing woman. She has a drive about her that is rare in any individual, let alone a mother bringing up two boys. It is her sharp mind that has made her who she is. In martial arts it's not enough to punch or kick or stick-fight or wrestle, Anne-Marie analyses what she is doing so if she makes mistakes she learns from them and that helps her to grow.

I have been fortunate to be her instructor the whole time she has been training and I have seen her grow and mature from a raw White Belt all the way through her achievements. What was evident right from the beginning was that she was (and is) a worker. She never took the easy route. Although she has been very fortunate not to have anything more serious than a torn hamstring she has certainly taken her share of bruises, scrapes and cuts over the years. She stands at 5'4"

and is quite small framed yet she has always given as good as she got. In the times when the classes have been saturated with males, Anne-Marie never ducked sparring. Even in the British Team training when we all fought each other (all weights) she would be willing to fight the heavyweights, so that no one ever did her any favours. The pinnacle of this came with the victory at the 1996 World Championships, which were held in Los Angeles. It was good to watch her here too. In her semi-final Anne-Marie had beaten the 1994 Champion, Jackie Kulp, but she didn't take her eye off the prize. When the final came up she spent fifteen minutes in total silence focussing on the fight at hand. The result was a resounding victory over Christine Pepper and gave Anne-Marie the coveted trophy.



Anne-Marie and Master Andy Gibney



For many a man, me included, they would say that this was the pinnacle of their martial arts life. But for Anne-Marie, although the World title was important, it is not actually the highlight of her martial arts career to date. In 1982 the BBC commissioned a series about martial arts that was shown around the world; it was called 'The Way of the Warrior'. One of the episodes featured Grandmaster Cacoy Canete and the Doce Pares School. The show led to the

worldwide expansion of Doce Pares. Also featured in the show was GM Cacoy's

daughter, Kitty. It showed Kitty as a very pretty girl who couldn't get a boyfriend, as the Filipino boys were scared of this tough Eskrimador.

When Anne-Marie hadn't been training very long I showed her the tape of this show and Kitty left a big impression on her. In 1999 we travelled to New York for a Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do training weekend. It was during this weekend that Anne-Marie met Kitty and the two got on very well. A weekend of drinking coffee, hearing Kitty's tales and going shopping is what Anne-Marie remembers as the highlight of the martial arts career to date. Why? She had met this female martial arts icon that she had thought was as tough as nails and Kitty had accepted Anne-Marie with warmth and friendship. To Anne-Marie it meant she had been accepted by the hierarchy as a warrior, but also as a decent and good person.



I think in this one example you can see what makes Anne-Marie unique. It isn't only her toughness, her titles, her awards or even the fact that she has managed to keep her looks throughout the years of training. It is the way her mind works. It is that factor that men from all styles and walks of life should be aware of. That it isn't the pen that is mightier than the sword it is the mind.

Anne-Marie Wright trains under Master Andy Gibney



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## Discovering The Filipino Martial Arts

By Natasha Whittaker



I started training in the Filipino Martial Arts in 2002 when I discovered Amok quite by accident. I suppose I was attracted to the art because it was very practical, easy to follow and simple. Amok was a very self defense orientated Martial Art which made it very useful as well as a great compliment to the other traditional martial arts I was practicing at the time.

Prior to that I had not known much about the fighting arts of Philippines. When I started training in Amok under Sifu Dean Jones who also taught Wing Chun at the Wu Chi School in Johannesburg. While at the Wu Chi school Damian Halferty introduced a form of Filipino stick fighting and started teaching it on a regular basis.

As time passed Damian decided that he wanted to teach a complete system from the Philippines and started researching several different styles of Filipino martial arts. Damian eventually found Bakbakan and out of all the research that he did found this art to be an excellent system and this would be the system he would teach us. Bakbakan was then adopted as the official style at our school and Damian proceeded to teach us Bakbakan.

At this point, training became very interesting, definitely more complicated and a lot of coordination was required. When I first started I wasn't sure if I would be able to manage, learning this art, it seemed completely foreign to me.

Our school has definitely enjoyed the teachings and training of Bakbakan and Master Rey Galang visited in November 2004 giving a seminar. This was a wonderful experience as we were able to see the bigger picture of what Bakbakan entailed. Master Rey Galang was patient and very approachable.

In May of 2005 Master Ray visited once again for another seminar. This was a great seminar and we learned a great deal, since everything was a bit more familiar with having had the prior seminar in November 2004.

Unfortunately Damian Halferty immigrated to New Zealand in 2005 and Sifu Dean Jones has taken over as instructor.

I have really enjoyed Bakbakan in the short time that I have been involved in it. It involves quite a few things such as fitness as there is a lot of sparring involved. Footwork



Natasha Whittaker in Red



is very important, as you need to be light on your feet. We practice floating footwork and 45 degree angle footwork. Coordination is a major part of Bakbakan, you need to be able to do forms and set a sequence of moves with weapons and then apply the movements in sparring. This involves hand and foot coordination and timing. Learning to work with weapons such as stick and knife is a great learning experience, which requires mental discipline and focus.



Natasha trains at:  
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Visit the Website:  
[www.bakbakan.com](http://www.bakbakan.com)

**Front row:** (from left to right) Keef Whiteman, Asen Krastev and Iemraan Kara  
**Back row:** (left to right) Natasha Whittaker, Karen Meadows, Jason van Wyngaard, Sifu Dean Jones, Colleen du Plessis, Chris Tochev

### **Ursula Bojanek** Michael Schwarz

It is my distinct pleasure to introduce all of you at this time to one of my most dedicated students.



Ursula Bojanek is a most dedicated student. Though she has been with the Davis/Cabales Escrima System a short time her dedication and perseverance just accentuates the natural ability she has shown in her pursuit of the Filipino martial arts.

Ursula came to Punong Guro Michael Schwarz as a student confused by some of her previous experiences with the martial arts in general. Thru the study of several different systems and a number of instructors, she had experienced a great deal of the martial arts culture. However, this did not satisfy Ursula's thirst for knowledge.

As part of a recent promotion testing, I asked Ursula to submit to me some of her expectations from the Davis/Cabales Escrima System as well as how she felt it differed from other systems she had studied.

This was her reply...

I was hoping to learn all 12 angles of attack right from the start, just to have a clue what the angles are all about and I am very glad that Punong Guro Schwarz did not keep that a mystery from me or something to be learned in due time or in some future years.

I am glad Punong Guro Schwarz combined what I've learned from my previous experiences in the martial arts and improved my form, skillfully, and in no time at all he taught me the proper requirements for advancement and tested me for my 1st level.

It is very satisfying having a teacher who is ranked and acknowledged in his art, as well as to study under someone in the Filipino martial arts with a defined curriculum, who can guide me thru the system, allowing the right amount of time for the learning process to take place and introducing new techniques when I am ready to absorb them, progressively and in a no-nonsense, highly organized manner.”

I was further impressed with Punong Guro Schwarz's ability to help me understand the mechanics of the techniques as well as the ability to use the techniques in street situations.

My expectations have been fulfilled very nicely. Apart from Serrada Escrima, I also currently study Aikido and Wu Hsing Chuan.



How Serrada Escrima is different is that it implements the bastons in each training session immediately, where as the other arts introduce empty hand technique only.

Because Punong Guro Schwarz emphasizes the applications of Serrada Escrima to empty hand translations in real life situations, I feel at this point that it must be an effective system in street situations. But, in fairness, I don't know enough about any of the other systems to yet determine their effectiveness fairly.

When I started, I basically showed Punong Guro Mike what I knew. Now, I am on the way to learning proper level requirements. I like the Davis/Cabales Escrima System, and I would like to “stick” with it and continue to gain the knowledge and skills of the art.

I am headed in the right direction and I wish, some day, to earn the honor of being called “A true and skilled martial artist.”

... As I stated earlier, Ms Ursula Bojanek, is a dedicated student and does indeed represent the future of women in the Filipino Martial Arts.







Ursula Bojanek is a student of Punong Guro Michael Schwarz who is the Midwest Director of WSEF and the Midwest Director of WMAU

**Email**

Website: [www.defensivecombat.com](http://www.defensivecombat.com)

## **Suzanne Ramsden**

Suzanne was introduced to the Filipino Martial Arts by Grandmaster Richard Bustillo in 1998. Immediately intrigued with the movements and philosophy of Doce Pares Eskrima and wanting to really understand and train seriously, she trained with Grandmaster Richard Bustillo dedicatedly since meeting him. She began her own training group and now has her own school where she continues to train and also learn from Grandmaster Richard Bustillo.

Suzanne loves training, but the greater joy comes from introducing others to the wonderful art of Doce Pares Eskrima. Suzanne also has a group of teens at her school training now and she can see how they will pass on the learning and the passion for the Filipino martial arts in the future.

Suzanne also teaches and trains in Boxing, Kickboxing and Grappling. What she has learned transfers and combines in some way to everything else. The Filipino martial arts, is very special and she feels privileged to have Grandmaster Richard Bustillo as her teacher and friend.

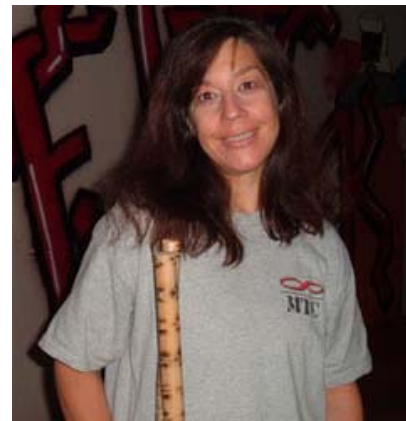
Suzanne is proud and honored to expose others to the beautiful arts from the Philippines.

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## Andrea and Aricka Sinkatan-Arnis Estrella

Andrea Morrow and her daughter Aricka Pyle, have been studying Sinkatan-Arnis Estrella for about 4 years, under Ama Maestro Bernardo Salinas, who is the inheritor of Arnis Estrella, which has been passed down through Ama Maestro's family since it's conception in the late 1800s. Sinkatan-Arnis Estrella is a part of the organization known as SFMA (Society of Federated Martial Arts) Andrea and Aricka also take training from Ama Maestro Salinas in Shotokan Karate where Aricka just tested for her Green belt and Andrea for her Blue belt.

Andrea and Aricka first were introduced to the martial art at a demonstration that the SFMA was doing in the mall where we live in Fort St. John. It was the traditional Filipino tinikling music and the sound of sticks striking together that first caught our attention. As we drew closer we saw kids stepping in and out of the long bamboo poles that were being beat together and then on the floor with the timing of the music. At the same time the pairs of kids were using Arnis sticks in a Dos Manos drill. As an outsider watching them, they were so smooth, with the rhythm, timing and flow of the sticks it was amazing to watch and that held our attention. Little did we know how much time and effort it took to get to that level of proficiency.



confidence in our abilities, to sidestep a strike with a few inches instead of a few feet. Our sticks have become an extension of our arms, we have the capability to lengthen them or shorten them depending on what is available to us. (i.e.. pen, keys, water bottle, walking cane) Aricka and Andrea both enjoy sparring, even though Aricka gets carried away at time and bruises Andrea's knuckles now and again. Aricka enjoys the self-defense and takedowns. She says "My mother had to learn



Andrea Morrow



Aricka Pyle

Aricka said "When you first pick up a set of sticks for sparring, you immediately want to go for the attack, before you are attacked. Why, because you think it's easier to attack than to defend yourself." Our training has taught us that being defensive puts us in a better position; we can study our opponent, learn their timing, learn their weakness and take advantage of it. We have learned to have



not to try and assert her authority over me as a parent in class (all five feet and two inches of her)." I say I just need longer sticks.

Being in northern Canada and not having any other schools close by we didn't realize how much we have progressed over the last few years, or how well known and respected Ama Maestro Salinas is. Over the last year Andrea went to seminars with Maestro in Red Deer, Alta and Vancouver, BC. The sfma also hosted their first Annual Recognition Awards and banquet in May of this year, 2005. These events gave us the opportunity to meet and learn from each other, to compare our progress with others, but it was also an eye opener to hear what other Guro's and martial art Masters across North America had to say about "our teacher". Reminding us of how lucky we are to be apart of Ama Maestro Salinas's family and train with him daily.

In the future both Aricka and Andrea plan on specializing in Arnis, and to teach both Shotokan Karate and Arnis Estrella. Andrea is hoping to have a school of her own within the next 5 years. Andrea is going to the Philippines in April 2006 for 5 weeks to train and to assist in seminars that Ama Maestro Salinas has planned. She is very excited about this, and just a little hesitant about leaving her two teenagers at home by themselves for 5 weeks.



Ama Maestro Salinas and students



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## **Dayang Edessa Ramos**

FMA Digest 2005 Woman of the Year

In 1994 Dayang Edessa Ramos started her training in Modern Arnis in Manila under Master Samuel Dulay. When she moved to Switzerland in 1996, her training continued in the form of private seminars with Master Dulay during frequent visits to the Philippines. In Switzerland, she took Wing Chun and Taichi lessons under Grandmaster Kok Yeng Chow and Daniel Minder. In 2000, she established Modern Arnis Switzerland, which was later to become the Swiss and European Commission of the International Modern Arnis Federation Philippines (IMAFP).

Since 2001, she has been making several trips a year to the Philippines for intensive private seminars under Master Samuel Dulay and Master Cristino Vasquez with supervision from Master Rene Tongson. She holds a 3rd degree black belt in Modern Arnis.

In Europe, Edessa is also a member of the Deutsche Arnis Verband or DAV (German Modern Arnis Federation). She travels regularly to Germany for seminars under Master Dieter Knüttel.

Edessa discovered her fascination for bladed weapons under the guidance of Master Dulay. As her teacher, he helped her to overcome her instinctive fear of the knife and taught her techniques in knife defense and combat, sangot (an Ilongo curved knife), and her favourite, the itak (or bolo).

This year, she continues her commitment to the bladed weapon through intensive trainings under Master Bram Frank. She has been recently appointed as the Swiss Director for his organization, Common Sense Self Defense/Street Combat (CSSD/SC).

During the 2nd Filipino Martial Arts Festival in Dortmund in 2004, she assisted and performed with Master Dulay in the seminars and gala night. It was her first public demonstration of a skill considered rare for women, "that of using the itak in free-style fighting."



In December 2004, she performed a Modern Arnis demo with Master Dulay in the 1<sup>st</sup> Swiss Budo Masters Gala in Berne. It was a non-stop 5-weapon demonstration that awed the martial arts community, primarily because it was their first time to view the full fighting techniques of the Filipino Martial Arts, and she was one of the very few women in the festival. Not only that, she was the only one handling a live machete.

Dayang Edessa is busy promoting and teaching Modern Arnis in Zurich. She is also on the brink of establishing the IMAFP chapter in Italy. Other areas that are in the works and on her agenda include Slovakia and Eastern Europe. The lack of financial and manpower resources have not deterred her





from pursuing her dream passionately: to heighten international recognition for Modern Arnis and the Filipino Martial Arts, and to achieve international renown for the masters in the Philippines.

She also writes regularly about arnis, the Filipino Martial Arts, and the various aspects of Filipino martial culture. Aware that Philippine masters have very limited opportunities to travel abroad and become known, she actively organizes seminars for them. She hopes to bring at least one master or senior instructor from the Philippines to Europe every year. Through her efforts and the generous support of her friend and teacher Master Dieter Knüttel, it became possible for Masters Samuel Dulay and Cristino Vasquez to teach



Master Dieter Knüttel - Dayang Ramos –  
Master Bram Frank



seminars in both Switzerland and Germany, hence drawing appreciation to the Filipino as a true warrior and bearer of the Filipino Martial Arts.

When not busy with Arnis, Edessa Ramos is a free-lance journalist, published writer, scuba diver and theater artist. She works as marketing manager and lecturer for the University of Business and Finance Switzerland.

You may write to her at: **EdessaRamos@solnet.ch** or visit **www.silkensteel.com** and **www.imafp.com**.



## Facunda 'Aling Cunda' Sabanal Berro

By: Celestino C. Macachor

Born in Tunga, Moalboal on November 25, 1924 Facunda "Aling Cunda" Berro is the descendant of two legendary eskrimadors of Moalboal, Cebu. His grandfather Laurente "Laguno" Sabanal was one of the early pioneers of the rustic town of Moalboal south of Cebu. Laguno along with Solferino Borinaga of Camotes Island was one of the first documented practitioners of eskrima that successfully

defended their home against Moro pirates during the early 19th century. To honor his courage the town of Moalboal used to be called Laguno. Aling Cunda's father Pablo "Amboy Kidlat" Sabanal; the horseback-riding drifter was one of the earliest eskrima teachers of colonial Cebu. Amboy Kidlat living in the shadow of Laguno may have even surpassed the legend of his father during his time.

At this writing Aling Cunda is the only living survivor of a brood of seven. Her siblings like their fearless ancestors were endowed with extraordinary strength. One of Aling Cunda's fondest memories of her late father was during World War II, when she saw how her father intimidated a Japanese soldier who barged into their home, by

bending a crowbar right before the eyes of the frightened intruder and slammed it on his chest. From then on, no Japanese soldiers knocked on their doors again. Aling Cunda passed on the genes of her ancestors to her daughter Luzvisminda who in 1987 won second place in the Third World Marathon held in Cebu City.

Aling Cunda learned eskrima by simply observing her father teach his brothers Brigido, Serapion, Alfonso, Ubaldo and elder sisters Magdalena and Segundina. Aside from her father one of her biggest influences was her aunt Insi Benang Sabanal, a ferocious fighter who she remembered foiled an attempted rape by nearly crushing the attacker to death with a tight submission lock.

Aling Cunda herself while still a high school student at the University of the Visayas repelled two attackers at the Cebu Normal School, throwing one of the assailant's unconscious on the ground while the other fled for his life. When a policeman approached to rescue her, she calmly told the officer, "I'm alright, but check that guy on the ground if he's still alive!" Typical of most eskrima practitioners of her generation, Aling Cunda claims that one of the secrets of their family's invincibility are the oraciones and amulets that they inherited from their grandfather Laurente "Laguno" Sabanal.

She had a collection of mystical panyo (handkerchief) inscribed with Latin incantations that they used as headband for protection. When Luzvisminda showed us an old picture of her grandmother Demetria, Aling Cunda fervently mused over that her mother was also an eskrimador even before she met her father Amboy Kidlat. When we asked why there are so many eskrimadors in her era, Aling Cunda confirmed what we had been expecting all along. She was the first and probably the last living eskrimador we interviewed who corroborated that the primary motivation of their family practicing the art was to defend their village against Moro pirates. Women being the favorite prey of Moro raiders for their harem, it is not surprising that some of them were equally deadly fighters. Even during the early 20th century Moro pirates continued to wreck havoc and terror on the coastlines of Cebu, her elder brother Serapion took on the job of their grandfather in defending Moalboal against Moro raids. This firsthand account on the use of eskrima against Moro pirates is the final seal to prove that our theory on the origins of the Filipino Martial Arts is historically correct!

Aling Cunda is a testament of her generation's courage, strength, tenacity and profound spirituality. Today at the age of eighty, she still commutes daily between Cebu City and her hometown Moalboal to gather scrap food for her livestock. Truly a remarkable woman and eskrimador.



**Guro Lynn Newby-Fraser**  
FMA Digest 2004 Woman of the Year

Guro Lynn Newby-Fraser has been training in the martial arts for almost 17 years. While having achieved ranking in various systems, including Master level in American Fighting Systems, it is primarily her training in the Filipino martial arts which truly excites and motivates her.

Guro Lynn Newby-Fraser says the martial arts has never really come very easily to her but, after watching her husband train for over a year in the Filipino martial arts, she decided that the Filipino martial arts was not only a very interesting and practical system but one where she, as an average practitioner, could develop a level of competency. Further, in addition to being a dynamic and exciting new aspect in her life, it struck her as being an awesome and practical system of self-defense and fitness for women to train in – after all, if she could do it, she says, so could any female training in the martial arts.

Aside from the dynamics of the exercise aspect of Filipino martial arts training, she enjoys the tremendous practicality of the baston and the daga. Of her various martial arts promotions and certifications and whatever else in her life could be considered an achievement, it is her promotion to Master and her ranking in the Archipelago Combatives system that she is the most proud of.

Guro Lynn Newby-Fraser, now 47 years of age would of not believed ten years ago, she would have the skills and enjoyment she does today in the Filipino martial arts. She has never quite been able to decide which is her favorite weapon or combination thereof – each of them is so dynamic whether alone or in combination. It is also so encouraging to know that as she gets older and her kicks etc get lower and lower, her ability to carry on improving in her skills in the Filipino system can continue.

While the Filipino Martial Arts is now an integral part of the adult curriculum at their school, she also teaches a specific Pacific Archipelago Combatives class at the academy. To her great satisfaction, 50% of the students who participate are women. “It is very satisfying as an instructor”, she says, “to see one’s students grow in skill level and confidence – more so from the viewpoint of a female instructor observing female students”. To be able to pick up and use the baston or daga and understand and apply them according to their dynamics, range, offense and defensive purposes is just so satisfying and never ending in the newness of what can be learned. “Actually, it’s just plain exciting”, she says.

Guro Lynn Newby-Fraser and her husband Master Geoffrey Laun are co-owners and instructors at Carrollton Martial Arts Academy in Carrollton, Texas.

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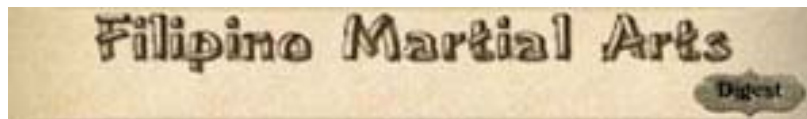
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