

~~Sensei Says~~ Sempai Says

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On September 6 - 9 the Pacific Association of Women Martial Artists held its 25th Annual training camp outside Monterrey, California. This was the first time I attended the camp, and it was an amazing experience. The camp was attended by 240 women of all ages and skill levels. According to camp literature, over 50 different styles of martial arts were represented at the camp.

The only difficult part (besides the training) was deciding which of the many classes to attend. Each day there were four class periods with approximately ten classes to choose from at each time. I tried to take classes in arts I cannot get exposure to any other place. My favorite experience, by far, was taking Naginata classes. The naginata is a spear-like weapon, which was the specialty of samurai women. I was able to fit in three Naginata classes, along with classes in kyudo (Japanese archery), knife throwing, Maori Weapons (from New Zealand), Gracie Jujitsu (from Brazil), Aerial kicks, and a two person bo (staff) kata.

On the second night of camp there was a demonstration by a number of the schools attending. Schools from the area brought in additional students to demonstrate. The show lasted over two hours, complete with an intermission! It was open to the public and many family members showed up to watch the event.

Overall, I was deeply inspired by the depth of knowledge and experience that was present – as well as the level of encouragement. During the opening ceremonies participants were asked to stand in response to the number of years they have been training. When they called out, "30 years or more of training" I looked around in awe at the group of women standing. I thought of the excitement of my very first class, how far I had to go back then, how far I have come, and, yet, how far I still have to go. It was just one of the many inspiring moments of the camp.

The date has not been set for next year's camp, but I will post the details when I get them. I encourage all women who are training to go and experience the camp. I plan to do my best to attend again. It's a long time to wait for my next naginata lesson!

- Julia Manela