

In 1984, Danielson and Miyagi brought to the big screen the sport of Karate and I, at eight years old, experienced my first crush. Ralph Macchio balancing on the bow of a fishing boat while practicing “wax on/wax off” and “paint the fence” was heart stopping to this little country bumpkin.

TBS rekindled this little romance on Sunday with the airing of “The Karate Kid” and despite the nipple-high corduroy waist line pants, I was still in awe when the “crane” kick won ol’ Ralph the title at the competition over his Cobra-Kai menace Johnny Lawrence.

Though the flick was created with the intention of filling the cinema seats with it’s underdog success story, the subtle lessons in Daniel’s training were what held my interest as a 30-some-year-old therapist.

Miyagi’s teaching to his student was about focus, concentration, balance, breathing and timing. He removed from his student the sense of Karate being about aggression versus defense, experience over foundation and power over skill.

Karate, the Miyagi style, was about response to his competitor, not offense. Staying quiet and grounded while the opponent danced around the mat with fancy kicks, twists and turns and intimidating punches set Danielson apart from his competitors.

Since the 1990s, the benefits of the martial arts to the physical and psychological well-being of the human have been well documented in research.

The martial arts enhance self-esteem through the provision of physical activity and group experience, and the teaching of relaxation, concentration, assertiveness and directiveness and honesty in communication (American Journal of Psychotherapy 1995). In comparison to participation in other sports over time, the martial arts have been shown to reduce one’s frequency of feeling angry, as well as engagement in verbal hostility. Independence and self esteem increase with participation in the martial arts.

Psychobabble

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The physiological benefits of the martial arts are numerous; so too are the psychological. Adam Paul Swiercz offers the following summary: Different martial arts bring about different effects. If someone wants to battle stress and anxiety, most forms of martial arts will suffice. For the elderly and those that are physically limited, Tai Chi and Qigong are wonderful forms of exercise. For adolescents, taekwondo and Hapkido can work wonders.

The martial arts, however, are by no means age specific. Taekwondo has also been shown to greatly help elderly people and prevent them from taking harmful falls. Whatever martial art one chooses to practice will undoubtedly affect him/her in a positive way.

Thank you Mr. Miyagi for inspiring an interest in a beneficial art, and to Ralph for being the object of my affection well in to my teens. May your memory live on in each humorous crane kick I engage in over my lifetime.