

## Spotlight on Karen Sheperd

*Known for her work as an actress, champion Martial Artist and stunt goddess -- Karen has been doing stunt work for **Buffy The Vampire Slayer** -- specifically performing the fight scenes for Eliza Dushku who plays the **Faith** character. She regularly performs the stunt work on the **Angel** series as well. She has also stunt doubled the Sydney character played by Nia Peeples on **Walker - Texas Ranger**, where she was constantly getting into fights, fights & more fights...*

### ***How long have you been involved in the Martial Arts?***

My whole life. My first class was when I was in high school. My first style was Shotokan (Hard Style) and then I went to Kajukenpo because of the freedom of movement. I was a gymnast in junior high and in high school. The Kung Fu styles were more adaptable towards gymnastics -- again, the freedom of movement. Won Hop Kuen Do is my *main* style. It's a branch of Kajukenpo as well as a variation of many different styles. It also incorporates some animal styles into it.



### ***Hollywood-Do***

You have to learn 'how' to do it -- then just do it.

*Karen Sheperd-2001*

### ***Do you have a favorite style?***

Right now my style is 'Hollywood-Do' (a *Sheperdism* -- and you heard it here first.) Whether it's Karate, Kung Fu or Boxing -- it's all film fighting, which I call 'Hollywood-Do'. This is when you go deep into the role for whatever's needed for a particular fight scene. One thing about my style and my background is that I've trained in so many styles -- that it's easy for me to pick things up. My foundation is large so I have a lot to work from. I might get called to do a Nunchuk scene, like I did for **Mystery Men**. I have a lot of training in various weapons. I pull from my experiences -- to bring what filmmakers need to the screen.

### ***Have the Martial Arts helped you in a business sense?***

Interesting question. No and yes. They have in the obvious 'sense of focus'. I try and apply that to everything I do, whether in business or otherwise. Focus is the *main* thing -- and that's something really something that I've learned. Learn how to focus and it you can apply it to whatever you do. In the business world and beyond...

Let me share a story with you...At the time--1978--there was no rating system for women in Kata or Forms. Back then there was only one National circuit and it was through the people at Black Belt. *Kata* was lumped together with both Men

and Women. There weren't that many women competing on the national level because there were so few divisions for women in tournaments at the time.

"Tournament promoters didn't have divisions for women, because there weren't enough women to establish divisions for. But I knew those women were out there... "

Young Martial Artistes (women) would come up to me at national tournaments and make comments saying "I wish I could compete at Kata -- but I'm too intimidated because it's all men." or "I'm not going to enter a division full of men because I'll never win." Only a few women at that time competed against men. I was one of them. I remember thinking -- "This is really unjust." I thought, "What about the women who want a chance?" What about those poor women? I kept asking people, "How is the sport going to advance for women unless it's brought to the same level of sports like tennis, gymnastics and figure skating?" I called the people at the magazine who ran the whole national system and said "Hey -- how come you don't have a rating system for women's forms?" The response was "Because there's not enough of you out there..."

They said I "should contact those women and start a petition." They needed to hear from the promoters that what we were asking for would be reasonable. I contacted as many of the women who were then competing on the national level as I could -- got them to write letters and spoke to every promoter that I could. I explained to the promoters what the goals were and that if "they were brave enough to offer a separate forms competition for women" more women would come out of the woodwork to compete. Now there are tons of circuits and plenty of women competitors. Later it was kind of cool to see ratings in magazines for women. Today more and more women are competing on a national level. I feel they are much more involved. The numbers have really grown. When I started -- only five-percent of Martial Artists were women. Now, it's up to fifty percent or more...

"It came down to the promoters -- Would they take a chance?  
I got a few of them, plus the letters that came out of it...  
Finally the rating system, was established in 1979."

***Why do you think this is?***

I think it's due largely in part to the Media. I think it's a great thing. Women are still way behind men as far as being taken seriously in the *business* end of the Martial Arts. By this I mean tournament promotions, film, film roles, film production and female fight coordinators. It's a real rarity when a woman is taken seriously in these roles. They're out there, but in comparison to the men -- the numbers are few.

***Tell us more about your stunt work.***

On **Buffy**, I played the character of Faith who was a recurring character. I had the pleasure of having some of the most memorable fight scenes with Sophia Crawford, who used to be Buffys' stunt double. Now she has *three* stunt doubles instead of one. It's very different now. For **Walker** -- I regularly doubled Nia Peeples who played the Sydney character. Basically, what I did was specialize in fights, fights & more fights. I do my stunt work as my bread and butter money. The acting jobs are icing on the cake.

It's a hard business to break into, but if they see you do *your thing*, it makes it a lot easier. It's not a phone thing, it's a DO Thing"

***What was the most difficult stunt you ever had to do?***

*Difficult* and *dangerous* are two different things. Difficult to me is doing a long fight sequence for a master shot. That means doing anywhere from 15 to 40 moves in one shot -- where you have to hit a certain mark in a certain time frame. A lot of times you're under a lot of pressure to do *everything* in one take. It's really a lot of pressure -- people don't think about that. If you're a stunt person it's a lot of pressure. But if you're the Actress -- when you're the actress doing your own stunts, then it's a lot different. You can take more time -- or do it again if you feel you can get a better take. There's a lot to it. You have to hit all the marks and make sure all the angles look right and are on. You have to try and make everything look fast and powerful...and do it all in ONE TAKE! There are a lot of fun times too. On **Walker**, I remember doing a biker episode. I was riding Harleys' all week and getting paid for it! I love my job.

***I read somewhere that you had some scripts?***

Yes -- I've got a couple that people have given me and I've been offered a couple of roles. I'm trying to get the scripts developed and raise financing for them. I really want to try to apply myself and develop my skills as an actress. The most fun I have is when I'm acting. I really enjoy it.

***What advice would you give to Martial Artists or anyone trying to get into stunt work?***

For beginners -- it's just "Train, Train, Train". Be disciplined and learn your basics well. For Martial Artists who want to go into the entertainment business -- you have to approach it like a *business*. Apply the same discipline you've acquired as a Martial Artist. Be a professional and appear as one. Prepare *professional* head-shots of yourself, with photos, a resume and a Bio. There are a wide range of resources out there...put yourself in contact with and make yourself available to; stunt coordinators, trainers and stunt doubles. There really are a *lot* of resources out there. Network and get to know people. Also, *show* them what you know.



Whether it's in person or on tape. It's not a phone thing. It's a do thing. Show them what you know and be patient *and* persistent. You have to want it really bad -- because there's a lot of rejection. But in the end -- persistence is omnipotent. (I can't take credit for that). The good things keep you thriving. There's so much rejection and negativity -- *then* something really good comes along. The producer of **Hercules** is a Martial Arts fan and had seen earlier tapes of mine. He offered me the role of the "Enforcer" which of course I was very happy with. He wrote that part just for me. What blew me away was, that episode went on to get the highest ratings the show ever had...Those highs are the things that keep you going.



***Do you have any final thoughts?***

I do try and answer all *reasonable* letters from fans. And also "When is it going to stop raining, so I can drive my Harley (sportster) with the guys? My advice would be, "Do what you love -- love what you do and have the focus to do it well." And oh yes, one other thing...*I am the Karate Diva!*

**Statistical Information:**

**1979:** Winner - International Karate Championships in Long Beach

**1979 & 1980:** Number #1 Ranked Female Forms Champion in America

**1980:** First ever Female Winner, U.S. Open - Kata Grand Champion in America and 'Winner' of Joe Corleys' "Battle of Atlanta"

**1980-1981:** Diamond Nationals and Winner West Coast Nationals

Karen is awarded her first black belt by famed instructor Al Dacascos (Father of Mark Dacascos)

Visit Karen's Web site @ [www.KarenSheperd.com](http://www.KarenSheperd.com)  
or [www.karatediva.com](http://www.karatediva.com)