

INSPIRATION
OVATION



BY KAREN EDEN

"I HAVE NOW DECIDED TO WEAR [THAT NECKLACE] UPON OCCASION. IT HAS BECOME A PERSONAL DECISION OF MINE TO NOT GIVE THIS LITTLE PEACE OF JEWELRY THE POWER TO MAKE ME FEEL BAD ANY LONGER. IN A NUTSHELL, I WILL NOT BE A PRISONER OF MY OWN PERSONAL HISTORY."

The Power of a Symbol

When I was 16 years old, like many young people I took a job at the mall. It was a woman's clothing store, and I absolutely *hated* it.

Day in and day out, I dealt with customers who don't really want to be dealt with. Yet, they were upset if you weren't somehow just standing there waiting to make yourself available to their every issue with the merchandise or the store.

I learned quickly that I'm not the sales type. That's quite okay. But during this time, it was also the holiday season and we were set to exchange gifts with other employees. My "Secret Santa" was another girl who got me this beautiful silver necklace.

Year after year, decade after decade, however, I have *never* worn that necklace. Why? Because every time I look at it, it reminds me of a time in my life that I was not so happy. That pendant reminds me of that horrible job!

In my mind, I have evidently placed an association with that particular piece of jewelry, based sheerly on the way it makes me feel due to my past experiences. Even looking at it today makes me relive the feeling of the misplaced and helpless teenager that I once was. I understand that it's not fair to the girl who bought me this necklace, but it's not her experience. It's mine.

Ever think about the power of a symbol? In martial arts, we have many such symbols. Almost instantly, when someone sees a tiger or a dragon, they will equate these symbols to either a karate school or a Chinese restaurant. Whether it's fair or not, these two symbols have become connected with the Asian culture across the globe.

I think of all the many symbols out there, and how one looks at them, these two can either encourage or inflame a group or individuals, for no other reason than why my own necklace makes me feel agitated. It's the power we assign them according to each of our own experiences. Without the power we assign them, they are but mere pieces of subjective artwork.

I remember, as a red belt, I went to the boiler room with my instructor to get some tang soo do belts that were stored away on some shelves. There I saw hanging what appeared to me to be a swastika. I looked at my instructor with an odd expression.

"It's not what you think," he said. "This is a symbol that represents something else in Asia."

I went home and did some research, and he was right. Ever since World War II in the mid-20th century, people associate the swastika with Germany's ruthless dictator, Adolph Hitler, who made it the symbol for his Nazi Party. But, in reality, the swastika predates Hitler by some 5,000 years as a symbol of good fortune for many Eastern religions. I was shocked to discover that such a revolting symbol was at one time the symbol of prosperity for many centuries.

"That may not be good for business, sir," I told my instructor. "Most Americans don't know the history behind that symbol."

"That's why it's hanging in the boiler room," he replied.

Then there's the symbol of my displaced teen years, a very simple silver pendant. Believe it or not, I have now decided to wear this particular symbol upon occasion. It has become a personal decision of mine to *not* give this little peace of jewelry the power to make me feel bad any longer. In a nutshell, I will not be a prisoner of my own personal history.

And if you should ever see me wear it, I hope you like it cause it is actually kind of cute. 🐉

