



## GETTING HER KICKS

**IT'S THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA IN THE KARATE WORLD.** A Dawn Barnes era, to be exact. The new resident of Calabasas is out to combat the "man's world" of martial arts with a kinder, gentler style. So far, so good. With 1,200 students practicing at her four Karate Kids studios throughout Los Angeles—most schools are lucky to enroll 60—traditionalists in the field have finally taken note of the burgeoning powerhouse.

"When I lecture every year at the Martial Arts Super Show in Las Vegas," she says, "I can see them [male instructors] looking at me like, 'What's her secret?'"

For one, it's her Positive Dialogue Response teaching method, which focuses on empowering children by eliminating words like "no," "don't" and "can't."

"So many kids would be more inspired if they were just taught in a positive way," Dawn asserts.

If she sounds like a psychologist, her insight is not the product of any formal education in the field. The eldest of seven, who studied with everybody from shamans to yoga instructors and meditation guides, insists, "The kids are my greatest teachers."

Twenty years ago, Sensei Dawn could have used a dose of her own medicine, for she admittedly was not feeling so empowered. "I was very shy," she says. "I was certainly not the big mouth that I am today!" Then, after walking into a karate studio in Beverly Hills to enroll her sons, she had a life-changing epiphany. She remembers, "I had a flash-forward almost that, 'Yeah, I'm going to get my black belt.' That was it."

Although it takes most people five years to achieve that goal, the former ballerina did it in almost half the time, which helped rid her of "constant self-doubt." Meanwhile, her boys, Christopher and Andrew, studied alongside mom: "They liked it, until I started teaching their classes!" she says with a laugh.

In 1995, after doing stunt work in movies like Eddie Murphy's *Golden Child* and teaching martial arts in after-school programs, Dawn opened her first studio in Santa Monica. "I knew that I would be successful because the kids loved me, and I loved them," she explains.

Her instincts were correct, and then some. She now oversees a karate enterprise that includes teaching manuals, instructional videos and, most recently, *The Black Belt Club*, a series of Scholastic books (the first one will be released in March) and a movie deal about four kids

who karate chop their way around the world. "It's going to be great!" she promises.

Dawn has built an empire, but don't tell her that. She still looks for ways to further her mission to build self-esteem in children, like writing teaching manuals for the academic world. She also wants to see her movie, slated for a 2006 release, make it on the big screen. Until then, she insists, "It's not an empire yet!"

Whatever one calls her domain, Master Dawn likes to keep the business all in the family. Andrew manages the Encino dojo; her 16-year-old stepdaughter, Alex, assistant teaches at the Santa Monica studio; and her sister, Alesia DeSisto, manages the Sherman Oaks and Calabasas venues as she studies for her black belt. Although Dawn's hubby, Ben Yellin, who helps run her rapidly expanding business, hasn't hopped aboard the black-belt bandwagon, she says they still call him Master Ben. "He's a very high-degree black belt in business!" she justifies.

For the Santa Monica transplant, who moved to Calabasas a year ago with Ben and her two stepdaughters, living in a "mini Palm Springs" is bliss: "We love it here. No parking meters, and I just love the environment of living near the hills. I feel totally relaxed here!"

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