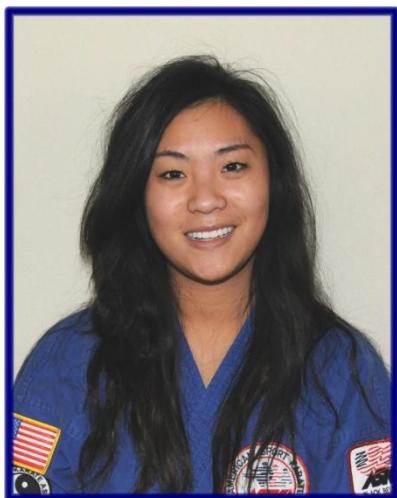


**Kelly Pham**

**3<sup>rd</sup> DAN Black belt Dec 14-2013**



Nelson Mandela once said, "I've learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who *conquers that fear*". It is important for students to understand that learning martial arts is not a destination, but a journey. My journey has transformed over the years; starting out as a curious (but reluctant) student, and continuing as an instructor. It's been eleven years since I've wrapped a white belt around my waist, but each and every day I strive to learn something new, regardless of my rank. Being a part of ASKA has helped me conquer fears and grow into the person I have always wanted to be. I've learned to speak even when my voice shakes with fear. I've learned to stand in front of a crowd even when my knees tremble beneath me. And I've learned to be confident even when anxiety radiates through my bones. I am honored to be not only an instructor, but an eternal student of ASKA. Ralph Krause, the founder of ASKA, has made a tremendous impact reaching both ends of the world. His hard work and admirable dedication to this sport has motivated me to keep his dream alive. I am proud to be a part of a traditional martial art, untouched by outside influences. Ralph emphasized not a student's rank, but rather the person behind the belt. Becoming a black belt requires physical strength, but more importantly, a good character. Anyone can color their belt black (I've tried once!), but it takes discipline and

patience to earn every thread. Some students may move faster than others, but that is okay, please do not get discouraged. This is not a race; this is about *an individual's* journey that is incomparable to others. I truly believe that earning a black belt is attainable by anyone, but what really matters is the adventures after you receive your belt. I don't believe my journey started until I wrapped my black belt around my waist and realized that there is an infinite amount of knowledge I still need to learn. This chapter in my life has been an unforgettable experience that I will forever cherish. Starting out at Belle Creek as a shy (but sassy) 13 year old, I have grown up alongside of many of you. And now as a taller (sometimes still sassy) 19 year old, I want to thank each and every one of you for helping me reach my goals, conquer my fears, and most importantly laugh at my lame jokes through the years. *All of you inspire me endlessly.*

For my new students, welcome! I love new faces. For my current students, be patient and tough; these traits will become useful. For my instructors, thank you is not enough to explain my gratitude for all that you do. And for my dad, I couldn't ask for a better best friend, mentor, coach, etc. You are my immortal hero and I am so proud to be your daughter. *Hakuna Matata*, always.

**Kelly Pham**