

## Master Wheeler's Eulogy

Presented by Sensei John Dritt  
at Master Wheeler's Funeral  
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I'm not going to speak tonight about Master Wheeler's karate skills, although they were exceptional that is not what we felt was most important about him.

An unknown author once said, "A teacher effects eternity, he can never tell where his influence stops."

I know that Master Wheeler had a profound influence on his students from the very first time we met him. If there is a distinguishing feature of Master Wheeler and the OKU it is the sense of family that he instilled in us all. Master Wheeler and all his family members made us feel as if we were a part of his own family. Master Wheeler was adopted hundreds of times as a father and grandfather. Master Wheeler started the OKU because he wanted to give people a safe place to improve themselves. A home they could come to. A place where they could feel a part of something important. He did not care about your past, all he cared about was your desire to improve. He welcomed everyone.

His long time students have all developed a deep personal relationship with him that is unique and special to each of us. To us Master Wheeler was more than just an exceptional martial artist, he was a leader in life, a hero and a role model.

Master Wheeler said to me:

"One of the most satisfying things about my life as a karate instructor is when a person who study's karate under me, tells me that studying karate and my influence on them was a big help to them in shaping their life. This has happened several times." We can all say that it happened more than several.

In preparing for these comments, I asked a lot of people what they thought I should say and several familiar themes emerged. They said, "Make sure and tell them how Master Wheeler changed my life. Make sure and tell them how much better I am as a person now than I was before I met him." "Tell them he was my Hero, he was the greatest man I ever knew." "Tell them how he made everyone feel like family." "Tell them that I loved him."

Now days there is a lot of talk about heroes and role models. When you look at Hollywood or professional sports figures well that is just not something you want young people to look up to. When you look at Allen Wheeler you see something very different.

I asked Master Wheeler about that and he said, "When I first started in Karate I really feel like God put his finger on me and wanted me to teach karate for him. To use it as a tool to witness for Jesus. I feel like I have reached a lot of people that would not have been reached in the usual channels of Christian witnessing. Through my martial arts training I have been able to help an awful lot of misguided youth and help them get back on the right track. I have helped hundreds of young people work through their personal problems." You can look at each of his students and see how true that is. Each of us have been helped through life's most challenging situations by Master Wheeler.

One of his students lost his beautiful young wife as a result of surgery when he was 22. That same year he was hit by a car on his motorcycle. It broke his back in 4 places. Mr. Wheeler came to the hospital. He showed him how he could rebuild his body with karate. He would stay after class and talk with him about the loss of his wife and say prayers with him. He was a big part of the young man's recovery.

I saw him work with a man who had just come back from Viet Nam. He saw a lot of combat while he was there. He had a lot of pain and anger inside him from that experience. Master Wheeler changed his life. He said to me, "Master Wheeler taught me how to be nice to people." He also went back to school and got his degree. The man said to me, "Make sure and tell them how he changed my life."

I think every one of his students has a similar story they could tell about Master Wheeler. Every one of them feel a deep love and respect for this man.

I remember when several of us took him to the Isshinryu Hall of Fame banquet. We were all seated together around a few tables. There was a head table up front for all the VIP's. The president of the IHOF came over and said, "Master Wheeler will you please come sit at the head table of honor up front?" Master Wheeler replied, "I think I would prefer to set here with my people, but thank you kindly."

In martial arts circles there is a lot of talk about the term Master. Selfish talk about who is and who is not a master and who is deserving

of that title. I first want to say that Mr. Wheeler never took that term on himself. In fact Mr. Wheeler felt that there was only one Master and that was Jesus Christ. He was not in karate for himself. He was there to help others like me and every other of over 10,000 students who came through his dojo. His students call him master not because of his skills in karate but because of the profound personal influence he had on us all.

Master Wheeler took our training in some unexpected directions. He started studying nerve center and pressure points long before any of us knew what that was. He told us this was something he thought we should learn. In addition to improving our understanding of karate it introduced us to the healing side of martial arts. This was a great gift he gave us, the healing work is the most rewarding thing I have ever done.

I was sitting with him at a tournament one day and I told him that I liked healing more than hitting. He said to me, "Guess how many times I have had to use my training to defend myself? I said I don't know. He said, "None. Outside of my time in the army I have never been in a fight. Sure I was capable of defending myself but I was always able to find a way out of it. But I can tell you that I have cured thousands of headaches, I've helped hundreds of sprains, bruises and personal problems." He said, "When you help someone you make a friend. If you get into a fight you make an enemy. I would much rather have a friend than an enemy. John I want you to focus on this and help all the people you can. There is nothing you can do that is more important than helping others."

There are a large group of his students that use the healing skills he taught us. We work with cancer patients, we can reduce pain and calm the side effects of chemotherapy, we work with hospice groups, we work with church based healing organizations, and we help people we meet in everyday life. I think Master Wheeler would be proud of that.

Master Wheeler was the best kind of hero and role model. It had nothing to do with what he said or how he taught karate. It was the way he lived his life.

Master Wheeler was also a role model for what it means to be a man. He showed us through his actions that:

A good man puts God first in his life and strives every day to live by the teachings of Jesus Christ.

A strong man takes care of his family, and brings honor to his wife by his actions when she is not around.

A brave man knows that there will come a time when he must make a stand on principles, do what he knows is right regardless of the personal consequences, and let the chips fall where they may.

A kind man goes out of his way to help others, silently, daily, and without expectation.

A successful man can achieve any goal with hard work, determination and belief in himself.

A great man can accept a student like me, give me more than I deserve, take less than I owe, and always welcome me home, because he is glad to see me.

A rich man has many people who love him.

I asked him on several occasions what he was most proud of in his life. He said, "I had the honor and privilege of leading some people to Jesus Christ, I'm most proud of that. The greatest joy in my life is my family."