The Point, Required Reading

"A truly good book teaches me better than to read it. I must soon lay it down, and commence living on its hint. What I began by reading, I must finish by acting".....Henry David Thoreau I n the last fifty years, I've read over a thousand books and countless articles related to the martial arts and training. I've heard a lot of reasons why people don't read. "I'd rather be training" is my favorite excuse. Bruce Lee had a library of over 2,000 books. He understood. Enough said.

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Sometimes it hurts or upsets, not out of meanness, but rather from stark realization of truths. It forces you out of your comfort zone. Trouble is, most won't leave that zone unless they are dragged, kicking and screaming. Familiarity provides imagined security; to entertain the new chips away at that security. Karate doesn't work. I've heard that again and again. It's not true....as long as you replace the missing pieces. Martial; of, relating to, or suited for war or a warrior- derived from the word Mars- the God of War. Anyone who has seriously studied karate soon realizes there are parts missing. Not merely gaps, more like huge pieces. The warriors of the past breathed, ate and slept combat. Theirs was a society we will never grasp. Never. They didn't "do" karate in the evening after work. We mimic the motions and assume it's the same thing. Train hard and it will all fall into place, we convince ourselves. But, training can't replace experience and experience is hard to come by. It begs a question: how do we fill the gaps? Do we learn from teachers who haven't had a real fight since recess in grade school? Roger Willoughbies in a martial arts version of Man's Favorite Sport? - experts in "how it's supposed to be?" Maybe put on a suit, horn-rimmed glasses, go to a biker bar and shout: "Harley riders are sissies?" Masutatsu Oyama advocated deliberately placing one's self in danger. Geoff Thompson wrote: "one real fight is worth a hundred dojo fights." Regrettably, there isn't a perfect answer, at least not one where we survive or can still remain a member of society afterwards. Anyone who has been in a serious car accident or near-death miss will have experienced time and perception distortion. These happen when you truly believe you are about to meet your maker - when it's about to hit the fan. Did your years of driving skill help? Most likely your "reptilian brain" took over and you squashed the brake with all you had. No amount of practice adequately prepared you because your mind always knows the real deal from training. Always. For many, it doesn't matter. Enjoyment doesn't need justification. Students practice karate because they like it. That's OK. So do I. The martial arts have a great deal to offer. The exercise alone is more likely to extend your life than the martial training. Your chances of being the victim of a violent crime are remote. To spend your life training solely for an event that may never come is, well, stupid. But, students believe their black belt teachers have the knowledge and wisdom of generations of warriors. That what is being taught is the truth and will work should they ever have to actually use their training. They believe their teacher is an expert in self-defense. A master. Unquestioning trust through implied expertise. "Any man who is a man may not, in honor, submit to threats of violence. But many men who are not cowards are simply unprepared for acts of human savagery. They have not thought about it (incredible as this may appear to anyone who reads the papers or listens to the news) and they just don't know what to do. When they look right into the face of depravity and violence they are astonished and confounded" - Jeff Cooper This is why the acquisition of knowledge is so important. It makes you realize the difference between truths, half-truths and untruths. It adds the experiences of others to help complete the picture. It adds Portland to the mortar, so the wall of bricks doesn't collapse when you put serious weight on it. No one of us is as wise as all of us. To question everything is an exercise in futility, yet to blindly believe or never question makes you an ostrich. A young woman, wise beyond her years, told me; "I like having my point of view challenged and I won't agree with someone just because everyone else agrees." A rarity: a thinker. Questioning leads to enlightenment. The Newsletter excerpts hopefully serve this purpose - to provoke thought - to scrutinize long held beliefs to see if they hold up. To pique interest to the point where you will read the book from which the excerpt is pulled. To provide insights you may never have considered otherwise. Although many are chosen for entertainment and training information, some articles should make you uncomfortable. Call it growing pains. That is a good thing. Someone once wrote why caterpillars wrap themselves in silk cocoons .....so you can't hear their screams as they become butterflies.