



KICKING WITH ELVIS — Elvis Presley, left, and Charlie Parker practice karate in a photo taken several years ago. Parker was a close friend of the late

rock and roll star. The photo belongs to Paul Mills of Evanston, who studies karate under Parker and teaches the martial art in Evanston.

An old friend of Elvis Presley

Karate master visits student in Evanston

By STEVE KODAD

Charlie Parker has seen almost everything during his 59 years on this planet.

One thing he hasn't seen is young karate talent much better than the students in Paul Mills' class in Evanston.

Parker is a senior grand master, 10th degree black belt in Kempo karate. He visited Evanston last week to visit Mills, a fifth degree black belt who still studies under Parker.

"Paul Mills is one of my top black belts," Parker said. "Paul is known nationally and internationally because he is extremely proficient. When people find out he is from Evanston, Wyo., they don't believe it. They think a small city couldn't produce someone of his caliber.

"His talents were quite apparent (at Mills' karate class). His students are as good as I've seen everywhere. They were really popping."

Parker, a Hawaii native, now resides in Pasadena, Calif. "My heart is in Hawaii, but my pocket-book is up here (in the mainland U.S.)," Parker said.

The karate expert travels all over the world teaching the Kempo system of karate. After he left Evanston, he planned to give tests and seminars at several locations on the east coast, including New York and Baltimore.

Parker has rubbed elbows with many celebrities during his career. He signed a contract with Paramount Studios in Hollywood to choreograph fight scenes in four action-adventure movies. He also worked with producer Blake Edwards in several Pink Panther films that starred the late Peter Sellers.

"Blake has been a friend of mine for years, and he is also a karate student," Parker said.

Bruce Lee, perhaps the most famous karate kicker in the world, thanks to his roles in feature films,

stayed with Parker in his younger days.

"I got him the job of Kato in the 'Green Hornet' series," Parker said. "When I saw this kid, I said, 'Get him on film! He will revolutionize our industry,' which he did."

Parker has taught karate to many celebrities, including Bill Cosby, Robert Culp, Sidney Portier, William Shattner, Warren Beatty and Joey Bishop, to name a few. Many children of celebrities have also studied under Parker, including the children of Michael Tucker and Jill Eikenberry of the hit TV series, "L.A. Law." Parker said Tucker also plans to start studying under him in the near future.

Elvis: old friends

Perhaps Parker's most famous student and friend was the late Elvis Presley.

"Elvis and I were very, very close," Parker said. "I did not work for him. When he had premonitions of danger, I would go on board with him on tour.

"Why did he enjoy my friendship? I was not a yes guy. I gave him honest answers."

Parker said Elvis showered him with gifts.

"He once bought me a white Cadillac — he paid cash for it," Parker said. "Then he goes down the next day and spends \$11,000 on a mink coat for my wife, because he didn't want her to feel slighted.

"He was a nice, good individual. It's too bad all the dirt has to come out."

Parker laid to rest any rumors that Elvis is still alive.

"He was dead — that was his body I touched in the coffin," Parker said. "I was alone with the coffin for 15 minutes. That was his body in the coffin."

Parker said he had a close friendship with Elvis for 17 years.



STUDENT AND TEACHER — Paul Mills, left, of Evanston, a fifth degree black belt in Kempo karate, posed with his teacher, Charlie Parker, when the senior grand master visited Evanston recently. Parker is a 10th degree black belt. Many celebrities have studied karate under Parker, including the late Elvis Presley.