

Cav Moment: A Warrior of Spirit

Written by Penny Thieme

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Jan. 27, Anani Shadowboxes her self-limitations in her Learn2Fly studio, Mission. She said 90 percent of the battle was her own mind. Photo by Penny Thieme

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Jan. 28, Yoga instructor Sumay Anani, meditates in the "Lotus" position, on the stairs of COM building on campus. Mastering her mind made her a force to be reckoned with in competition. Photo by Penny Thieme

College alumna Sumya Anani, is the owner of Learning2Fly, a community aerial, fitness and spiritual center in Mission. She is licensed by Hay House as a Heal Your Life workshop leader, life coach and business success coach. Hay House is an enterprise founded in 1984 by author Louise Hay that teaches master classes on mind-body-spirit transformation. Anani is also, an assistant adjunct professor of physical education who teaches weight training and yoga at the college.

One of her favorite quotes is by an unknown author: "Yoga is the martial art of the soul and your opponent is the strongest you've ever faced: your ego."

Anani believes spirituality is the crown of life and we are all here on an expedition of discovering ourselves, developing our gifts and empowering others. One of the many ways she helps others achieve this is through teaching.



Above: Jan. 28, Anani displays her International Women's Boxing Hall of Fame belt next to Jonathon Borofsky's "Walking Man (On the Edge)." Anani was among the first female boxers in history to be placed on a ballot to be recognized with the ranks of male boxing greats such as Muhammad Ali, George Foreman and Sugar Ray Leonard at the International Boxing Hall of Fame. She credits the genius of head strength-training coach Istvan Javorek,, also known as Stevie (retired) for her athletic excellence. He mentored her for 27 years. She said, "Stevie was a huge part of my herstory." Photo by Penny Thieme

"I love teaching at [the college], I love working with yoga, teaching yoga and weight training," Anani said. "There is a very diverse age range of students in my classes. I've got traditional college age and I've got students in their sixties and seventies. ... I feel like it is about empowering people through movement and empowering people through health."

"Herstory" refers to history from the female perspective; it includes the side of history involving women that is typically left out of historical narratives. Even though Anani is a strong, sensitive, highly skilled and disciplined female athlete, entrepreneur and educator, she like so many women, is overcoming cultural and societal pressures and conditioning.

"... For thousands of years the patriarchy has been dominant," Anani said. "I think learning to speak up for ourselves as women, is just something [that is] so needed. I think we are seeing it [more] now in the world, but it was something that was definitely not easy for me. As women we tend to play small. I don't want to be too bright because someone else might feel insecure around me. Women are the connectors of the family, we are the ones who bring people together, we don't want anyone to feel insecure, we want everyone to feel empowered. I think for

me it has really been a journey. I know I'm still on it because I haven't conquered it. [I am still developing] the ability to really use my voice the way I want to."

What many of her students don't know is, Island Girl, as Anani is known in the boxing world, holds four world championship titles in three different classes of women's boxing. In 2019, she was inducted into the International Women's Boxing Hall of Fame.

Additionally, The International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, New York, made the historical announcement that they will be immortalizing the careers of two women boxers for the first time in their three-decade history. Anani was among the first female boxers in history placed on the 2020 ballot to be recognized with the ranks of male boxing greats such as Muhammad Ali, George Foreman and Sugar Ray Leonard.

Anani did not win the vote in the first round, but she remains a future contender on the merit of her outstanding career record of 28 wins, three losses, one draw and 11 knockouts. Toward the end of her career, it was difficult for her to get fights because she was nearly unbeatable in the ring. She retired in 2006.

There is a lot of egoic, competitive posturing in professional sports but that wasn't Anani's approach to the sport or life. She had great respect for her opponents as athletes, and the only competition she faced was herself.

"The Apollo engineers said, 'Ruthlessly compete with your own best self.' Can I be a better fighter in this moment than I was yesterday?" Anani said. "I never one time, in my whole 10-year career, never once was I competing with the woman across the ring."

"Yoga gives you a [heightened] level of concentration and awareness," Anani said. "As an athlete, you've got to face your fears, whether you are in a competitive experience or just in life...and every single woman needs to know how to defend herself."

Bhavani Maki, Anani's mentor, said, "Yoga is the practice of releasing all self-negating, self-destroying and self-limiting thoughts."



Jan. 28, Anani, meditates in the "Lotus" position, on the stairs of COM building on campus. Mastering her mind made her a force to be reckoned with in competition. Photo by Penny Thieme

"...For thousands of years, yoga has known this, Anani said. "Science is just now catching up going, 'yeah, there is really power in your thoughts. Every cell in our bodies are listening. So, we've got to stop criticizing our bodies, we've got to stop criticizing our gifts. We've got to stop comparing ourselves to other people.... It's toxic. Our life is to explore our talents, our gifts, our treasures."

"When you are focusing on your body and on your breath, you start paying attention to your mind, the thoughts that you are thinking," Anani continued. "Are these thoughts helping you or are they doubts? I was scared. Boxing was dangerous...My training [was] with my mind and focusing on my affirmations. The crux of my confidence came from my training."