



tomo

International slave 2016

Step-down Speech

Good evening.

It is surreal to be back on this stage one year later stepping down as International slave. It has been quite an amazing year.

As many of you know, the martial arts have been a large and formative part of my life. Aside from speaking generally about how the guiding principles of the martial arts have informed and supported who I am as a slave, I have not shared much detail about that piece of my journey or my accomplishments with the Leather Community.

However, I was deeply affected by a recent experience within the martial arts world that spoke to me about my journey as a slave and specifically your International slave 2016, that I feel compelled to share this story with you tonight.

Last summer, about halfway through our title year, I was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award in the martial arts. I remember when they initially told me about the award – my response was I am not nearly old enough!

The person who presented the award is someone I have known for many years. During her speech, she described me as “a samurai personified”. As I stood there on the stage bowed in acceptance of the award and embarrassed by the applause, I thought of her words. I had tears in my eyes and felt as though I could not have been paid a higher compliment, not by the glass award I held in my hands, but by what she had said. It was a moment in my life where I felt completely seen and understood and this left an imprint on my heart.

I have lived as Samurai in a modern American world for most of my life and have spoken in our community about how this way of living has shaped me as a slave. Living as Samurai has meant a practice of tenants prescribed by the code of the warrior. One of those tenants is devotion. Devotion guides and defines my path as a martial artist, as a person and as a slave. And yet, the past two years as a titleholder have presented real challenges to my devotion.

While being a community ambassador has been an incredible experience, it came with a lot of opportunity for growth. The journey as your International slave was filled with joy and also challenge to find balance. My devotion was tested. Not in wanting to remain devoted, but how to. How do I find balance as my Master’s slave, my partner’s partner, my boy’s Sir, my community’s representative, and my student’s teacher? I have come to understand that devotion is not just a word, it is an action that requires both quality and quantity.

Devotion is a virtue that I embrace deeply in my life – perhaps more than any other. I am not perfect, not as a martial artist, not as a person, not as a slave, and not as a titleholder. Yet through devotion, I strive for perfection in all that I do.

This year I certainly was not perfect.

However, often, a faupaux on my part would provide comic relief for our stress. For example, at the Northwest Master slave contest last December, as outgoing titleholders we were serving as Tallymasters. As you might imagine, I take my job as Tallymaster like any other job I do - very seriously – sometimes to the extent of forgetting a basic standing order. After the intermission when it was time to return to our seats, I walked right around my Master, got into my chair, got my computer, my pen, my papers and was focused on finishing up the numbers for the contest. I realized that my Master was not yet sitting next to me and when I looked over, she was standing beside her chair at the tally table. Then I heard a quiet yet stern voice in my ear “tomo...you are the international slave...do you think perhaps you should get my chair?”

Thankfully we laugh together, A LOT.

I also made mistakes in our travel plans, I was not able to keep up with all the chores around the house, and I may have even forgotten to feed the chickens a time or two. But I continued to strive for balance, to meet all of my commitments as best I could and I think I did...

o k a y.

The greatest lesson that I learned this last year was how to meet all of my responsibilities and find patience with myself and my world when it was

difficult. I learned how to strive to be the best I could personally be in a manner of compassionate perseverance.

I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to represent the Master slave community. I have learned so much, met amazing people, and had immeasurable rewarding conversations. It has been my honor to be your ambassador and I stand ready to assist all who represent us in the future as well as continue to speak publically about my belief of this title system.

Regardless of the subtle banter between Master Jim and I on facebook and fetlife (I keep saying words like stepdown, final trip, titleholders last stand) and he keeps repeating one word....lifetime)

Sir, please know that my Master and I have loved Southplains long before we had thoughts of being titleholders, matter of fact longer than we have known each other and we firmly believe in this event and this title – we are here and will continue to support both moving forward.

Thank you to all of you, our community for allowing us to represent you.

Thank you to our friends for your love and support.

Thank you to the Producers of Southplains Leatherfest and the International Master slave Title. I know that a Producer's work is never done, so Master Jim, slave marsha, and Sir Cougar – thank you.

Thank you to my partner ...for always being so incredibly supportive of me and forgiving all the times I fell asleep at 6pm in the living room chair...

Thank you to Daddy - Sir David Labriola – you did so much for us. Like flying across the country to take us shopping (a calvin klein model - clothing and boot shopping – you can imagine what a hardship that was) Thank you Daddy for ALL you did for us before, during and forever...

Thank you to my boy, for your devotion, your patience, and your never ending service.

To Ma'am's girl, who was unable to be here with us tonight, thank you for your support, service and having anything and everything we ever needed in your magic bag.

...and thank you to my Master...We laughed together and we cried together. We learned about ourselves and each other. We impacted the lives of others and our own hearts were deeply touched. I talked a lot about devotion tonight, but I learned something else about devotion I have not yet shared. I learned that devotion is also defined by depth, and the depth of my devotion is in my heart and shown by my steadfastness to our Master slave relationship and my dedication to you. Thank you for allowing me to have had this adventure with you.