

My Personal Journey with Martial Arts:

The early years.

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I have been in a quandary over what to write for my 3rd Dan essay until my recent visit to my Chiropractor, Dr. Cameron Snelling (III Dan at Nibun Mt. Albert), suggested that I write about myself, telling me how much of a “legend” I am in ITFNZ. I felt embarrassed of his high thoughts of me, but it had me thinking that maybe he was right, not that I’m a “legend” but why I do what I do to get me through life in general. In the conclusion I’ll give you some anecdotes that I tend to live by.

So let me start by introducing myself.

I was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii on the 31st of March 1949. I am 56 years young now and attempting to grade for my 3rd Dan in May 2005. I have always been a late starter in my life, not by choice but by what has been drawn to my attention at the time.

In my formative years, I would guess about 7 (just because it’s been a few years back, Alzheimer’s), my mom decided that I should “toughen up” and take the martial art of Judo. To me it was a way of getting me out of the house for a couple of hours. You have to understand that there was no television till about 1955 so there was no such thing as electronic babysitters like we have in this day and age. I learned how to break fall, albeit very clumsily in the beginning, but soon became pretty proficient because I was always getting thrown. I had some non-memorable grading moments basically moving slowly up the ranks because my interest level was low. I tended to skip a few weeks of training sessions and upon returning to the next training session the sensei (instructor) had a “sparring” lesson with the slackers. As I was now becoming a real “expert” at break falling by being thrown on the tatami’s (mats) with relative ease by my sensei I noticed he was about to do a right hip throw. At this point I thought “yeah! I could stop this throw by bracing my right leg between his legs and leaning back!” Next thing I heard was my knee “popping” and a big slam on the tatami’s.

Lesson number one: If my opponent has got more weight and much stronger than me there’s no way a scrawny kid like me is going to stop him from throwing me. It would be better to “go with the flow”. I came out of that lesson with a sprained knee that took about three months to get better. And so ended my Judo career. I never went back to training much to my relief.

Another thing my mom got me doing was joining the Boy Scouts of America. Another way to keep me busy for a few hours, weekly camps, etc., etc. I did the Boy Scout thing for a few years, going for merit badges, learning how to survive in the outdoors, competitions, working as a team, etc., etc.

But this was not enough for my mom. There was this karate dojo starting up at the community center where the judo and Boy Scouts halls were. Guess who was in his new, crispy karate-gi in the new dojo now? This scrawny kid who had no real interest in being the next Bruce Lee. Déjà vu! Like the Judo lessons, struggled through the colored belt ranks, not really wanting to get hurt during sparring sessions (still don’t), basically scared. I guess I continued the training for more

the computer era in 1968. There was no such thing as a PC, not even an electronic digital calculator was invented then. It was cardboard cards that were manually punched with information and machines that had to be manually wired to process this information. I actually ended my training 2nd highest in my class.

I received my orders to go to Vietnam and arrived in Saigon (Ho Chi Minn City now) on December 8, 1968. A few days in transit and received my orders to report to the Americal Division Headquarters in Chu Lai. Chu Lai is located on the east coast, about fifty miles south of Da Nang, which was close to the DMZ.

About three months in country and I finally met most of the "local boys" from Hawaii in our camp. Here I met Archie Hapai III. A smooth talking guy that became a politician back home in Hawaii. But it was through him that I was first introduced to this Korean martial art called Taekwon Do. Archie invited me to attend their training sessions and I showed up one night. I was introduced to the instructor Mr. Oh Da Yang (4th Dan) (not quite sure about his name because it's been a while) and immediately joined the training session. As I understood, Mr. Oh was a civilian contractor working on base. Never got to know him personally because there was a war on. Trainings were five days a week, three to four hours a night. We trained in Quonset huts, helicopter hangers, any open space became our dojang. The Quonset huts proved very useful for jumping because of their springy floors. Our exercise consisted of jumping over two guys touching their fingertips with outstretched arms at shoulder height. The helicopter hangers gave us room to run and jump over five guys standing shoulder to shoulder, bent at the waist, through two guys making a circle with their arms, and one last guy standing behind all this as a target. Man, I could fly back then, but now I drop like a ton of bricks! I moved up the ranks quite rapidly because now I really wanted to be like Bruce Lee. I had reached the rank of red which meant at that time black was next.

I recall a training session where we each had a turn sparring our instructor. As I watched my fellow classmate spar, at one point there was a deafening silence with no one moving. Then with a huge yell from my instructor, my classmate froze for what might have been an eternity for him but just a few seconds in reality. Mr. Oh then attacked my classmate with hand and foot techniques which he never saw coming. Another example of how powerful the kihap can be. There was a favorite sparring routine I enjoyed using. I would start with a left front snap kick, as soon as I put my left foot to the ground I would launch myself into the air and continue with a flying right side kick to the head. This routine worked really well until one night I was free sparring a fellow classmate and used it on him. As I jumped and executed this beautiful side kick in the air I watched my classmate step to his left and scoop my right leg. Needless to say I landed flat on my back.

Lesson number three: No matter how good your techniques are, if you continually use the same favorite ones, somebody out there is going to figure out a way to defend against it. Add variety to your sparring so your opponent has a hard time "reading" you.

This next lesson was literally an eye opener. Let me explain. I had six months left on my tour of duty. It was another sparring session (we really did have patterns, breaking, and self-defense sessions too!) and I attacked my classmate with a right skipping side kick. I executed the kick before he could reverse back and my supporting foot landed on his front foot as he shifted backwards which had me reeling backwards. I extended my left hand down to break my fall (after all that practice breakfalling you'd think I'd use it). After x-rays were done the doctor showed me

a hairline fracture in the ball of my left wrist socket. I got excited because he said that with a fracture like that, it took six months to heal and you got sent to Japan to recuperate. Halleluia! I get to leave! Then I asked, "so, what do you do now?" The doc replied "oh, we cast you up and send you back to duty." I was devastated! But you know how you can get some positives out of negatives... Well, I got a big bonus having that cast, with my sparring. In my earlier years I hated getting hurt during sparring. I used to close my eyes when I was attacked and I still did it at this time. No more, now with my mighty cast as a fabulous blocking tool! I just laid this beautiful, heavy, unyielding mass of plaster in front of me to parry any attack that my classmates could muster. Hand and feet went reeling back with agonizing pain with just a flick of my arm. This was just the shot in the arm I needed to improve my sparring

Lesson number four: Keep your eyes open when you are attacked.

This was incredible. By parrying attacks from my opponents with my cast, I actually could see many openings/targets. This 'tool' gave me the confidence I needed to improve my counter attacks. I was out of my cast in three months, my wrist fully healed and I continued to keep my eyes 'open' while being attacked.

One Saturday night Mr. Oh had shown up at my living quarters. He asked me to get my dobok and come with him. I immediately obeyed his request but was very perplexed, as this was not a normal training night. As we were being driven to this huge hanger that I didn't recognize, he mentioned to me about a tournament. I didn't quite understand him because of his weak English until we entered this venue. It was filled with martial artists. I was dumbfounded. I had never seen so many practitioners in my life. I was told to change and warm up. As I was getting ready Mr. Oh told me to do something that was very odd. He said, "tonight you hit!" as he smacked his right fist into his left palm. We never trained for heavy hitting, always close with an occasional 'too close'. But for tonight he insisted that I 'hit'.

My first match was against a white belt. I had watched his earlier fights and he was no white belt. He possessed skills that I was not familiar with. I had found out later that he was a brown belt in Okinawan-te. This was my first introduction to a back kick. I wore a few of them in the gut that night. Now I started thinking how to counter this move and I notice that he drops his hands as he attacks. So I immediately formulated my counter. I made myself available for his back kick. As he does so I shift to the right and immediately do a high side tuning kick to where his head should be. Just like clockwork, he recovers from his back kick, turns to face me and his hands are still down by his sides. At this time my right instep meets the side of his head with a tremendous slap that echoes through the hanger. There is dead silence from the crowd as he staggers back and the referee jumps between us to stop the match. As I look for Mr. Oh, I see him sitting with a whole lot of Brass (military officers) at the head table. He gives me a grin to show me he's pleased.

My next match was against a Black Belt 1st Dan from the Jhoon Rhee TKD school back in the states. Like my earlier opponent, I also watched this guys' earlier match. I had noticed he was very quick with his style of attacks. We ended up fighting in front of the head table with my instructor and all the brass for this one. We started out throwing a few kicks to and fro trying to find our range. And suddenly he turns his back to me. I immediately try a downward knifehand

strike and I got nailed by a back kick in the gut. So now he has me on alert for back kicks. Another unusual technique he used was sliding forward, grab my dobok sleeve and pull me in for a hand attack while I tried to pull back. He did this a couple of times and I then engaged the brain. He attempted to grab my left sleeve and I allowed him to pull me in. I slid forward to crowd him and laid three successive flat fingertip thrusts to his philtrum. His mouth was open and I had the back of my fingertips cut by his teeth. He again attempted to grab my right sleeve and pull me in. I again slid forward and crowded his back. Three successive upset punches to his kidney and he backed off. He never attempted to grab my sleeve again. Match ended. Brass was rumbling. Mr. Oh had me returned to my quarters, very pleased with my performance. Later I found out the reason Mr. Oh had come for me. There was a lot of goings on with the Brass about who had the best student, while my instructor sat quietly listening to their discussions. He said he couldn't sit quietly anymore and proceeded to get me. I was very honored and humbled by his belief in me.

All those previous lessons that I had developed for myself made a strong bearing at the tournament.

Lesson one: go with the flow

Lesson two: show your spirit, your strong inner strength

Lesson three: variety, mix it up, keep them guessing

Lesson four: even under pressure, keep your eyes open, keep looking for opportunities

At the end of my tour of duty in Vietnam December 8th, 1969, Mr. Oh awarded me my 1st Dan Black Belt.

In conclusion all I would like to say is engage your brain! Know your strengths and fix your weaknesses. Adjust, adapt yourself to the challenge.

I'll leave you now with a few anecdotes that I try to live by;

Here's a classic:

- Do unto others, as you would want them to do unto you.
Whatever you do it comes back tenfold, good or bad, you figure!
Bill Drake, a good friend, and business partner, body builder
- We all got to meet our maker
There's always somebody bigger, meaner, stronger, faster, etc.
This one keeps me humble!
Boss Cecil, the current Eastern Tornados Rugby league coach
- In top competition, it's not what the winner "does", but it's what the loser "doesn't do" that determines the outcome.
- This cartoon is pinned on my office wall at work. Imagine a long neck bird trying to swallow a frog, but the frog has his hands sticking out of the birds' beak squeezing the birds' neck preventing him to swallow. The caption is: You never, ever give up!