

## Martial Arts – A Personal Journey

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I began my journey in the martial arts around 1973 in Waterbury, Connecticut. I met a friend who lived across the street from my grandparents. His name was Joe Pascucci, and he invited me to watch a class and introduced me to his instructor, Robert Cheezic. Mr. Cheezic had learned Tang Soo Do with Chuck Norris. I would visit Waterbury during the year and for two weeks each summer during school vacation. Joe taught me the basics from the Korean style of Tang Soo Do Moo Duk Kwan. This was big for me because prior to this I was limited to library books like Junior Judo. We trained outdoors or in his garage, and would walk to the local news stand to look at the martial arts magazines. I was hungry for knowledge because I felt insecure in my adolescent years.

In 1975, while trying to find a way to continue studying karate locally, I convinced my father and mother to let me sign up for lessons at Zarbo's School of Tae Kwon Do in East Greenwich, Rhode Island. Tae Kwon Do and Kenpo were the predominant styles locally, and being a Korean style, Tae Kwon Do was similar to the Tang Soo Do that I had been practicing. There was weight training equipment available in the back of the karate school and running for aerobic conditioning was emphasized. I liked the solitude in running, and this carried over into my martial arts practice at home, outdoors, on the beach, and when traveling.

I continued training after high school with David Arundel, who had Black Belts in Tae Kwon Do under Dan Zarbo and in Kenpo under Nick Cerio, and we became good friends. When I earned my Brown Belt I received a key to the school and loved to train on my own there as well. I would put on the stereo and work out to music, exploring rhythm and broken rhythm. David would come in early sometimes and we would go for a run on beautiful sunny mornings, on local roads winding along the shoreline in Narragansett. One year during Lent we met every day for morning Mass, and would have breakfast at a local restaurant called Juan's Stop. Some days Mike Antunes would join us for breakfast. He was a Kenpo Black Belt and the saxophonist for John Cafferty and the Beaver Brown Band. Members of the band trained at our school, and we would go see them play in local venues.

I enjoyed the time when David and I could work out together, putting on the boxing gloves and headgear for full contact sparring, or relaxing late in the evening taking a sauna with a small group of friends and talking about life. It was growth in body, mind, and spirit. There was a feeling of camaraderie—people who trained at the school were like a family, and consideration and respect for others was at the core. I later felt this same sort of camaraderie when training at other schools or with other groups of martial artists in seminars.

As I developed the flexibility to kick over my head I could do things that not a lot of people had been exposed to at that time in high school, and it gave me personal satisfaction even though I hadn't been a typical high school athlete, doing typical high school sports. My quest was to

develop the highest and most perfect kick like I had seen others do in books and magazines. I wanted to try new angles and combinations and studied books by Hee Il Cho and Chong Lee to get new ideas for my kicking. I really liked Bill Wallace's kicking style, which worked better for me when I was right side forward, so I worked on being able to change leads in my sparring.

I have learned much from many different martial artists with different backgrounds and styles. I came to understand that there is a place for tradition as well as innovation. Mr. Zarbo's addition of hand techniques from western boxing to traditional Tae Kwon Do, and then Mr. Arundel's willingness to blend the hardness of Tae Kwon Do with the softness of Kenpo and Jiu Jitsu showed me they were willing to think out of the box. One summer attending Rhode Island College I tried Uechi Ryu, but while I was intrigued by the history, lineage, and classical nature of the art, I realized it was hard to go back to a very traditional art, when I had embraced cross-training even at that early stage. Yet concepts from that experience such as the immovable elbow in close to the body which I remembered later to resemble the center line concept from Wing Chun, had value to me. One of the themes at seminars with Paul Vunak was that the sum total is greater than each of the parts.

Professor Milton (Hank) Gowdey was a Jiu Jitsu Master who gave me tremendous insight into his philosophy and how he had modified the straight line Yabe system he learned to be more circular in the Yang Ki Yin system he taught. He encouraged me to learn as much as I could from different martial artists and styles. Professor Gowdey likened it to a toolbox philosophy where you keep all kinds of tools...some very specialized that you may not use that often, but you know they are in there if and when you do need them.

I use the example of a screen tool in my teaching in health care. You may have it in the toolbox and rarely need it, but it is difficult to replace a window screen without it. The screen tool fits the situation perfectly. The individual martial artist with a composite of skills can transcend style and become more complete in their preparation. If a soldier carried nothing but hand grenades, there would be a tactical disadvantage in a close quarters situation when they are not the weapon of choice.

There are many good martial arts practitioners and much can be gained by listening to others. One of the guiding principles in my continuing process of martial arts discovery is to "Absorb What Is Useful." This principle from Bruce Lee and Dan Inosanto's lineage has driven me to be more analytical in my learning and as Bruce also put it, to "hack away at the un-essentials." More than ever as I grow older, this is a lesson in martial arts as well as in life.