

Are you too old to join a karate class?

Here is My 50 Year Path to Black Belt

가라테/주먹법/태권도

KARATE FIST METHOD TAE KWON DO

I, Russel Holder, aka "Raz," not so long hair and beard anymore, met Steve Janes, aka "Nasty", 6'4" with long black hair and beard, in 1967, and rode with him and John Watt, aka "Trash", 6'4" with long red hair and beard, for many years thereafter. Steve and Trash both took karate from Robert J. Babich. One day I was at Steve's house and he suggested that I start taking karate from Robert J. "I don't need to take karate," I said, "I know how to fight." Steve says "well then how about you just come to class and watch?" "naaaaaa... I can take care of myself." "Yeah? get into your fighting stance and I'll put my fist on your chest." "Go ahead and try." Steve put his fist on my chest. "hmmmm... OK... try that again." Steve put his fist on my chest again. "OK... how about I go to class with you and watch?" Fact of the matter is, if Steve were still alive he could still put his fist on my chest!

So I went to the brown and black belt class over the next few weeks and watched. Steve was a brown belt (with a black stripe, refused to test for black belt because of the registering of hands thing), and, it was interesting watching. Robert J. would spar with a brown belt while watching all the other students, black belts sparring with black belts, black belts sparring with brown belts, brown belts sparring with brown belts, and, IF Robert J. observed a sparring pair do something that could be improved then he would bow to his partner and interrupt the other pair to provide improvement instructions to them and then resume with his partner. One night I suspect Robert J. had just spotted a maneuver that could be improved which was simultaneously accompanied by the brown belt he was sparring with putting a move on him... well... Robert J.'s reaction happened so fast that I could not say what really happened, but, I think I saw Robert J. do a sideways flip and 360 degree spin and land in a forward stance, and the brown belt's arms and legs were all totally extended spread eagle and he was falling over backwards. THAT did it for me. I was convinced that there was something to this karate, so I started as a white belt at the Kang Duk Won (KDW [House for Espousing Virtue]) Korean Karate school run by Robert J.

Robert J. Babich, who I was introduced to as "Robert J.," was the quietest, gentlest, most powerful man I have ever had the pleasure of knowing; he developed, studied and taught an art called Kwon

Bup Karate in San Jose in the 60s. There were only four belt colors: white, green, brown, and black. Robert J. is a soft spoken man and he never, in the years I knew him, raised his voice. What makes this really amazing is that he taught all types of students from all walks of life, including accountants and outlaw bikers, and, they, we, all listened when he spoke.

I studied under Robert J. for the next few years. One night after class Robert J. called me into his office and he handed me a green belt certificate and said "dye your belt green." FAR OUT! Now I knew enough to be dangerous, but definitely not enough to even think about attending the brown and black belt class!

Kwon Bup (The Fist Method), the style that Robert J. developed and taught, is a "hard style" Korean karate with a philosophy of "avoid - deter/kill," vs, e.g., Tae Kwon Do karate which is a "soft style" Korean karate with a philosophy of "avoid - deter - hurt - maim = kill." Robert J. taught a plethora of means to deal with an attack!

I have many stories from those days in class and out of class... some other time... perhaps... thank you very much Robert J.

That is how I started studying karate over 50 years ago and the path from a beginning student to the rank of black belt took me many years to complete. People I would talk to about starting training would say "nooooo, it takes too long to be any good" to which I would reply "sure, but at the end of those years you will either be the same as you are now but older, or, you'll be older AND you will know karate." This is true at any age.

I wanted to resume my training for years but was never financially able (marriage, kids, work, house payments, etc.); however, I did provide for lessons for my last two children, Maryann and RL, for seven years at Sensei Joe Taylor's Shotokan Karate Do Jo in Monterey. Joe was amazing with kids, by his manners and example the kids gave him their strict undivided attention; he taught a very "traditional" soft style Japanese karate, and, by traditional I mean only Japanese was spoken during class... ich nee sahn she go rok seech hach koo joo... Maryann was quite the aggressive student, RL... well... lacked kime (power). I have stories about class, outside of class, tournaments, etc... some other time... perhaps...

Fast forward through two marriages, 6 kids, several houses, several jobs as a software engineer (sitting at a desk getting fat), a couple blown retirement savings and you find me in my third marriage, overweight, out of shape and living in West Sacramento with Sharon, my 3rd wife, and Sharon and I riding with various motorcycle groups, and... we got our neighbors, Randall

and Dani involved with riding along too. Campfire talk eventually got around to karate and Dani was suggesting that I resume my training at Jungs' Martial Arts doing training in the Tae Kwon Do method, a "soft style" Korean karate method similar to the "hard style" Kwon Bup Korean karate method I studied 40 plus years ago. Could not do it - retired, limited income, and not in a good enough physical condition. One day I decided to quit smoking, went on a diet, lost 65 pounds and started working out for a couple hours a day 5 days a week at a gym. After a couple of years I felt like maybe I could finally resume my training if I could afford it AND THEN... Dani talked me into just going to her school and just watching... Mr. Jung was VERY convincing and I found myself starting over as a white belt. I was in pretty good physical condition for a man in his 70's when I resumed and I am in even better physical condition now (thank you very much Mr. Jung).

It is my good fortune to be a student at the Jungs' Martial Arts school. The Jungs' school is, in my humble opinion (IMHO), an outstanding school. Mr. and Mrs. Jung are both, again, IMHO, very proficient in all aspects of Tae Kwon Do, as are their black belt staff that they have trained over the years, and, all of them and senior students are very knowledgeable, helpful and encouraging to the not-so-senior students. The adult classes are thought provoking and AS physically challenging as you make them, and the classes have a varying individual and group curriculum. Some classes are more exhausting than others and I dislike them yet like them more! I believe going beyond what you are comfortable doing is the best way to become more capable.

Consider now the 2nd ATA TKD Black Belt mid-term test: 15 consecutive rounds of sparring including 1-on-1, 2-on-1, and 3-on-1 rounds. I had great apprehensions about being able to remain on my feet for the 15 consecutive rounds due to the fact that once the instruction to begin is given I go all out and all previous plans to pace myself are gone with the wind... I seem to recall someone saying that the best defense is a good offense... so, I take it to the opponent(s)... some KDW coming through... seems to work for me... well, at the 2nd mid-term, same as the 1st mid-term, I was exhausted after the 1st two rounds; however, I was just as exhausted after round 3, and round 4 and etc., continuing at "BEGIN!" as if I wasn't exhausted, and now I realize it is all a state of mind that I will always be able to call on; and, in fact, I found 2-on-1 to be less exhausting than 1-on-1, and, 3-on-1 to be less work than 2-on-1. The variety of opponents, their attacks, my blocks/attacks was great experience, I loved it and I am looking forward to more of that, who knows... I may even become proficient in the coming years!

If your future looks like watching a lot of Bonanza and Hogan's Heroes re-runs then you should come join us in the adult class. Sometimes I arrive early for class and have the opportunity to observe part of a youth class and witness youths receiving martial arts instruction infused with positive life attitudes and skills... works for me too.

The last few years I have put a lot of effort into reaching a milestone in my martial arts training only to discover that the more I know the more I become aware of how much I do not know, so, for me, the 1st degree black belt merely says some stuff has been learned - I am still a long way from doing things I know vs. knowing things to do, from moving by knowing-and-reflex vs. thinking-and-action.

After all these years, finally attaining the rank of 1st Degree Black Belt, I think about what's next? I have enjoyed life behind the bars riding all over the lower 48 states, and Sharon and I will continue riding. Sharon and I will continue to get as much time at the beach with our dogs as possible. And Sharon and I are both hooked on living a healthy life through diet and exercise. As boring as pushing iron is, karate makes up for it and is a perfect accompaniment physically and mentally; physically because of the aerobic nature of the training and mentally because of the focus that sharpens one's mind, not to mention the benefit of developing a useful life skill as opposed to watching TV or operating a playstation joystick.

I really like the hard style KDW Kwon Bup because it is a quick means to an end of a dangerous situation; however, I have developed an affinity for the soft style TKD because it seems to me that if one becomes proficient enough in TKD then there are other solutions besides dispatching an opponent. Therefore, I plan to continue martial arts training - Tae Kwon Do from Jung's Martial Arts, and, Kwon Bup and Matrixed Martial Arts from Al Case's Monster Martial Arts. But what about Shotokan Karate, American Kenpo, Hapkido, Kung Fu, Judo, Jeet Kune Do, Jiu-Jitsu, Aikido... the list goes on... and it's all good stuff... all in due time... I should live so long!

And, I am interested in volunteering to teach basics to beginning students (if you want to know something better then teach it), and I must reiterate here: "practice makes perfect" is incorrect; "perfect practice makes perfect" (thank you very much Joe Taylor).

Now, if I could just figure out how to keep from getting dizzy on repeated spinning kicks...

KNUCKLEHEADS FOREVER!