

I feel very fortunate that I began my martial arts training at the end of the "golden era" which was from 1960 to 1982. There are many reasons why but I thought I would highlight the main ones that I have felt proud about when listening to newer/modern black belts tell their "tales" about their tough training and how great they are. I hope you enjoy and perhaps this will explain some reasons why I am the way I am as your Sensei.

Kumite...not sparring was the method of application training in classes. When we would do Kumite it was done in three manners. First there was ippon, or one point kumite which were designed to teach you what to do against certain attacks. Then there was Jiyu Kumite which was where we would attack each other as we wanted and defend how we needed to using our skills. The last stage was Randori, or free for all which allowed us full ability and was the closest thing to a real fight. Even though the importance was based on proper execution of techniques and control (not to kill each other), the mentality was completely different than what is taught today. When we would practice either Jiyu or Randori you had to know your stuff because if you didn't - you got hurt. What was even more different was that after you got kicked in the gut and couldn't breathe you still had to continue on. There was no babying and I can state in full confidence that you definitely became much tougher and very good.

Class sizes were much smaller and I was one of the only students under my early teen years. Back then the senior students of a dojo were much more dedicated than we are today. They were there to promote the dojo and help their sensei and did so out of respect for the teachings which they had learned. Today people are all about their own needs. When I achieved my brown belt I was given a weekly cleaning chore and a weekly training duty that had to be done. Not completing these duties meant many pushups or losing my rank for a period of time. That never happened as I was glad to do them out of respect for the teachings my sensei had given me. If sensei needed something for the dojo (money, equipment, help...etc.) all of us would jump at the chance to do our part. We wanted our sensei to know how much we appreciated the training and learning. When a competition came up all of us green belt or above would quickly sign up and go to represent our dojo. It was not about winning but rather to make our sensei proud of us by doing our best. We were never punished for not getting a medal or trophy, but rather for behaving in a manner that was not within traditional etiquette guidelines.

Training was much tougher and classes were much longer than today. Today for a dojo operate successfully we need to have classes available every day of the week to meet people's schedules. Back then classes were only twice a week and usually 2 hours long. You either made it to class or you didn't. Only those who made it to classes on a consistent basis were ever promoted, which is something I still agree with today. By tougher training I mean we would do conditioning exercises called "Taiso" or building blocks of conditioning. We would perform hundreds of blocks and strikes at each other at almost full force to build up our resistance to them. Sensei would always state that if you want to Kumite you must be able to take as much as you can give. I can still remember that first three years and the bruises I wore with pride knowing I was getting better. As for repetitions of techniques, well today we do about 20 kicks each leg of each kick, back then would do 100 kicks each leg of each kick. We would also do stance training where would have to hold our horse stance for about 20 minutes while we performed blocks and hand techniques. Today most people make it to 5 before they quit which leads me into the next phase.

Quitting was a bigger problem at dojo back then but the ones who stayed became SUPER GOOD. In classes you never wanted to show weakness and would push yourself as hard as you could until either your body or mind gave in. Now this may sound harsh but keep in mind that each class you were actually improving! After about a year a 100 kicks were child's play and holding a horse stance for 20 minutes was nothing because you had learned how to truly concentrate and focus, plus your body was solid and muscles were as strong as an oak tree. The typical student only lasted about 3 to 6 months before quitting. A good student usually was around for about two years and the best students were never absent from training.

Competitions were held back then, not tournaments. We competed against others to prove our skills and earn respect...not trophies or medals. Age groups were much larger and you usually only had three

divisions which were novice (white, yellow, orange belts), advanced (green, blue, purple, brown, red belts) and black belt. When I was 8 I competed in my first competition. I was going up against kids ages 7 to 11 and I was one of the smallest. We did not wear sparring gear and all techniques to the head were to be light touch or within one inch just to score. Contact to body was much harder than today because you had to stop your opponents forward motion to score a point. Points were given out in 1/2 or 1 full point. A 1/2 point was given to techniques that scored but you may have been off balance, not executed the technique with the correct form or lacked fighting spirit (commitment and KIYA in your technique). Full points were given for a well executed technique that you did not get hit back on. Overtime matches were very common and they were called "sudden death" which is in direct contrast to the modern term of "sudden victory". The reason for the term meant you were supposed to believe you and your opponent were both equally matched and/or injured. The next technique (point) meant the end of the other person's life and your ability to live on. Keep in mind this is theoretical and not meant to actually be about killing each other. In competitions during the golden era a student never had to win to earn respect. All you had to do was compete, demonstrate courage, honor and ability and you earned respect. You lost respect by whining, crying, not continuing on after you were hit or by being disrespectful to the judges and your opponents.

The best fighters were known throughout the US in the 1970's. If you were to walk into any dojo and ask who the best fighters are they could name them. During my era they were Keith Vitalli, Larry Carnahan, Tokey Hill, Bill Blanks, Steve "Nasty" Anderson, Linda Denley and a few more. Some of these names are famous now but others have moved on to promote famous fighters. Today if you were to ask any dojo who the best fighters are they would name someone from either the UFC or the WWF, which neither are martial arts related in any manner. Fighters today do not have the respect they had in the golden era mainly because you do not have fighters who are just that good like these people were. Back then if you were hit by one of Nasty Anderson's backfists you knew it and if Keith Vitalli threw a side kick at you it would hit with thunderous impact letting you know you were just kicked. Today's fighters fight for medals and trophies instead of establishing a legacy such as Chuck Norris or Tokey Hill did.

Black Belts were respected and feared by the general public during this time. Since there were so few of real black belts people knew the person who attained it had to be tough and full of fighting spirit. The black belt stood as a symbol of strength, indomitable spirit and the ability to defend one's self. This began to fade in the late 1980's and today people do not respect those that made it to black belt like they used to. The main reason for this is there are hundreds of dojo out there today that will promote any one to black belt, regardless of how good they are at martial arts and it is getting worse. Good dojo are getting harder to find because people want to get a black belt the easy way and are not willing to sacrifice to EARN ONE. When I earned my shodan in 1987 I was very proud of that accomplishment because so many had quit before me which meant that I was one of an elite few to earn this HONOR. This defines why I have never slacked off on being so hard core about perfect technique and hard training over the years because I will not sacrifice my integrity to make a buck!

All in all the golden era is far gone and has been replaced by UFC, McDojo and a plethora of black belts that can barely execute a kick correctly. It is a time I miss but times change. As a black belt I had to adapt to this and even today I find myself struggling to not get into the mindset of my predecessors. There are days that I truly miss the training and days that I am glad we do not fight that way anymore (especially now that I am getting older and do not heal as quickly). This is one era that I feel blessed and privileged to have been a part of and will never forget the memories.