

My first dojo was actually located in Vincennes, Indiana. I opened it up in April of 1989 located on 2nd street in a small building. There were ten students, all college buddies. This is where we founded the Vincennes Tiger Club, or martial arts training center. The dojo remained opened until 1990 when I transferred to a different college. At the height of enrollment we had a whopping 30 students all various ages training here. Last I knew there is now a new school located at the same place called "Sacred Heart Karate" that teaches Isshin Ryu. Since this was never meant to be a real school and I did to have a place to train I do not considered it my first dojo, but my very first student was Brian Kixmiller, who still lives in Vincennes today.

My first dojo was opened commercially (where you allow anyone to train) on February 1, 1993 in Hicksville, Ohio. It was a former dance studio of my first student at this dojo, Kristi Rodocker (now Bowersock). We had 11 adults and three kids enrolled in the first month being open. Out of the 11 adults only Kristi, Troy Snyder and Ton Somkit remained to earn their black belts. The dojo was located on the corner of Rock and Cornelia Streets. It was about 24 x 36 total in size and had a small entrance area, small changing room but no bathroom. Classes were held on Tuesday and Thursday with kids class at 4:30 to 6:00 and adults class 6:00 to 8:00.

The first summer teaching there almost saw the dojo close. Everyone had agreed to train for one year and agreed to pay monthly dues for a period of one year. We did business with a handshake and no contracts. When June hit only three students (all those listed above who earned black belts) remained. We could not afford the rent or utilities so we shut off the electric and I paid as much as I could to the landlord who was very understanding. June, July and August were all the same and I was about ready to close it down when I signed up ONE new student. I saw this as a chance to make a change and not to quit. I decided to go for it and keep paying for the dojo out of my pocket. That September we did a demo at the local high school and I managed to run a small ad in the News Tribune offering classes for children and adults. This was the month that Brock and Shaun Hatlevig signed up to learn karate and they went on to earn their black belts as well as both became world champions!

We slowly began to grow eventually getting to the mid 20's in size by December of 1993. I was glad I never QUIT and have never looked back on it until I wrote this page in my journal. By mid 1995 we had outgrown our building and needed to acquire a larger place to train. We moved the dojo to 125 East High Street in downtown Hicksville at this time which became my second dojo and we opened a school in Kendallville, Indiana this same year and eventually opened a dojo in Auburn, Indiana in 1996. I moved the main dojo to my residence in 1998 and retired from teaching in 2000. When I retired Kristi moved the main dojo back to the original location on Rock and Cornelia, Ton and Jermey took over both the Auburn and Kendallville Dojo, of which the Auburn school is the only still in operation today out of my original dojo.

In my life as a sensei I have always held a fondness for that small dojo I opened in Hicksville. I miss those days of training without air-conditioning or even a toilet. The bond between the students and me was much stronger than we have today. Class sizes may have been smaller but we had more dedicated students and my black belts loved the dojo so much they were always there to help it grow and to fix things up. It was one of the best experiences in my life, both as a martial artist and as a person...and one that will remain with me forever.