

My Life and Chayon-Ryu

My life in martial arts began like many of the children we seen in class. I wasn't really a child as I was about 13 or so when I started. But I had wanted to do something to help me cope with the bullying that I had always dealt with over the years. I had always been one of the smallest kids in school. I was often picked on at school and my next-door neighbor relished any opportunity to demonstrate his superior wrestling ability on me and the rest of the neighborhood kids.

I had always been a good student in school. I tried to make friends with the "right" people. Many times, however, those friends were not around to watch over me. I was never physically hurt badly, but my ego and self-esteem definitely struggled. I was afraid to go into the bathrooms at school. I was sometimes afraid to walk around the neighborhood.

One summer, I had finally had enough. I talked my father into letting me attend a small karate school in Brenham, TX where he lived. It was a Chayon-Ryu school taught by Esau McKnight. I spent the summer there and, although I do not remember, I think I managed to make it to 9th gup.

By a tremendous stroke of luck, it turned out that the headquarters school for Chayon-Ryu was only about a mile away from my home. I was able to pick up right where I left off, but this time with the architect of the system! That was the summer of 1983. I reached green belt just before the summer of 1984. I would have been a junior in high school at the time. I remember, clearly, the day that my next door neighbor (a senior at the same high school) no longer bothered to bully me. I had instigated an event. I whacked him with a rolled up swimming towel. He chased me into my class, but that was all it took. I think just the mere act of challenging him directly was all it took for me to be free of his bullying for the rest of my life.

It was a slow progression that took place over a long period of time. Within the next couple of years, I realized that I was not afraid to walk places. I never recognized anyone as a bullying threat to me again.

I stepped away from Chayon-Ryu for a few years after that when I traveled to Austin for college. After three years I, again, returned to Houston to complete my college education. During that time, I was also able to return to Chayon-Ryu. I helped with Grand Master Kim's University of Houston classes while I also returned to HQ to resume studying as well.

I am the product of a broken family. Actually, broken sounds like a little too strong a word. I guess I would call it a *fractured* family. My parents divorced when I was pretty young. My father has always been in my life while I lived with my mom. I saw him every week and spent summers with him as well. But, on a day-to-day basis he was not always there. Grand Master was. I can remember him taking me under his wing and asking me to join him when the "school" would go to dinner at the Korean restaurant after a rank exam. I could not afford to pay and I did not have a ride, as I was too young to drive. It never mattered. Grand Master made me feel like one of his own kids. Later,

in college when I would help teach U of H classes, he would offer me some of his lunch. A simple gesture that makes my heart smile when I think about it now.

It was at this time in my life when I started having some difficulties with a relationship. I was very sad at times and occasionally when I would be particularly upset, I would think to myself, "I should just go and get drunk." But then, I would think about Grand Master's teachings and I would realize that these difficulties would pass. That to face them head on was the right thing to do. I do not mean to say it was easier, just that it was right. Seek perfection of character. Endeavor. These are the rules we are supposed to live by in the dojang, but they are just as important to live by outside as well; maybe more.

I left Houston again – this time to Japan for year. When I returned I headed off to California with my new wife and soon started a family. Practicing and studying went on hold for a few more years than I would like. Eventually my children were old enough to begin down their own path of Chayon-Ryu. I started teaching them in my back yard and resumed my own study. I refused to give up on the dream of reaching black belt in Chayon-Ryu.

Eventually I reached black belt and realized my studies had just begun. I wanted to honor Chayon-Ryu. I wanted to help others master their own bodies and personal difficulties. I started teaching other students. Teaching others has improved my understanding of what I have learned over the years. I have only had students for a couple of years now. I approach those students with the same gentle manner that worked so well for me as a student. And teaching students has helped me better understand the techniques Grand Master Kim and the other senior students have taught me. I am also learning the painful lesson of losing students. I know that each person chooses their own path and there are many paths to choose from. But I find it sad to see students with great potential or a strong work ethic leave my instruction. It is difficult to not take it personally. I just try to do the best that I can. It does make me think, however, how GM Kim must have felt when so many students over the years have come and gone.

Chayon-Ryu is rich. I feel so fortunate in this life. Much of that I owe to Grand Master Kim and Chayon-Ryu. I know that it was me that made the choices as I have gone through life, but many of those choices were guided by many important people.

Now I feel like an uncle in Chayon-Ryu. When I travel home to see the family, they are all still there. Some of my old Chayon-Ryu family has also found their way back to the school. I have had many wonderful conversations with several masters over the years. It truly is a family and I refer to that when I talk to new, potential students. The old dojang holds a lot of memories for me. I love the smell of that place. It reminds me of many wonderful times and where I came from and how I got to where I am now.

I am Chayon-Ryu.

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