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**Goju-Ryu Karate-Do Kyokai**

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**Lessons in Teaching: My First Student from White Belt to Black Belt**

By Kim Barrington

One of my biggest challenges in teaching karate was learning to work with a spouse or family member. The difficulty of the lesson learned varies with the family relationship. The top of my list is teaching a spouse. This was especially true when I started my club and my wife, Trish, decided to become a student. She was also my first student to make black belt.

Don't get me wrong, Trish was a good student. The problem lies in the ability to distinguish the roles between instructor and husband, uncle, father, etc. The student/family member doesn't automatically understand your role as teacher and their role as student yet there were other lessons to be learned by me.

In the beginning, I ran classes a lot slower than I do today. In the first year, I started by only teaching standing basics. I did this because I wanted the students to have a strong basic foundation. Even though Trish worked hard, it was hard to get her to understand what I meant by keeping a low, deep stance. She did a nice job but I wanted her to get in the low stance and not move her feet or hands. All of the students were required to hold their stances while I checked everyone which took a long time. This cost me a lot of students because they were bored and didn't understand the importance of the basics. Although I tried to explain, they didn't appreciate the skill I was trying to instill in them. Trish and a few other students stuck it out with me and I added moving exercises. I didn't show them a kata until they were with me about one year.

The first katas that I taught were the taikyoku katas (jodan iche & ni, chudan iche & ni, gedan iche & ni, kake-uki iche & ni and mawashi-uke iche & ni) as well as gekasai iche & ni. For the first class's promotion, Trish and the other students needed to know all of these and perform them well. For my own training, I had been going to the YMCA so I invited those black belts to sit on the promotional board. Everyone in class was so nervous that they requested more practice and we held an all day workout the same day as the promotion. Trish and the others were given great compliments on their performance and attention to the basics. This helped me to maintain my resolve to keep the basics at the highest importance. As the instructor, your job is to instill a strong foundation so that each student leaves the classroom/dojo stronger and planted. By teaching Trish, she made me a better and stronger instructor. She challenged my skill as a teacher. With her in class, I had to find a way to make classes more interesting to keep her faith in me and in my teaching skills. She kept me thinking of ways to keep class interesting so she and the other students didn't lose interest. I started randomly mixing up the basics and the katas by running them at different angles, or running a kata without the hand motions or without the foot work. What I am trying to say is Trish kept me on my toes by asking questions constantly which made me rethink how I taught the classes. I use those learned lessons to plan my classes today.

It was hard on Trish and me to maintain the student/teacher relationship. We had to constantly work on it. It was no easy task. Sometimes I would take a deep breath and count to ten before addressing any issues that we were having during classes. I encourage my students to ask questions as long as it has to do with what we are working on at that time. Trish at white belt until go kyu did everything she was told. Then she started asking me challenging questions even asking me for reasons why I taught something one way and later she wanted to know why I changed it on her and the other students at her rank. I would explain that at each level, I would make changes as needed to be performed at a much higher skill level. Other than my wife, I have also had my youngest son and currently have my nephew and his son and daughter in class. I have found over time that you need to set a few extra ground rules before you let a family member start classes. You need to sit with the family member and discuss their role in your class. Talk frankly with them. I have explained to my family members what I expect from them and what they can expect from me. Ask them to come to class eager and ready to learn. Ask them to keep an open mind. I am fair and will treat them as I do any other student but they need to know that I am a husband, father, uncle or cousin outside of the dojo. When they are in the dojo, I am sensei. I expect them to give me the same respect as the other students are expected to give. All this sounds easy but think again. The closer the relationship the harder this will be.

The family member may think it is acceptable to interrupt class and even correct you. I am currently dealing with my nephew who even though he is currently at ni kyu, thinks he knows as much as I do or tries to get the other students to think so. I have had to correct or rather redirect him at times. Letting him know that he needs to pay more attention on his own skills and let me take care of correcting the other students. I let him know that the other students are doing just fine with where they are in their rank. I have also had to let him know that he cannot correct a black belt. I have handled all this as

gently as possible by also saying to him that he was starting to catch on but that he had a long path ahead of him. I also include that he can be helpful but only when instructed to do so.

As Trish progressed to ni kyu, she was performing at a higher level than others and was able to help the lower ranks understand different aspects. When I was too technical, she was able to explain it in simpler terms for the student to understand better. I didn't realize that Trish was actually teaching at this point of her training. I had never sent her with a student to teach a separate lesson or run a class by herself until she made black belt at which point I decided one day to have her and another who made black belt with her run the class. They had no warning or experience running a class and there were other higher ranking black belts in attendance. I expected them to just jump in and start running a class as I did. Trish had never said the commands out loud. She knew the words to the commands but she had the worst case of stage fright and the other had no problems being up front but couldn't remember the commands. This proved to be disastrous. Trish couldn't get out of class fast enough. After she calmed down and returned to the class, the two worked together to run the class. Trish would whisper the commands to the other who would give the command to the class.

I then started working with Trish on how she taught classes. As I think back to what I learned from Trish the most was that I needed to let her learn her own method of teaching. I thought that my way was the only way to teach. I set her up with a few students to teach various lessons. I would step in and let her know that I didn't care for her method of showing and especially how she explained things. This became very frustrating for her and at home we would argue about it. When I finally stepped back and let her teach, I actually had to admit to myself that she could get thru to the students and had them understanding better than I did. This is most likely the most important lesson I learned from Trish. She had told me that I had to let her and my other black belts have a certain amount of freedom to teach the students that I gave them. I learned as an instructor that if I had the confidence in their abilities than I needed to let them teach their way. I had to trust the person that I put in place to teach what I asked them to teach and look at the results not the method.

Now I have all my students say the commands out loud and will randomly pull a student to the front of class to run various warm up exercises or basics and moving exercises with the higher ranks running katas. I have learned by doing this the students start to gain confidence in themselves. It also helps them to know that I believe in their ability to help others learn. Because of Trish, my students have a better instructor in me and I maintain their interest throughout their time in class.

Be cautious with how you handle your family members in the dojo. They may only be trying to emulate you and only want to do their best. Even if you see that they are being disruptive, they may be having a difficult time with the transition from family member to student. Always keep in mind that there may be a time that you will have to set your family member down and have a very frank conversation. If their presence in the classroom/dojo is being too disruptive, pull them aside and let them know how you are trying to teach everyone and that you don't want to lose them. Take pride in your teaching and be fair to all the students. Each student has the potential to also be your greatest teacher.



## A Most Pleasant Surprise

By Bill Handren

My cell phone rang. It was Kim asking if my truck was black and he mentioned the license plate number as we spoke. He was calling from my driveway

He and Trish had driven over two hours from Springfield, Illinois to bring a hand painted GKK logo sign which Trish had painstakingly painted on a heavy sheet of plywood. I photographed it against my huge AirDyne to give an idea of the size. I have wanted something like this for years.

They visited with my wife and I for a few hours. We haven't been able to travel to Springfield for a few years so this was a special surprise for us.

This was a most generous and thoughtful gift and a perfect lead in for where our logo originated.

## Blast From The Past:

### A Story About Our Patch

by Bob Engel

As the wonderful philosopher J. Krishnamerti said, "Art is putting everything in its right place."

It has been a personal honor and an extremely beneficial experience to be a member of the Goju-Ryu Karate-Do Kyokai.

In my twenties, I was fortunate to travel to Japan on a number of business trips. These trips opened my mind and started to change many of my conditioned life views. I had taken a couple of years of judo and before that I was a high school wrestler. During that time, I was drawn to what was a relatively new to America mystical fighting method called karate. I didn't know much about karate; was mostly intrigued by the movies and shows that were popularizing it.

After reading an article on Jack Coleman and the Mid-West Goju-Kai, I was impressed and became a student. At the time, it seemed I was going through many of the problems some of us experienced in life. I had many moments where I had to challenge my fears. When I met Jack Coleman and was accepted by him, the other students and teachers, I knew I was in the right place at the right time. The relationships brought more balance into my life as I was learning about Goju-Ryu karate.

Finding out I was an artist, at some point, Mr. Coleman talked with me about doing a patch. Coincidentally, as an artist, I had done some patches for the New Jersey Rod and Gun Club as a younger guy. At the same time, the organization was undergoing change. Mr. Richard Stamper was entering my life as my new sensei, so this new sensei started teaching at the dojo and gradually switched places with Mr. Coleman. The torch was being passed. As a green belt, I was apprehensive on some level. As it turned out, he was the right new teacher for me. Then Mr. Coleman left for California and Mr. Stamper acted as the art director on the patch. He filled me in on Master Yamakura's philosophy, thoughts and other information along with his thinking related to the patch.

As part of the process of developing the new patch, Mr. Stamper gave me the buckle shown here as a visual guide to our heritage. It seemed to me it was a very powerful and perfect representation for its purpose. Armed with this information, I set out to design the patch. The patch was inspired by the character, philosophy and heritage of its masters, leaders, teachers and students. Visually I was inspired by the colorful battle flags. They had to quickly and accurately be read in the chaos of battle. It seemed simplicity and boldness should be the foundation of the design. It seemed important to show the hard and soft aspects of Goju-Ryu. I decided to use the fist as a key element. Red is the hottest color and excites the eye and can conjure up many different meanings, flesh and blood, etc.. As an example of things are not always what they seem, curiously, I am left-handed so I drew my right fist then flopped the art to create a left fist entering the patch. For me, the black and white portion represent the unseen, unknown and soft aspects. Using the characters instead of English writing on the fist, I believe, were Mr. Yamakura's idea. It definitely tied the design together showing our heritage. I feel like everything was put in the right place in this design.



Mr. Stamper sent our design to Master Yamakura. As I remember, there were a number of designs being submitted from other dojos. I was, of course, quite happy to find out we had been chosen. The patch design received a certificate of registration from the United States Patent and Trademark Office on March 23, 2004. Mr. Coleman also responded positively to the patch design in a letter where he described many meanings the patch brought out in his thinking. For me, the circle was complete.

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