

## Newsletter April 2008

Greetings from sunny Penang. This month the newsletter takes the form of my reply to an e-mail I received. Due to my exalted position as "Pan-Galactic Grandmaster" of the "World's Largest Martial Arts Organization" over the years I have received a certain amount of what might best be termed hate mail. Suspiciously enough, however, this piece of great "literary criticism" came after the March newsletter in which I highlighted some of the less than honest practices of certain former Zhong Ding members, so let me just say that I have my suspicions as to where this e-mail originated! But for the purposes of this article let us assume that this letter really did come from a karate instructor who uses an e-mail account owned by Andy Kendrick but signs himself Eddie! Could he be Andy's teenage son who became a blackbelt at six and holds a Guinness world record for breaking the largest number of lollipop sticks in the space of twenty four hours? But sorry, I digress, first of all you need to know the contents of the e-mail so here it is in its eloquent glory:

*Dear Sufu*

*I had a look at your site and found the information on Tai Chi interesting and informative. I was however disturbed and perplexed by your article on grading. You mentioned that you trained in Karate at some stage of your journey.*

*As a Karate instructor I have been taught that the most important reason for a grading syllabus is to make sure that each student under ones tutor ledge is assessed in their proficiency at the level they are training at.*

*Whilst it is vitally important that students show fighting spirit, Simply being able to fight could not be used as a measure of a martial artists skill.*

*I have in my time of studying Karate met many violent people who did not have a problem with facing or dishing out violence. Those that stayed the course gained the confidence to deal calmly with provocation that would have caused them to become violent in their past.*

*The fact that you do not make any mention of grading from the point of view of teaching and assessing leads me to the opinion that this article is nothing more than an excuse to relate stories of your own heroism.*

*I can only think that you suffer from either incredible arrogance or naivety undermined with a very real lack of confidence. The only instances of your "bravery" you can muster are ones in which you shove a fat man across the room and even more sickeningly where you use your years of training to call out a young man and smash his face in.*

*The fact that this took place in the toilets paints a nice picture of the school bully dishing out a beating to some poor boy. The fact that your motivation for this violent assault was because he did not recognise you as someone who could be a martial artist shows your lack of confidence, martial skill and highlights only your cowardice. You are apparently an author. I suggest in future that you try to actually to stick to the subject matter rather than just eulogising about yourself. The only compliment I can pay you is that you are honest, not many people who purport to be a leader would document instances of their own ineptitude on their site.*

*Eddie*

Ok so there you have it. Now let us look at some of the issues that Andy/Eddie raises. First of all the article was not about gradings, it was about tests and specifically the kind of tests that a martial artist who trains in Asia under an Asian teacher might have to face.

Andy/Eddie, I suspect, from the tone of his e-mail trains in a sports centre, putting on his white pyjamas maybe a couple of times a week, teaching a leisure time activity to hobbyists.

I live in Asia where, if I get challenged and refuse the challenge not only do I lose face ( a big deal over here) but I also lose my students and probably my teacher since no self- respecting martial arts teacher in Asia wants a student who turns down challenges.

Now as to the issue of violence and people being trained to walk away from provocation; these are indeed noble ideals and ones that, in an ideal world I would wholeheartedly endorse, indeed some of my students might have found that they have benefited from their training in this way... BUT in the two incidents that I described I was the one challenged and in such a way that, as I have pointed out above, I had no choice but to respond to the challenge. In both incidents the problem was dealt with as efficiently as possible and we were all friends afterwards.

I fear that Andy/Eddie has never trained under an Asian teacher in their own cultural context otherwise he would not be as confused as he seems about issues of violence. Even in his own purported art Karate there is no shortage of incidents of extreme violence meted out by instructors to students and others. How many of you remember the late Gary Spiers story of having his nose crushed by Higaonna Sensei, because he had the temerity to attempt a groin kick on him!

Andy/Eddie, I am afraid that many of my teachers are or have been violent men. Some have even taken the lives of others – that is the nature of the Asian martial arts in the countries that they come from. Just as we should not use the academic standards of a university professor to judge the mathematics performance of a primary school student, nor should we use the standards of Sports Centre karate to judge the behaviour of martial artists in Asia.

Andy/Eddie seems very concerned about the purpose of gradings. He has been taught “that the most important reason for a grading syllabus is to make sure that each student under ones tutor ledge is assessed in their proficiency at the level they are training at. Whilst it is vitally important that students show fighting spirit, Simply being able to fight could not be used as a measure of a martial artists skill” (Please note the eccentric spelling is Andy/Eddie’s not mine!)

In Asia I’m afraid, in traditional systems the kind of tests that pass for gradings are designed exactly to test whether the student can fight because if they are given permission to teach and they lose a fight, their teacher also loses face, students and possibly his living. This is serious business. I’m afraid that the idea of a skilled martial artist who could not fight would be regarded here as something like a jam doughnut without the jam ; do you see? The vital ingredient is missing.

Of course in our grading system in the UK we do not require our students to be great fighters; we do however examine their ability to use their art in a fighting context. This might well be what Andy/Eddie regards as “fighting spirit”. Our gradings, however, do not assess teaching ability – we have instructor courses for that.

It is at this point that I have to question Andy/Eddie’s own level of competence in reading comprehension. At no point in the article did I describe my Chinese opponent as fat, I merely stated that he was larger than the average Chinese. Furthermore I did not “call out” the student, nor did our encounter take place in a toilet. I fear that Eddie/Andy might have had an unfortunate incident in a toilet as this seems to be on his mind.

Andy/Eddie accuses me of cowardice; he is right I am a coward. I’m particularly scared of flying bugs – my wife deals with those. I’m also scared of my wife and my mother. I am also particularly scared of letting down my teachers and of betraying the trust that they have placed in me. I have had the privilege during my martial arts career of training with a number of superb martial artists. They have all attempted to instill in me a sense of what their art is about and of the moral obligations that must accompany the development of skill. I hope that I have not and will not let them down.

I am glad that you think I am honest and were you to come on one of my seminars you would see that I regularly demonstrate my own ineptitude, in fact I’m well known for it!

So now let us continue to explore the idea of cowardice. I consider it cowardice to send an e-mail from an address that seems at best dodgy and which is in essence anonymous. Therefore Andy/Eddie I am going to give you the opportunity to enjoy face to face communication with me while at the same time learning something of martial arts in Asia by inviting you to be my guest, free of charge at our twentieth Anniversary celebrations. Of course you will have to find your own air fare but there will be at least one karate instructor there, Sensei Tim Nicklin 5th Dan of Okinawan Goju Ryu. I'm sure you will be able to learn a lot from him. Details are on the website Andy/Eddie. I look forward to hearing from you.

Oh and as a final note all of the traditional martial artists that I know in Asia are extremely polite, this is because without politeness you are constantly putting yourself in a position of danger and fighting could result in serious injury or death. Thus they also stress the importance of politeness to their own students. You have obviously not been taught politeness and you are in the words of the Malays "kurang ajar". It's all explained in one of my articles. Happy reading!

## IMPORTANT NOTICE

If you wish to attend either the May visit to Beijing or the September Penang Extravaganza please contact me or let your instructor know asap so that we can ensure you have a place.

Thank you.

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