

The Dojo

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Ni-Dan essay

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Being physically active, practicing safety, being patient and being up for a good challenge are all great qualities one can incorporate into everyday living. Growing up with a brother and 5 cousins, these qualities were taught to all of us as lessons by my grandfather. These lessons became a way of life for me. This way of life is also carried out in the dojo. During our classes, I usually catch myself going back to a memory of learning. When we train here using balance and timing, I remember my grandfather teaching me how to get in and out of a boat. Without using those techniques, it was easy to fall into the water. If I did fall in, I needed my physical strength to pull myself up onto the dock without cutting my legs on the barnacles. My grandfather, being in the service, trained all of us kids with physical activities. Most of the exercises we did with him, I do with the dojo now.

When we train in kata, I can experience the humility and patience it takes while trying to get it right. I remember feeling the same when my grandfather had me swim around his 50-foot charter boat. He would throw me into the canal and wait until the day I could swim around it without holding on. Once I was able to accomplish that challenge, he then taught me how to pilot the Boston Whaler. None of us succeeded in the swim-around until at least the fourth try. In kata, we practice sequence before we can start practicing technique. Patience, humility

and being up for the next challenge are the qualities needed in order to make either challenge successful.

Physical strength, safety and patience are constantly practiced at the dojo during training. This combination of qualities was necessary for when my grandfather taught me and two of my cousins to sail as a three-man crew. The boat was 15-feet long and the mast and sail were 15 feet tall. Each of us were taught how to operate every part of the boat. Then we would select the one part of the boat we wanted to run. During yakosuko kumite and bunkai, we learn both offense and defense. On the water, we learned how to operate the boom, the kleet, and the rutter. When the boom mate pulls in the sail, the kleet mate learns to duck or lean in order to avoid getting struck in the head with the boom. When the rutter mate turns too sharply, the others learn to lean in order to prevent the boat from over-correcting and capsizing. Training in yk's, defense learns to move and lean as offense comes in with an attack. Training in bunkai, we use certain angles to position ourselves in order to avoid being too far away or too close to partners. This accuracy provides for a smooth and fluid bunkai, the same as for smooth sailing. When we practice bunkai, we get to a point where we are ready to ask Renshi to watch us perform. This reminds me of the summer that I learned

how to sail, because I asked my grandfather to come down to the docks to watch how smoothly we worked as a team, tacking up and down the canal.

Going into my Ni-Dan test, I will have been training in this dojo for seven years, with the last three as Sho-Dan. As a kyu rank, I've always enjoyed the classes trying hard to retain what was being taught. After being Sho-Dan for a while, with the opportunity to teach, I am beginning to understand more of each lesson. I am noticing students' needs and have been challenging myself in helping them the way they need to be helped. Understanding the techniques and traditions of Matsubayashi Ryu is making my training better than before since I don't need to retain classes as much as to simply understand what is being taught. This is a breakthrough for me and it reminds me of the best lesson my grandfather taught me. He told me this, "Don't remember anything I just taught you... just understand it and you won't need to remember." My childhood lessons with my grandfather and the lessons being taught at the dojo have created a safe and sound lifestyle for me. My goal in the dojo is to extend this way of life to the other students and the other instructors for many more years as a Sensei.