

“An Interview with Sensei Sukh S. Sandhu, Kancho of The Gi Yu Kyo Kai Dojos”



By Todd Engelman

07/15

Sho Dan The Gi Yu Honbu Dojo

Dayton Ohio USA

After the most recent Annual Seminar, I was able to get some time with Sensei to discuss his thoughts about budo and The Gi Yu Kyo Kai Dojo association.

Q: Tell us about your background Sensei? Personal, Professional and Martial Arts related?

Sensei: I am currently married to my wife of 9 years now and we have three daughters ...we live in South Dayton, Ohio USA. My girls train in our Kids CORDs program of course...I will need help keeping all the dates away from them. I have been lucky enough to have one of the most supportive wives a man could ask for. I was born in Europe and eventually grew up in The United States. I have had the opportunity to live and travel all over the globe. I have been in Ohio for 30 years or so. I played several sports in high school and have always been interested in Martial Arts. Martial Arts came about because of necessity more than anything else. My brother and I moved a lot when we were younger and we tended to be picked on a lot for being “different” where ever we lived...so, my older brother was the one who started the martial journey first and then he brought me along...mainly to have someone to beat up on, but now he is my student. So, basically I have been involved in martial arts since age 5 or so and have been studying the budo I train in and teach currently for almost 26 years. During college, I worked several jobs, from waiting tables, helping manage a restaurant, bartending, bouncing, security for VIPs, landscaping, property management, teaching martial arts...pretty much anything I could do to make a buck. We grew up very poor, poverty made us want to strive for more, and what better country

to give you that opportunity than the USA. I graduated from college with a degree in business, however I was running and helping with family businesses long before that. Being a first generation immigrant, work was paramount. I know what it feels like to not have the opportunities this wonderful country provides...so work hard and take advantage of what this nation offers. After college, I opened an Italian Restaurant and bar. After running the restaurant for some time, I decided I needed to use my degree, so I became a financial advisor/stock broker. I am currently a Regional Sales Manager and Sr. Vice President for a Broker/Dealer owned by a large regional bank. Of course, I continued to teach martial arts at different places and continued to train in martial arts. I started dabbling in different art forms as well, mainly grappling forms. I searched out folks who were associated with BJJ, Judo and also forms of Karate and Aikijutsu and such. I continued my apprenticeship in firearms and learning from some of the best weapons instructors in the world to hone those skills. I had the opportunity to meet a lot of highly skilled individuals over the years from the military, law enforcement, martial artist and fighters. I also spent time learning about tameshi giri and sword drawing and cutting targets. I earned multiple rank belts from various arts and teachers; I earned several degrees of black belts through the years, 1st Degree black in Judo, 2nd Degree black in Bujinkan Ninjutsu, a 5th Degree black in Jinenkan Kobudo and a 8th Degree black in Jissen Koryu Bujutsu under the Gi Yu Kyo Kai. I also during these years, competed in some different tournaments etc., mainly to gauge the effectiveness of what I was studying. Though belts/ranks are important to set objectives and benchmarks for folks to strive for...for me, at this stage of life, ranks do not mean much to me. I am more interested in the “practice” and study of the forms of combat to find harmony and peace within myself, which translates to my external environment and my external community. I also stayed the course and continued my journey following Manaka Sensei and learning Kobudo from him.



1994 Washington D.C., L to R - Sandhu Sensei, Gary B., Manaka Sense, Shawn H.

Q: Tell us about the beginning origins of The Gi Yu Dojo?

Sensei: Well, after spending almost 18 or 19 years learning directly or indirectly from Manaka Sensei (currently of The Jinenkan Organization) and eventually becoming his most senior student in 2004/2005, I decided that the direction his organization was going was not for me in 2007. If I did not believe in and put in 100% effort in helping my teacher’s organization, then I would eventually fail him and that was unacceptable to me. Though I respect him and what he has given me beyond compare, it was difficult for me to see the direction of his organization. Unfortunately, that direction did not coincide with mine. So, with a very heavy heart, I ventured out on my own. I did not ask anyone or any students to follow me. I just told them my reasons for resigning and they could continue to train with me and if they had the opportunity, they should train with Manaka Sensei. I want our Association to be open to all

individuals, regardless of the martial path they are on, they are always welcome in our dojos...but the politics are not.



Ohio, 2006 Manaka Sensei, Sandhu Sensei and Tiger

Manaka Sensei had named my dojo many years before and he said that the 2 things that he thought of, when he thought of our training group was Gi (Justice) and Yu (Courage). So when I resigned from his organization, I kept the name he gave us and we continue to try to embody those ideals...among others. Of course, we still teach and train as Manaka Sensei originally taught and trained with us. We continue to try to live to his ideal and the continued effort to understand, study and train in the art forms he gave to us. He is honored in our dojos daily. Our Black Belts and Kyu students are some of the best martial artists and , quite frankly, people I have ever been fortunate to be surrounded by. Their support over the years is what has given me the strength and focus to continue forward on my path of budo. So, all the credit goes to them and my former teachers/mentors in the creation and continued growth of The Gi Yu Dojo.



Japan 2004



Maryland 2007

Q: What is The Gi Yu Kyo Kai and how does it differ from other organizations?

Sensei: I started looking at all the martial arts organizations I had been a part of or had experience in, along with others I did not personally belong to and I tried to figure out ...what goes wrong with these institutions? They either become too large and there is no “quality” control anymore, or they fall apart, or what the original intention of the “kan” was is no longer being followed etc. Too many politics, too many egos, too much selfishness....and then add the possibility of financial gain! I created a “kyo kai” or association rather than a “kan” organization because just as in any business organization, they are “top” heavy. Only one or a few folks are in control. In an association, all folks have equal say in the direction

of the overall association with the main philosophy and mission statement paramount to its decision making. For us, The Gi Yu Kyo Kai Mission statement is: To produce productive members of our communities through the practice and study of Jissen Koryu Bujutsu and Martial Arts, To perpetuate a continuation of the lineages we study for future generations to learn from. I wanted a “flat” line of control rather than a top heavy “triangle”. In our association, once you get your first DAN level, you are allowed to give “opinion votes” to the Kyo Kai, and once you become a Dojo-cho, you are allowed to “actually vote” on all matters related to the Kyo Kai. There is of course one person nominated as KanCho (president) of the association. That individual has veto power if need be. This way a few things happen (that I have felt are factors to keep a martial arts group from becoming frayed, watered down and politicized), 1. It keeps me or whomever is in the President role honest. I have to have “buy in” before we make a decision from everyone, even for rank testing...a black belt panel is convened and there has to be more positive scores than negative in order to pass, so no one gets preferential treatment. Rank is based off merit and nothing else. 2. The art forms we study and the Kyo Kai will live on, even after my death. We have created a structure and framework for future generations to continue our mission statement, for the benefit of mankind. In fact a few years ago, I myself tested under the Kyo Kai members for my 6th, 7th and 8th DANs to prove to everyone and to myself, I was still challenging myself and learning. As a leader, I believe, you must walk your talk. In other words, if you ask of others to do certain things, you yourself must be willing to do the same. That is true leadership. The Kyo Kai eventually awarded me my 8th DAN (8th degree) Black Belt. We have rank requirements all the way up to 9th DAN. At 5th DAN, you are considered Menkyo Kaiden in all the lineages we study via The Gi Yu Dojo system. Menkyo Kaiden means total transmission. That is Mastery Level Teacher status. However, where as some organizations no longer test their students past a certain rank, they basically pay a fee and they are awarded rank and title. We ask our students to continue to prove they are still a student by having rank requirements and tests after the 5th Degree Black Belt certification. I want the emphasis on helping, growing and mentoring students. I have no issues with folks who own martial arts schools and do it for a living. I think it takes a very strong individual to do that and stay true to the art form they study and their commitment to their students without “selling out” for egotistical or financial gains. So, our number one priority comes back to our mission statement, produce productive members of our communities through martial arts. Tough , physically skilled individuals who understand “right from wrong” and possess the “character” to showcase that and the leadership skills to take charge of any situation.



Dayton OH, 2015 L to R

Matt W., Todd E., Mike M., John C., Chuck V., Jaye S., Aman B., Sensei, WS B., Doug S., James S., Don B., Brittney M., Adam C.

Q: Can you tell us about the types of things you teach at your schools?

Sensei: Well we study several Koryu lineages meaning old style and several Gendai ones meaning modern style. Everything from unarmed striking , grappling standing and on the ground, staffs of various lengths, Japanese sword styles (long and short), knife, spear, glaive, truncheon/baton, chained weapons, to firearms protection. I always say, we were the original mixed martial art. Through these endeavors, we hone our bodies, challenge our minds and strengthen our spirits. The specific lineages we study are, Koto Ryu, Gyokko Ryu, Togakure Ryu, Kukishin Ryu, ShinDen Fudo Ryu, Takagi Yoshin Ryu, Jinen Ryu, Gi Yu Dojo Suwari Gata, ShinKen Gata and Combat Shooting skills.



Q: Do you teach the same material for your kids program?

Sensei: It would surprise many folks, that YES we do. Of course we do not teach the kids the “why”. They do not have the maturity yet to understand the devastating concepts they are being taught. Although, toned down, the movements are the same as the ones taught in the adult classes. However, we are trying to emphasize several other things through our C.O.R.D.S. program as well. I created this program over 15 years ago, and the results are paying off in the students. The physical skills we are working on with these students are about the physiological connection of knowing where to instinctually move to be safe and counter challenges. As they mature in to the adult program , they will understand the “why”, and they will be far ahead of most of the beginner students, because their bodies can physically perform without thinking. Our program consists of the following ideals: **C.** *Confidence To Overcome Life's Many Challenges* **O.** *Optimism To Achieve Anything Your Heart Desires* **R.** *Respect Of Others, the Environment and of Yourself* **D.** *Discipline Of Oneself to Pursue Ones Dream* **S.** *Self Defense To Protect Yourself, Family, Friends, and Community.*



C.O.R.D.S. Kid's class Dayton Honbu 2015

I tell parents when they come in that if they are looking for their child to just get "rank", I will recommend them to the many martial arts schools that are in our area. However, if they are looking for a place where their child will actually grow and foster good characteristics that will help them in life...then The Gi Yu Dojo is the place for them. I also tell parents from the very beginning that I will never give a child a Black Belt, I think that sends the wrong message to very impressionable minds. There is nothing more ridiculous than meeting a parent who tells you their 12 year old is a 2nd degree black belt in xyz martial art. To me, that is all about money. I am not taking anything away from the effort the child put in, but a Black Belt is also about maturity and let's face it...how many 15 year olds have had any real life experiences yet? So, when a child goes through our CORDS program and achieves their 3rd tip Brown Belt, with the parent's permission, we move them in to the Adult program as a Green Belt. A very big move.

Q: Is it true you turn away more applicants to train at The Gi Yu Honbu than you accept? What type of people are you looking for to be a part of your martial arts schools?

Sensei: Yes that it is true we decline the majority of applicants to our dojo. At the HONBU dojo, we still have adult students apply for training. Because we are not a commercial school, and we are exclusive in the way we train and in our mind set, where not everyone gets in. We are not looking for anything/anyone in particular, but rather we look for someone who would be a good addition to our community, our family and vice versus. The relationship between the dojo and the student is a two way street. We ask, are you a person who is just not trying to learn how to fight, but also trying to better yourself in your life. From the students perspective, he/she should ask themselves, does the Gi Yu Dojo fit in to their life and would the dojo be a positive influence on what they want to accomplish in life, not just in martial arts. Prospective students need not have years of martial arts experience. We just want good solid people. I do not have to make concessions to get students for financial gain, so we are

pretty steadfast to this process. We want quality over quantity and for the last 20 years or so, the process has not failed us. We want our students to be honored and proud of the elite group they are a part of. Our affiliate dojos can decide if they want to follow this procedure or not, that is their decision and the Honbu dojo has no issue with that...this is just what we do at the Honbu.



Atlanta GA 2013, Sandhu Sensei and Dojo-cho WS Bumgarner

Q: Where would you like to see The Gi Yu Kyo Kai Dojos in 10 years?

Sensei: I would like to see our association grow, but at a pace that creates future leadership in the way our mission statement emphasizes. I have been very fortunate to be surrounded by some of the best students, martial artists and people over the years and I would love to see them lead the next generations forward. We do a lot for our community and we are involved in lot of programs in southwest Ohio from at risk youth, women's abuse centers, military servicemen and women support groups, fund raisers for hospitals, local community groups...the list goes on and on. I would like to see that type of leadership from our Kyo Kai members all over the world. I would love to see many Gi Yu Dojos, prosperous and engaged in their communities. If you are unhappy with your environment, your neighborhood, your view of future generations...then be an active catalyst to change those environments. Action speaks more than words, change what you feel is not right and be involved in doing that through your community in a positive constructive way. I believe in my heart, what The Gi Yu Kyo Kai philosophy represents, is universal regardless of race, sex, religion or what country you live in. Peace through strength, wouldn't that be a great objective to rest our hats on!



Honbu Dayton Dojo, Dojo-cho Aman Brar 2014



Honbu Dojo, Dojo-cho Chuck VanDine 2011

Sensei, thank you for taking time to share with our reading audience a brief description of what The Gi Yu Dojos and Kyo Kai is all about. The pictures used in this article were gathered from Sensei's extensive personal collection of photos and videos chronicling his years of martial arts training.





Todd Engelman's Bio:

Todd began his martial path with Tae Kwon Do in middle school. He studied Aikido for 3 years (1st kyu) during college in the early 90s, Upon returning to Dayton in 2009, he began studying at the Gi Yu Dojo, attaining the rank of Sho Dan (1st degree black belt, 06/13). He has helped with our CORDS kids program since 2011. During high school, he was a competitive trap shooter, and has trained in self-defense shooting for over 20 years. He works as an Aerospace Engineer with the US Air Force, and has designed and maintained numerous fighters, bombers, and rocket systems. He is currently earning a master's degree in Military Operations with a Joint Warfare specialization. He serves as a Lt Col in the Air Force Auxiliary, has been on over 300 search and rescue missions, provided disaster relief during Hurricane Andrew, flown support missions for both Homeland Security and the Drug Enforcement Administration. He believes that "training in martial arts is less about fighting, and more about gaining confidence in all aspects of your life. By pushing yourself and your own limits, you come to understand those limitations only exist within your own mind".