



# ***Gentry Martial Arts***

## ***news March 2021***

### **Upcoming events:**

March 6 <sup>th</sup>	Stop Bullies FAST kids' class 9:00-11:30
March 6 <sup>th</sup>	FAST Adult Basics 12:30-4:00
March 7 <sup>th</sup>	Raya and the Dragon outing 1:00 pm
March 13 <sup>th</sup>	Leadership Team 9:00-10:30
March 13 <sup>th</sup>	BB prep 10:30-12:00
March 19	TKD testing 5:30
March 20 <sup>th</sup>	Stick Fighting 9:00-11:30
March 27 <sup>th</sup>	BJJ tournament (CGI)
April 1-2	Kristian Woodmansee returns for BJJ classes.
April 10 <sup>th</sup>	Lil Dragon testing

### **Raya and the Dragon Private Showing**

You are probably as excited as we are for the new release of Raya and the Dragon. We have booked a private showing of the movie on opening weekend, Sun MARCH 7<sup>TH</sup> at 1:00 Pm at Showtime Cinemas in Mooresville. Students (up to two per family) will get in free (but still need to register). All other family members will be \$7.00. You must sign up/pay (cash only) at the front desk before the event. Space is limited but should be enough for everyone.

### **Spring Break Social Media contest:**

Going somewhere on spring break? We want to see you represent. We will be holding a contest over spring break. Take a picture in your best martial arts pose with your exotic surroundings (even if it is just around town). Pics in uniform or GMA swag will be given more consideration. Tag us on Instagram or Facebook. Best pic(s) will win a prize!

### **Kristian Woodmansee returns**

We are excited to be bringing Kristian Woodmansee back to our BJJ program on April 1-2. BBC and Tues BJJ class will be switching nights this week to accommodate and maximize our time with him.

### **Quotes of the Week**

We are late starting our focus points, so we will continue with those, and after that, we will be going over some of our favorite sayings from Grandmaster Choi.

### **Don't forget GMA website, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.**

Want to be the first to know when the school closes for weather? Need to double check the special events calendar or pics? Check the GMA website and our Facebook group, and sign up for email announcements online. Like the GMA Martinsville Facebook page for other public announcements and promotions. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter @Gentry\_MA for lighter notes.

### **Training Anniversaries:**

Mike Dodge (BJJ 15 yrs.)	Maddox Sparks (TKD 5 yrs.)	Preston Santiago (TKD 4 yrs.)
Nathin Plummer (TKD 3 yrs.)	Alysha Patel (LD, TKD 3 yrs.)	Shivam Patel (TKD, LD 2 yrs.)

## Birthdays:

Emmett Koch	3/1	Hope Gunn	3/3	Jenna Berry	3/3
Jesse McFarland	3/5	Evelyn Kauffman	3/6	Bryan Bolin	3/7
Megan Brook	3/7	Aleah Spires	3/14	Maya Mras	3/21
Lise Roberson	3/29				

## This Month in Martial Arts History (selected from “Dates with Destiny” in *Martial Arts Success* by John Corcoran.)

- March 1, 1907 (-Feb 2 2003) GM Won Kuk Lee (founder of Chung Do Kwan) birthday
- March 10, 1940 Birthday for Chuck Norris
- March 11, 1967 Birthday for Renzo Gracie
- March 19, 1931 Birthday for Ed Parker, Sr. (famous for Bruce Lee demo and taught Elvis Presley)
- March 24, 1950 Birthday for Peyton Quinn—Reality based training pioneer, influence on FAST program.
- March 10, 1921 Chojun Miyagi and Gichin Funakoshi (important to our line) hold the famous demonstration for the future Emperor of Japan—putting Okinawan Karate “on the map.”
- March 20, 1971 South Korean President Chung-Hi Park declared TKD as Korea’s national sport.
- March 30, 1990 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles debuts in theaters—creating a craze.
- March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1999 The Matrix debuts in theaters—changing the way movie fights are done, and changing perceptions of what we do!

## Levels of Praise in Martial Arts

It was yet again recently brought to my attention that some people do not think I am effusive with praise. I would like to think that all of our instructors, including myself, are encouraging and will do everything we can to help our students. We will celebrate victories and console you in defeats. But heaping on praise, especially when unwarranted, probably isn’t going to happen. Sometimes this leads to a disconnect with some of our students who expect a few more “atta boys.” I think it is just another example of how martial arts changes your perspective—in this case, standards of excellence. So, this month I want to share some of our experiences with praise in the martial arts (or lack thereof).

Over the years, we have latched onto various catch phrases or inside jokes in regard to levels of performance. Sometimes they are movie or other media quotes, such as:

- “Try harder, cause right now you are sucking.”
- “How is XXX supposed to learn against such weak resistance?”
- “I long for the days when my students were merely bad.”
- “I see you are struggling under the weight of your own shame.”
- Even Kung Fu Panda had the line “There is now a level zero.”

Perhaps we adopt them because not only are they accurate, they also are similar to what we have heard firsthand.

Once our best efforts as a team could only receive “that was perfectly adequate.”

At one of my black belt tests, I had a grandmaster encourage the group of candidates with “Someday, even you could be as good as me.... but I don’t think so.”

One of the highest bits of praise I received as an instructor was when GM Choi turned to me in the middle of a belt testing and commented, “Your students aren’t so bad anymore.”

Kristian Woodmansee is fond of saying that if something works, it isn’t that you are good, it is that the other person sucks more than you do. He also just recently posted signs in his academy over the trashcans that read “trash (like your jiu-jitsu).” It is funny, because it is true. My BJJ, after all these years, is trash. Kristian would say his is too...and I will probably never catch up to him.

In a similar vein, one of the most inspiring Hapkido practitioners/teachers out there is GM J.R. West, who has a three-level rating system that is hard to not adopt. The highest is “that didn’t suck” followed by

“that sucked” and lastly “that needed to improve to suck.” Here again, the humor smacks of reality. Most of us mere mortals can only strive to suck less.

Surprisingly one of the few martial arts t-shirts I don't own is the world's Okay-ist...as in the world's okay-ist kicker or okay-ist grappler. While I have dedicated much of my life to martial arts, I have not been dedicated to achieving world class status in any one thing, and so my goal still remains to be Okay at what I do. I certainly want to be considered respectable and worthy of my rank(s), but I have given up hope of being truly exceptional at any one thing like world champions are. I strive to be perfectly adequate.

And there is the disconnect. When your measuring sticks are world class, masters of their craft and art, it is hard to go overboard praising beginners by comparison, no matter how excited we are to see their progress. These masters have met a higher personal standard, and while we might not have met them ourselves as instructors, we are aware of the standard we and our students should be striving for.

I will always remember one illustrative story about our tai chi chuan Grandmaster William CC Chen. He used to frequently reference a student of his “who was pretty good at chess” and then make some analogy between the two. It was quite a while before I realized that chess player was the American prodigy Josh Waitzkin, whose life was the basis of the movie “Searching for Bobby Fischer.” Pretty good at chess? Kinda an understatement, don't you think, GM Chen? Well, it depends on perspective. GM Chen is one of the best in the world at tai chi, himself a bit of a prodigy in his youth (he was known as the baby master), who has travelled the world teaching and fighting. And yet, I can totally see him describing himself as “pretty good” at tai chi. And by that standard, so was his student's chess. So, do you expect him to tell you your tai chi is amazing?

I suspect this perspective on excellence is common with most all who have reached the pinnacle of their craft. If you played a pickup game with Michael Jordan, do you expect him to honestly be impressed with your “perfectly adequate” hooping? If you played a round of golf with Jack Nicklaus, do you think you would wow him? Any praise you might receive would be more along the lines of “you are not as bad I as I thought you would be.” But generally speaking, we have much less access to professional athletes and world class performers in other fields. One of the great things about martial arts is that we still do, and we should appreciate that it gives as a different perspective on excellence.

I have a few colleagues/friends who were in the inner circle of another famous master I have had the pleasure of training with. \* These are fine, dedicated martial artists who would spend their own money to travel the country assisting this master with seminars, etc. They were some of his “right hand mans”. But they would share stories that while on long rides this GM would constantly bemoan how no one training today can live up to previous generations, so much was being lost, how his art was going to die with him, etc. One of them mentioned that while driving him around, you were left feeling so inadequate that it was everything you could do not to steer into oncoming traffic. I can attest to the fact this GM is certainly more encouraging than this in class (though certainly not effusive). Anecdote aside, here is another GM who has invested his life into his art, a level of commitment and sacrifice few individuals will ever give to anything. Now worried if what he has created will survive. So, tell me again how the student who shows up to class sporadically needs more acknowledgment for his efforts?

I certainly understand the sport psychology element of giving someone confidence to perform, but at the same time, having a false sense of security when it comes to martial arts/self-defense can have catastrophic consequences. The mats can be a very honest place. You can't hide in a sparring match or roll. Your weaknesses will be exposed. But yet some people are able to rationalize or ignore that feedback. Telling someone that they are great when they are not can be dangerous, it feeds into their delusions of grandeur. At worst this can get them hurt or killed, but even if it doesn't, it most certainly stunts their growth.

Some martial arts schools have adopted the policy of handing out accomplishment patches, some to the extent of making their uniforms look like Boy Scout sashes. A long time ago, I bought a couple of readily available patches to illustrate this point. One said, “perfect side kick” and another said, “perfect forms.”

Really? Ask any world class competitor if their technique was perfect or ask any grandmaster if their kata/poomsae was perfect, and they would certainly think it a dumb question (they may be too polite to tell you.)

So, what does a 10-year green belt work on if his kicks and forms are already perfect? Afterall, he has the patch to prove it. Unwarranted, excessive praise can adversely affect work ethic, humility, and dangerously inflate egos. To reiterate, I view this especially risky when it comes to something as serious as self-defense skills.

Martial arts training will keep you honest and humble. It should give you a standard of excellence to strive for, and to enjoy the process in of getting there. These are positive things. Our instructors hopefully try to encourage and inspire you to strive for these things, but hollow praise and validation erodes them. So, with a new perspective, next time be happy when you to don't suck.

\* I started to write "trained extensively with." but then deleted it. I had to laugh as I realized my definition of extensive is just as subjective as the topic of praise that we are discussing. I doubt this teacher would consider my efforts extensive.