

*1. Before sept 11th, you were a successful investment banker in NY. What prompted your decision to leave it all behind and dedicate yourself to martial arts instead?*

Going to shaolin had always been a dream of mine, as had completing the martial arts training I had begun as a kid. 911 made me realize tomorrow might never come. I always told myself I would build up a successful financial services business and then retire young and go pursue my dreams. But leading up to 911, all during my financial career, I used to meet with individuals and companies and look at their finances. I got to know my clients and pieced together the events of their lives. Basically, everyone, except completedullards, starts out with dreams. And then they graduate college, get a job, get married and ALL of their dreams go out the window. I didn't want to see my dreams out the window.

I had studied abroad, during college, four years in University of Mainz Germany and a lot of my income on Wall Street came from my languages. The company and other agents and brokers would turn over cases to me and once the company assigned something like 200 clients to me simply because of my languages. I was the only one available to service these clients. A normal agent acquires clients at a rate of 1 per week, and that is working hard, 60 hours per week, soliciting new clients. I had hundreds just handed to me, because of language ability.

I love languages and didn't want to forget my languages and didn't want to stop learning, so that was another reason I had to go abroad again.

Among the forgotten dreams I encountered in my clients was, many of them would find out about my language skills and then tell me that twenty years ago they had also completed a degree in French or a foreign language and spent a single semester abroad. And now they were working in new york, a million hours per week. No language use and no chance to go away again. And that single semester anroad becomes their happiest memory.

That seemed sad to me. And I know their current life wasn't what they had dreamed about or envisioned for themselves.

Many people incurred health problems between age thirty and age forty, some were already fat by twenty eight. Their dreams could never come true.

Financially, I saw people in new york working 45 – 60 hours per week, commuting an average of two and a half hours per day, earning an average of 7,000 USD a month, and having nothing but credit card debt and a massive mortgage payment.

Many of them argued "its about quality of life" well, I don't see any quality in that life. Others said "I am doing it for my family." What family? These people never saw their families. They got home from work at 8:00 PM.

My grandma, who raised me, was a school teacher. I saw her everyday from 3:30 on. And she was always home on Saturdays and Sundays to spend time with me. That was a lot better than any material possession someone could buy with a bigger salary.

By the end of four years on wall street I had reviewed the finances of more than 1,000 families. Most did not have one month's salary in the bank. When the bubble popped on wall street and people became unemployed, they immediately liquidated their retirement accounts, and paid penalties of up to 45% because they were desperate to keep up their house payments.

They sacrificed their dreams their health and their families...for what? To live at high levels of American poverty.

When 911, it was like the final nail in the coffin. Dreams looked tenuous at best before that day. But that day, I realized 3,000 americans would never complete their dreams. I was one of the new Yorkers who was stranded in the city when the bridges and tunnels were closed. It was raining white dust, which I thought might be a chemical, biological, or radiological weapon (CBR, ABC, I had had some anti-terrorism training in the army). I sat down on the steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral thinking I and everyone around me would collapse and die.

We didn't. but that experience cemented my resolve to go follow my dreams.

## *2. What it hard to switch lifestyles?*

The main thing that was hard to loose was my attitude. I was a very aggressive, very arrogant new Yorker. And you have to be, to succeed in finance. But in Asia, I needed to tone it down, because I was bulldozing people. I was working full time as a teacher, in Taiwan, for the first year and a half, and I still had money from New York. Plus I had brought crates of stuff with me from New York, silk shirts and everything. So I didn't need to buy anything and I always felt like I had tons of money and free time.

Later, after Shaolin temple, I got stranded in Hong Kong, because of the SARS epidemic, and couldn't return to Taiwan. So I got stuck in Hong Kong where I burned out most of what I had left in savings. I returned to Taiwan after the travel ban was lifted but I just couldn't get back to work. I only wanted to write and adventure. By November of my second year in Asia, I had liquidated the last of the money I had in New York. After that I had some really rough, really lean years.

## *3. At this point, How many martial arts have you trained in, and what would you consider to be your base?*

It's not so clear to say how many martial arts I have trained in, because there are some I have done for years, and adopted to my own fighting style, and some I have done just for videos or movies or magazine articles.

My base is western boxing. Then I adopted Muay Thai, Khmer Boxing, and Bokator as my base. And those are the arts I consistently train in for my own fitness and fighting. I also train a lot in Muay Chaiya which I love.

I earned a black belt in Kumdus, a Kuntaw derivative martial art in the Philippines, where I train with my teacher, Grand Master Frank Aycoccho. I like Kuntaw and also Bokator because they encompass my kickboxing arts but add in stand up grappling and even simple ground submissions. They wouldn't hold up against BJJ or modern MMA but it is nice to learn a traditional martial art that recognizes the importance of ground fighting.

For my black belt in Bokator I had to learn Khmer traditional wrestling. I love any kind of traditional wrestling art. In Korea I learned some Ssyrum wrestling for a magazine story and for my book, "Warrior Odyssey". It is on my list of dreams, to go back there and really study Ssyrum deeply.

My new book, warrior odyssey, covers my first six years in Asia. The arts that appear in the book and in my personal experience are: Taekwando, kung fu, Twe so, tai chi, Wu su, San da, Muay thai, Bokator, Khmer boxing, Ssyrum, Kuk sul won, Taekkyon, Khmer wrestling, Kuntaw, Arnis, Shan lai tai, and some practical military fighting.

Volume two of the book will continue with my quest in Asia through about 2011 and will include Yaw yan, also Hybred yaw yan, MMA, Syou bodgi, Muay chaiya, Savate, Silat, Tomoi, Indian martial arts, Bushido, and whatever comes next.

*4. Of every martial art that youve trained in, is there one that you would consider to be the most applicable to self defense?*

When it comes to self defense, every martial art (I mean every traditional martial art) has techniques where the teacher says, "Imagine someone is grabbing your shirt." I am picturing the overweight guy with the ponytail who was never actually in the CIA and isn't really god, although he said he was on Larry King Live. His students grabs the teachers shirt, the teacher does a twist and a bend and yells Khiya! And the student goes flying through the air. Then the teacher says, "imagine someone is choking you" and a student chokes him and he does something to break the choke and takes the student to the ground and locks his limbs. And there are a thousands similar techniques and variations taught as "self-defense." But they all include "simple" tricky" twists and bends and throws.

First off, David carradine is living proof that choke defenses don't work.

The basic positions or attacks that self defense classes teach are someone choking you from the front with two hands, someone grabbing the front of your shirt, snatching your purse, bear hug....I don't know that these situations actually occur in real situations. Whether they do or not, it is impossible to teach someone "simple" tricky" twists and bends and throws in a short seminar. In a crisis, your body only does what it is trained to do. If you haven't actually trained it, you can't do it.

My first teacher, David Collins said to me once, “Grab my shirt.” I grabbed his shirt and he punched me in the mouth. Then he said, “Choke me.” I choked him and he punched me in the mouth. His point was, you have practiced punching people in the mouth and you are good at it, so use that for your self defense. Kur Ba, my monk and first Muay thai trainer in Thailand did the exact same thing, using elbows.

For self defense whatever you trained is what will save you. Even a Tae kwon do person should be able to use those high kicks to defend himself or herself.

But as a simple answer, I think the best stand up fighting arts are Muay thai and Khmer boxing, and the best grappling arts are BJJ and wrestling and Sambo. The best all around art is Hybred yaw yan.

*What was your most raw training experience? How did you get through it?*

Shaolin by far was the most privation I experienced during training. It was cold, dark dirty, it was snowing when I first started training and the dormitories weren't heated. You wore like ten layers of clothing, sweated and trained for 8 hours each day and then slept in those close for a week and only bathed on Sundays. It was disgusting.

The monastery in Thailand where I learned Muay thai was also cold and difficult, living in the mountains, sleeping in the jungle in winter.

*What was your best experience?*

The monastery in Thailand was one of the best experiences and stays with me forever. The other extremely unique experiences were that I was the first foreigner ever to witness Khmer Bokator and Shan Lai Tai kung fu. And Derek Morris and I were the first foreigners ever to earn black krama (black belt) in Bokator. My black krama is in Bokator fighting only. And to this day, I am the only person who has completed that program.

In 2007 when I first went into Burma and trained with the Shan State Army rebels, that was an incredible experience. It was sad to see how many people had been killed and were being killed in the genocide in Burma. I did interviews with victims of rape, torture and forcible eviction, almost all of my friends in the Shan army were war orphans, their parents having been murdered by the Burmese government troops. I made 43 documentary videos inside of Burma and it was one of the most moving and deep experiences of my life. I still pray for those people every day and hope that the Shan state will find independence and peace.

Martial art was a vehicle that took me so many places. In Burma, martial art took me to the brink of humanity.

*What was it like being a westerner training at the Shaolin Temple?*

When you go to Shaolin you have the option of living in the Shaolin hotel, with fancy accommodations, or living in a big professional school which has private and semi

private rooms for foreigners. I chose to live in a real Chinese school, with Chinese students. The only advantage I had over them was that instead of living in a dormitory room with 60 students, I lived in a four man room with a door. So I got some privacy. But I still slept on a wooden slab like everyone else. It was rough, cold, no heating in the buildings, no running water, you used the bathroom in an outhouse. Food was dirty and consisted of rice with shaved potatoes.

It was cold and dirty and really hard. You train 10 hours or more per day. My Chinese improved a lot when I was there and I got very fit but I really prefer fighting. So I am considering going back this summer, but if I do, it will be at a San da school to learn Chinese kick boxing.

If you are going to Shaolin you really need to be able to speak Chinese. I met four or maybe six other foreigners who were living at Shaolin schools at that time and their grasp of what was going on and the depth of their experience and friendships with Chinese students was extremely shallow because they didn't speak Chinese.

And using a phrase book isn't going to do it. You live and train with these people 24 hours per day and you may be the only westerner. You need to be able to have real conversations with them or you will be bored and lonely.

*What would you recommend for those interested in coming to SE Asia for martial arts training?*

You need to finish your BA and have a clean criminal and drug record. All countries in north east Asia and east Asia require you to meet those requirements to get a work permit and none of those developed countries will let you stay in the country for a long period of time if you aren't working or going to school.

In south east Asia, nearly all countries are cracking down on visas and the requirements are approaching those of north east Asia. In Thailand it is difficult to stay more than 30 or 60 days without a work permit. They have really cracked down on renewing 30 day visas, they simply don't want people hanging around doing nothing. Cambodia is still easy on visas, as is the Philippines.

If you want to train in Asia, it is important to learn the language. Also any program you find online which advertises in English is only for foreigners and obviously more expensive and less authentic than ones you find when you are here.

When choosing a school you need to ask yourself, what is your goal? Is your goal to come here and get more proficient in martial art or to have a cultural experience? The two may be mutually exclusive.

For example:

People write me all the time and say "I want to come to Thailand and learn muay thai in a real Thai camp with Thai people, not a camp for foreigners."

There are a million camps like that in Thailand. Obviously they don't have websites so you have to find them yourself or get a referral. The coaches won't be able to speak English, so your learning will be slower. The boxers won't speak English so you will be lonely. The coaches won't have modern or international experience so your overall training won't be nearly as scientific or good as going to a big commercial camp like Fairtex.

If you go to a commercial camp, they know how to train foreigners. They have experience. They can make fights for you...

When I lived in the Muay Thai monastery I learned a lot of Thai language and culture but I didn't really learn much Muay Thai until I moved to Bangkok and started training at a professional school.

*Do you have any advice for up and coming martial arts and or fighters?*

A publisher asked me to write a motivational book, telling people the secrets to success in martial arts and languages. But my reply was too short for a whole book.

“Work your butt off and don't stop till you are done.”

It was only big enough to post on my profile at Facebook. So the publisher asked me to expound on my philosophy “don't get distracted. Eliminate every activity that isn't related to achieving your goal.”

People don't want to hear it. But the only secret is to just work and work and work. That's it. If you need motivation to keep working, then you obviously don't want it. So just quit. You will be much happier if you just let it go.

I am 43 years old, unmarried. I don't have a home or even a permanent apartment. I live in hotels in different countries in Asia most of the time and sometimes in temples where I study with monks or in villages or on army bases... I study languages and martial arts. I speak about 8 languages. I write books, numbers 6 and 7 are coming out this year. I make videos, about 100 videos a year on Youtube. I do TV work when I can. I have done about six TV shows already this year.

Because of all of the publishing that I have done (about 70 magazine articles per year) I am a recognized expert on certain martial arts and certain linguistics theories and certain ethnic minorities. So I get a lot of work doing research or writing or consulting when someone needs information in these areas.

To get to this point, I had to and I have to live rather monkish. I don't drink any alcohol. I don't take any drugs. I don't go out at night. I don't go to discos. My main social life is occasionally meeting friends for coffee and talking but in the back of my mind, I am always working on the next story or the next adventure.

*Do you plan to stay in SE Asia or do you plan on coming back to the states at some point? What do you think the future holds for you?*

I plan to stay on my path. It may keep me in southeast Asia or it may take me to central Asia or south Asia or to Africa. I don't know what is next. If I do finally get my own regular TV show, rather than just appearing on other people's shows, there would have to be an understanding that I live here in Asia and not in USA and only go back to USA for filming or for meetings. I love USA and I am a patriot but living in USA is too hard for me because I would have to give up everything I have dedicated myself to. I have dreams about going back to Korea and Vietnam to finish learning the language. I want to go study in Mongolia and back to china and eventually Japan and Indonesia... the world is huge. There is a lot to cover and you are only one person with one life time, so you need to spend it wisely.