

The “Wandering Warrior”

Finally! Someone to tell "Where To Go" with confidence!



**"Wandering Warrior"
Jill Roth**

Have you always wanted to know what it is like inside a Krav Maga class? Is your friend espousing the benefits of T'ai Chi and you want to know why? Are you too nervous to go into a class unprepared?

Send ME in!

I'm going to go wherever you choose to send me. You can choose which martial art I go to and try for each issue. I'll ask them your most popular questions and then try out a class and report it all back to you! What is this issues' adventure? Kempo!

Tell Jill

**"Where to Go"
and
"What To Ask"**

once she gets there!

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THE DISCIPLINE YOU STRIVE FOR.

Definition of Kempo: A martial art comprised of hand strikes, kicks, and blocks. Unlike many other styles that focus mostly on kicking, Kempo places equal emphasis on both hand strikes and kicks so that Kempo practitioners become well rounded. Kempo strategy calls for confusing an opponent by mixing multiple hand strikes and kicks to different targets of the body. [Shoalin Kempo karate in particular is] a martial art based on fighting characteristics of animals. Shaolin Kempo Karate focuses on the animal styles of the tiger, leopard, crane, snake, and dragon. (definition is paraphrased from www.bluegrassmartialarts.com)

For my Kempo experience I chatted and worked out with Jonathan Drake of Bluegrass Martial Arts in Louisville, KY.



YOUR QUESTIONS:

MSSD: How is Kempo particularly beneficial for women?

Jonathan: Keep in mind that there are many types of Kempo. At my school we teach Shaolin Kempo Karate. The benefit of this style is that we learn and practice techniques to prepare for specific situations. For example, if we are preparing for an attack with a club we would learn the theory for this (move in and block) and then review and practice several examples of moving in and blocking, that would apply to an attack with a club. Kempo is a very practical self defense. We like to say “train for the fight you hope never comes”

MSSD: Will I get kicked in the face?

Jonathan: No. We start off easy. Students [during their training] progress through a series of “acceptable targets” as they move up the ranks. The face is not an acceptable target until much later [in their training] and by then all the students involved will have a great deal of self control...I would put our safety record up against any other sport such as football or basketball.

MSSD: What kind of physical shape do I need to be in before I can begin Kempo?

Jonathan: I hear this a lot. A lot of people believe they need to be in good shape BEFORE they start a martial art. We are not looking for perfect physical specimens... we would recommend using Kempo to get into better shape.

MSSD: What are the health benefits that I could expect from Kempo?

Jonathan: Tons! Increased flexibility, strength, cardiovascular health. The more you move your body and the more you are able [to move], the bigger the effects. Kempo is a sport you can do for a long life of health.

MSSD: How much time would you recommend I commit to Kempo?

Jonathan: That is a tough one, because it all depends on your goals, people come in to get in shape, learn techniques, because their bored and/or to meet people. If you want to get your black belt in four years, you will need to be here a lot. If you are here to meet people, less often would work...even at 1 day a week you are going to get better.

MSSD: Is Kempo competitive like Karate?

Jonathan: It can be, but it isn't required. I usually post announcements about local tournaments for my students, but we don't usually host them at our school.

MSSD: Can a woman in her 40's start Kempo?

Jonathan: You bet! My oldest student is 82 and started in their 70s!

THE WORKOUT

In order to help me feel comfortable during my first "real" class Jonathan had me come in and have an "intro" class first. With his centered energy and openness, he immediately put me at ease. I was surprised he introduced himself as "Jonathan" and not "Mr. Drake" or "Sensei". But I found this to be indicative of his entire philosophy. He doesn't pose as the "high and mighty" sensei that has reached lofty heights of martial arts of which we will never be worthy, but rather as a fellow partner on this journey. It was obvious that he is continuously stretching to improve his abilities not only as a martial artist, but also as an instructor. He is constantly reaching for better ways to convey his knowledge to his students. During our tour of the facility I was warmed by his passion for his dojo. He shared how he started with a horrid brown shag carpet and hard concrete floors and how they have progressed to the impressive dojo it is today. Jonathan had a vision of what his dojo could be and he has made it happen.

We started our intro class with some basics, blocks, strikes and kicks. He also taught me the first "kempo" so that I would feel confident in

class. A “kempo” is a set of moves that prepares for you for a specific attack. For example, my first kempo was an evasive move, block and counter attack that I could use if someone was punching at me. He shared with me how the class would be laid out and what to expect. We bowed out and scheduled my first real class. Sigh, here we go!

OK, deep breath, we are in our first class. Fortunately, the Kempo class is set up with the more advanced students lining up in the front lines. YAY! This allows me to follow the more experienced students from the back. Jonathan immediately puts me at ease by introducing me to the class during class announcements. Each student took their cue from this and welcomed me during or after class. Class began with basic calisthenics. (whew, well within my comfort zone, so far so good) We then moved over to the wall for partner stretches. This is terrific as it not only prepares my muscles for the workout, but I am also able to make a “new friend” to carry me through the rest of the class.

Next we moved onto our kempos.

This is quite cleverly set up. Jonathan had us all start with number one. (oh, yay – I know this one) he then moved up numerically through the kempos. Each student continues to the last numbered kempo that they know, then repeats this one until the end. This allowed me to do my kempo about a dozen times. Wonderful, I’m gained confidence with every repetition.

We moved onto practicing this same kempo with a partner. This is a whole new twist. I now have confidence with these moves, but it adds on a new dimension of difficulty when you are attempting to “hit” the correct target and maintain the correct distance from your partner. I like how practical this is and how I am progressively adapting my new skills. Jonathan asked us to rotate partners after each repetition. Again, I am set at ease as my partners introduce themselves during our rotation. I’m impressed with how useful it is to constantly change partners. Their height, speed, firth are all different and I am continuously adding to my knowledge and ability to adapt.

Lastly, we moved onto forms. This is a set series of moves that helps you improve your memory and more importantly improve the flow and efficiency of your moves. You do these moves by yourself in a set pattern on the floor. Obviously, I don't know a lot of moves yet, but it was fun to try and perfect them and focus on my hand and foot timing. To finish the class we all lined up one more time with the higher ranks in the front and us beginners in the back. We knelt down and had a couple of minutes of meditation. This was our chance to mentally review the class and assimilate any knowledge that we've learned. Jonathan ends the class with some announcements about coming events and a final "good, very good".

Kempo is an excellent martial art and I loved its practicality. The environment is clearly inviting to women and I felt welcome and supported. I feel it is especially beneficial in preparing you for "in close" attacks. It has a lot of blocks and strikes that work in close proximity to your "attacker". Kempo also has enough of the "art" of martial arts to make it fun. On their website www.bluegrassmartialarts.com it explains.

“A martial art based on fighting characteristics of animals. Shaolin Kempo Karate focuses on the animal styles of the tiger, leopard, crane, snake, and dragon. Skills and abilities learned from these animals include:

Tiger - strength & tenacity

Leopard - speed & agility

Crane - grace & balance

Snake - inner strength & rhythmic endurance

Dragon - versatility & indomitable spirit”

I enjoyed the camaraderie of the other students and really resonated with the community that Jonathan has developed at his dojo. Kempo is an excellent choice for someone looking for a practical martial art that can improve your flexibility, cardiovascular health and confidence in a dangerous situation.

That was great, now, where do you want me to go next?

~JR

THE STATS

Do you wear uniforms?

- Yes, it's called a "gi" and it is a lightweight, soft cotton.

What is the flooring?

- Nicely padded floor.

Nationwide Price Range ?

- \$75-\$125 per month

Are there women at the school?

- Yes!

How physically exerting is it on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = sloths are confusing me for a tree, 10 = there may have been gasping)

- -8- It was a great workout; I felt I could push myself as little or as much as I wished.

Can accommodate physical challenges?

- Yes

Age limit?

- No

“MARTIAL” versus “ART” scale (1 = ART completely and internal art no combat to 10- MARTIAL – this is down and dirty combat moves only)

***••-8- Kempo is a powerful combination of practical moves and applications and the flow of artistic movement.**