

THE WANDERING WARRIOR



Brazilian Jiu Jitsu by Jill Roth

THE INTERVIEW

MSSD: What kind of shape do I need to be in BEFORE I start?

Seta: It is interesting, people often think that they have to start in great shape to start BJJ. In fact, just the opposite is true. BJJ is a great way to get into shape. I am in the best shape of my life. Truly every shape and size is welcome. Not everyone starts out as an amazing athlete. In fact, people who feel uncoordinated in other sports often excel at BJJ

MSSD: Will I get hit/kicked in the face?

Seta: Yes, you will. At some point in your training it is going to happen. It is like any physical activity. Volleyball and basketball players get hit in the face all the time. It happens. But, it is good because it makes you aware and keeps you on your toes.

MSSD: How much time per week? Can you really do BJJ if you have a family and a job?

Seta: It is hard to say how much time is needed, because everyone has different goals within BJJ. All students move at their own progress. For my family it was really beneficial when we started working out together at home. BJJ is a bonding experience as we have a little "mat time" for the whole family at home. At our school, we see more and more families sharing this sport together.

MSSD: What are the benefits of BJJ for women?

Seta: The biggest benefit I see for women is self confidence. Women grow up with images of what we "should" be and "should" look like. BJJ gives you a sense of self worth. You are good enough, strong enough, and tough enough.

This month we will be learning about the world of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu with Seta Reupenny from the Gracie Arizona Jiu Jitsu Academy. Seta teaches the all women's class on Saturday mornings.

DEFINITION OF BRAZILIAN (GRACIE) JIU JITSU

Gracie Jiu-Jitsu is a martial art that focuses on grappling and ground fighting techniques which can be used by a smaller person to defend against attacks by larger, stronger opponents. Specifically, Gracie Jiu-Jitsu refers to the style developed by Helio Gracie in the 1900s from a modified version of pre-World War II Judo including some techniques from Japanese Jujutsu. Because of Helio's slight build, he developed a fighting style using technique, leverage and timing allowing a practitioner to successfully defend themselves against a bigger, stronger adversary.

Today, we train in Gracie Jiu-Jitsu for self-defense, sport grappling tournaments (gi and no-gi) and mixed martial arts (MMA) competition. (www.graciearizona.com)

THE WORKOUT

The first thing I saw when I pulled up to the Gracie Jiu Jitsu Academy was a sign that read "PROFESSOR PARKING ONLY ALL VIOLATORS WILL BE CHOKED." I thought, "These people are either going to be really fun, world of hurt." It was a little bit of both.

After I changed into a Gi that they were nice enough to loan me, I had time to sit and watch the kid's class before mine. I was blown away. There were 30 kids in the class and EVERY single kid was enraptured in what they were doing. And, they weren't just rolling around on the floor "playing" and having a good time. They were rolling around on the floor, demonstrating good technique and well thought-out strategy.... and having a good time! I have never seen 30 children that focused on one task. Impressive.

I was welcomed into the family before class had even started. Donna, an experienced student, had spied me sitting alone and waiting for class to start. She didn't hesitate to come over and make me feel at home. She said hello and answered several of my basic questions. With Donna on my side, I felt more secure in learning something new, which was good because our fabulous instructor, Seta, was calling us to start.

Now, I should tell you that I started off my morning with a 3 mile run. I figured, "It is my first day of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, how much could they really have me do? I'm sure it won't be a very thorough workout."



I see my students thrive as they feel better about themselves and feel empowered. Here is an area of their life where it's not about who looks good, but about competition, about beating your opponent. You put on your GI and it is just totally different. As you learn how to use your body, you discover things you didn't know that you could do. I love BJJ for my four daughters. The confidence they've developed on the mat translates into other things. They feel good about themselves and it shows.

MSSD: Can women in their 40's start?

Seta: Yes, I'm almost 40. The first female BJJ Black Belt in Arizona is in her 50s. Women are very strong. We give birth, this is nothing compared to that. We have several women in their 40s that are kicking butt on the mat.

MSSD: Is it competitive like Karate?

Seta: Yes, we have lots of tournaments. Here in Arizona we have one about every 3 months. We even have one just for women. Having so many moms and families become active in BJJ has made the tournaments really fun. They are friendly environments and you make friends with women from other schools.

MSSD: What kind of health benefits can I expect?

Seta: My family and I are in the best shape of our lives. Not only did we lose weight directly from the physical exercise, but also, we are learning so much about nutrition. Before BJJ, I didn't really know how to eat right and take care of myself. Now, I'm learning about nutrition, supplements and what my body needs to survive on the mat. I've learned to make healthy choices so I don't pay for it the next day in class. When I first started, I was only able to workout 1 day per week. Now, I have built my stamina up to the point where I can go to class 5 days a week and feel fantastic.

MSSD: How invasive is it on the joints (knees)?

Seta: BJJ is not particularly difficult on your knees. I don't know of anyone that has developed knee problems from BJJ.

MSSD: How long does it take to get to earn your Black Belt?

I have one word for that plan of action..... STUPID! Even though it was my first day, I had a very good workout. And, I'm sure as you get better and better, (and your instructor can spend less time explaining and more time doing) it will be an even more challenging workout.

We started by warming up. This was achieved by running around the perimeter of the mat forward, then sideways, the other sideways, and then backwards. We then proceeded to run to one side of the school and slide down the floor on our backs and sides. This is called shrimping. It kind of looked like a switchblade opening and closing, but on your sides. Seta had to demonstrate this to me and then explained that no matter how long it takes, you always finish the skill that you are working on. We then ran back to the other end. Next we did forward rolls down the mat, run back, followed by backwards rolls down the mat, run back. I missed it, as the rest of the class did bear walk (I was learning the beauty of rolling backwards over one shoulder from Seta). I caught back up with the class when we did monkey walk. These were kind of like cartwheels, but on your knuckles, run back. At this point Seta figured that we were warm. Yep, pretty warm over here.

We made a large circle in the room and then began to swing our arms to loosen them up. Ah, time to breath. Having swung our arms forwards and backwards, we stretched our legs. Yay, more breathing. We did forward bends over our legs and then straddled our legs

and leaned forward again. We were back in my comfort zone, now, and I was feeling better. We laid on our backs and circled our hips and legs and then rolled forward and backward, coming up to a squat each time. I was a little behind the class, but was rewarded with a smile when I finished all 5 of my required tasks.

Now it was time for partner work. I was worried that I would be all alone when Donna came over and saved me. Seta instructed the class to go through a set pattern of drills that help to prepare you for "rolling" later. "Rolling" is like sparring in other martial arts. But since most of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) takes place on the ground, they call it "rolling."

Donna did a great job of being patient with me and helping me to understand the "hows" and "where fors" of each technique. The first thing you need to know about BJJ is that you will be VERY close to your partner. An anorexic tapeworm would not fit between the two of you while you are practicing. I took an all-women's class and can see how this would be more comfortable for a beginning student. That being said, the Gracie Arizona Jiu Jitsu Academy is the only school that I have seen with an all women's class.

Our partner practice started with "going up and down the body." You practice where you would put your feet on the other person to gain the largest advantage. (hook behind the knees, locked on the hip joints, and pushing against the crux of the elbow). You work your feet up and down your partner's body focusing and pushing



Seta: It takes an average of about 10 years. You can't compare yourself to others. Everyone progresses at their individual pace. Promotions are based on time on the mat, success on the mat, skills learned, etc. Promotions are a big deal and the whole family is invited. Everyone is proud of you for your achievement.

MSSD: Are there forms and one steps?

Seta: No, but we do work on specific skills and techniques that the students can use when they roll.

MSSD: What if the first class is too much for me?

Seta: At some BJJ schools it can be pretty strict, but my students are moms with fears. I want my students to feel welcome. All I ask is that they finish whichever task they are working on. They may be "shrimping" down the mat while everyone else has moved onto the next move or two, but they will be the best "shrimper" they can be. I want them to come back, and next time they will progress to the next move, too.

MSSD: What respectful behavior is expected of me?

Seta: Be on time – this shows respect. Shake your opponents hand before and after your practice or match. Bow out at the end of class.

MSSD: What if I don't want to go barefoot?

Seta: Honestly, I've never had a student worry about this. We all go barefoot.

MSSD: What can a student do for homework inbetween classes? Is it good to do this on one's own?

Seta: My family has a little "mat time" every week at home. We focus on the movements. Once you learn how to move your body effectively, it becomes much easier to learn the specific techniques.



Instructor: Seta Reupenny

as necessary.

Next, we practiced "sweep 1" and "sweep 2". I never really "got" these two, but the general concept is to move your body around in the way that you would need to in order sweep your partner from the right or left side. A sweep is when you position yourself and your partner in a way that you are able to "sweep" their legs out from under them and they end up on the ground.

I felt much better about my attempt at the "berimbola." This was an intricate combination of rolling over and placing your hands and feet on your partner. You use their legs for leverage and move in and out of their legs in a rolling kind of dance. I'm sure it wasn't pretty but at least I kind of got it.

Finally, we laid on our backs and held our partners ankles while they stood. We did a series of leg lifts that would have made Jillian Michaels proud. I was beginning to see why Seta was in such great shape. Donna told me she was a mother of 6, but you would have thought her abs had been flat her whole life.

With our drills completed, Seta called us all together to show us the technique we would be focusing on that day. The all women's class isn't a beginner class, so this was an advanced description of the intricacies of the technique. Seta, carefully demonstrated all the weak spots you need to "shore up" in order to succeed when you roll. Fortunately, I had Donna to fall back on since I had never seen these before. Seta had us focus on making sure that our weight is spread out evenly. She suggested that we visualize a tent. Each corner of the tent has

a spike to hold it in place. We should endeavor to be this stable. It is key to stay close to your partner and block them from being able to move. If they can move, they can move you-not what you want.

After I had practiced with Donna for a while, Seta came over and showed me some of the places that I needed to shore up. BJJ is an excellent combination of physical workout and mental mastery. It is like a chess game. You and your opponent are constantly searching for each other's weaknesses.

Seta, showed us one more key point to focus on and then it was time for us to roll. Donna left me, and I thought for sure I would just end up watching the others roll, but I was so impressed. One by one, the other students came over and invited me to roll with them. We switched partners about every 5 minutes, and not once did I feel left out or awkward. One of the students always jumped right in and made me feel welcome. With that, class was over.

We shook hands and hugged each person from the class. If you had had the pleasure of working with that person that day, you thanked each other as well. After all the hugs were over, Donna came over one more time. She asked if I wanted to join her in the following class, as she usually stays for two more classes and then 2 hours of yoga. What? After I politely declined, she said she hoped to see me next Saturday. These are some Gung ho women, and I was inspired by their openness and commitment.

NEXT ISSUE

Where will you send me next?

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THE STATS

Required uniform?

Yes, you need a heavy duty Gi.

Jill's Note:

Many of the moves use the Gi as an integral part of the move. Interestingly, there is also a style of BJJ called "no Gi". Many of the strategies are completely different without the places to grab onto a Gi. During our pre-class chat, Donna mentioned that without the Gi to soak up the sweat you can more easily wiggle out of your opponent's grip.

What is the flooring?

Nicely padded floor.

Nationwide Price Range:
\$90-\$200 per month

Are there women at the school?

Yes! Seta has developed an all women's class with 10-15 women in every class

How physically exerting is it on a scale of 1 to 10? 1 = sloths are confusing me for a tree, 10 ?

9-It was a great workout; Just about the time I was doing some pretty hard breathing, Seta would stop and gather us around to show us another key point.

Can you accommodate physical challenges?

Yes, we have a blind woman who recently joined our school. It presents a unique challenge to make sure she is comfortable and able to learn the techniques efficiently.

Age limit?

Training begins at the age of 5. After that, there is no age limit on Jiu Jitsu. It is open for all who have the desire to train.

“MARTIAL” versus “ART” scale

1 = ART completely an internal art no combat to 10-MARTIAL – this is down and dirty combat only.

9 – BJJ was developed specifically to be an effective martial art for people with a smaller stature. That being said, there was an incredible amount of respect and honor demonstrated on the mat by both the children and adult students.

-Jill Roth



Jill Roth holds her fourth degree Black Belt with the American Tae Kwon Do Association, a Blue Belt in Kempo, a level 2 Reiki and an NRA Certification in Basic Pistol. She has taught Tae Kwon Do across the country. She studies different types of martial arts all over the state and writes about her experiences in our Wandering Warrior section.



Common Gracie Jiu Jitsu quote:

"If size mattered, the elephant would be the king of the jungle." -Rickson Gracie



The Gracie Arizona Jiu-Jitsu Academy follows the teachings and style of Relson Gracie (pictured to the left). Relson is a member of the Gracie family. He was the Brazilian National Champion for 22 years in a row. He currently lives in Honolulu, Hawaii and teaches Brazilian Jiu Jitsu at his academy in Hawaii.

