

Harris Sensei

June 10, 1939 - September 10, 2008



Sensei Dave Harris



Creative, kind, funny, insightful, caring, and brilliant are just a few descriptions that come to mind when I think about Dave. Though he didn't like the title Master, there is no doubt anyone touching hands with him would agree. If Master Yueng was Yoda, Dave was Obie One.

The first time I met Dave I really didn't meet him. Chuck and I were looking for a Taiji teacher. We heard about Taiji Master Raymond Chung who had a class in the Greenwood area of Seattle. In the middle of the block that currently has Ken's Market was a house or church-like structure. The sign outside: North Seattle School of Karate. We walked up the stairs and entered. Raymond Chung was in the middle of class putting his students through 'running' pushing hands.

We sat down to watch and behind us was a corkboard with several photos. As I turned around there were several pictures of Aikido Master Koichi Tohei, Raymond Chung and this other guy. Raymond was very impressive so I decided to eventually join his class. Unfortunately by the time I wanted to sign up he had stopped teaching in Seattle.



1960's

It was 1972, Tohei taught a seminar in Seattle sponsored by my sensei, the Seattle Aikikai and the UW Aikido Club. During one of the breaks I met this guy that was in some of the photos I saw at the Karate school, his name was Dave Harris.

Dave was a 'hands on' guy. As we talked about martial arts he started showing some Wing Chun. I was excited! (This time period was during the Bruce Lee era and everyone wanted to learn Wing Chun.) He showed some amazing stuff and invited me to his school which

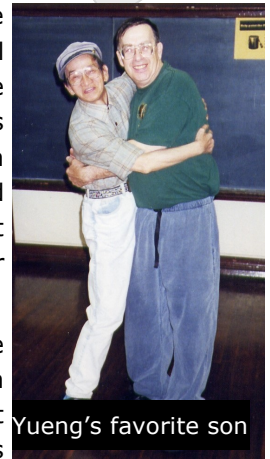
had just moved, four blocks from my mom's house :)

Chuck and I went to visit and were amazed by his skill and friendliness. After that I skipped Monday Aikido night to attend his classes. His students were a bunch of old guys who had been with him for as least

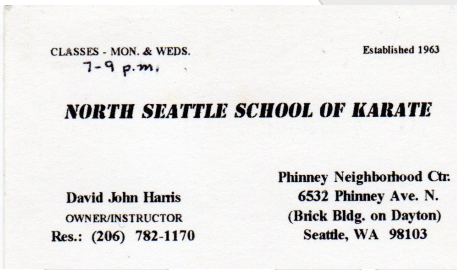
10 years. Needless to say they were very good but not near Dave's level. One of the students we called Uncle Don was the father of two of my judo classmates. He had a third degree black belt in Judo.

We spent the first hour going through various drills and Chi Sau. The second hour he insisted that I learn the traditional Yang Taiji Sanshou so he'd have someone to practice with. This is before I started Taiji with Tchoung. Also, he was interested in the Aikido. We taught him that while he taught us various other forms and weaponry.

Dave's new school was on the corner of 6th Avenue and 65th street in Ballard. Across the street was a bar, on the other corner was a gym. Needless to say there were occasions where a meathead would wander in and try him. The first occasion I witnessed, Dave was working with me on the Chi Sau when this guy comes in and yells, "Who's the teacher here?" He then he comes up to us since we were closest to the door and is face to face with Dave. Dave says, "Can I help you?" The next second the guy tries to sucker punch him. I saw the guy drop to the ground, falling on his straightened arm and Dave holding the guy's glasses. The guy laid there for a moment then yells, "Far out." Dave helps him up and returns his glasses. The guy pretends to leave, turns and tries to punch Dave again. Straight punch to the chest, the guy flies back into the wall by the door. He eventually finds



Yueng's favorite son



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the doorknob and leaves. I've heard many stories like this.

This was one of the reasons Dave really didn't want anyone to know he did martial arts except within a small group of friends. His reputation was known in the martial arts field and he was challenged once in a while. I have more accounts under stories that I heard from students and colleagues.

Dave was an art and creative thinking teacher at North Seattle Community College. His teaching ability matched his martial arts skill. Also, he had done several sculptures, ceramics, and paintings that I thought were awesome. Talking with his colleagues at his memorial, they all talked about his mastery in ceramics. Able to throw a pot effortlessly, then instantly change its shape several times so fast they couldn't see the transitions.

As time went on I became good friends of Dave and Geri. We were pretty much family, though Dave was a very private person and didn't share too much about his life and family. From about the mid 1980's, after our classes we'd meet at the Winchell's and eventually the Pastry Case in Wallingford to discuss martial arts. Mostly I'd be learning from him and listening to his ideas from philosophy to teaching, styles, and applications.



Dave was a strong influence on me. One example was during a class we both attended where the instructor's skill wasn't all that great but his knowledge was. After the instructor showed an application I made a comment about it being kind of awkward and inefficient. Dave turned to me saying, "Maybe so, but look at his footwork, it's really fascinating."

Often he'd bring me out of my narrow view to see other options and look for them. We'd be looking at a picture or a book and I'd say something like the stances aren't very good. Again he would come back with, "It might just be just the angle of the camera."

The week before Jay and I moved into our Ballard home we decided to tear down the kitchen backsplash the contractor had put in so he could redo it. Jay and I were there around 11:30 at night when there's a knock on the door. Dave and Geri were driving by and wondered



if anything was wrong. We filled him in and said our good nights. Fifteen minutes later Dave returns with a toolbox and for the next two hours helps us tear it down.

Dave would try to study with anyone coming through Seattle. Early 1960's he started to study with Master Fook Yueng who eventually named him first son in his teachings. He traveled weekly to the Richmond WA to study with Sid Woodcock studying Shinobi Gumi Aikijitsu. He was the one responsible for bringing Raymond Chung and Tchoung Ta Tchen to Seattle to

teach Taiji. He attended all of Aikido Master Koichi Tohei's seminars in Seattle. When Bagua Master T.Y. Pang arrived we both signed up as well as when Master Zhang Jie started teaching. He also attended workshops taught by Master Gao Fu. The list goes on.

HISTORY

Dave's father had a bakery on Greenwood Ave. across from Ken's market. He worked in his dad's shop which is probably where he got those big forearms kneading dough for bread. He went to the University of Washington and during that time was also studying Karate. I can't remember the name of his instructor or the club but after achieving his Shodan he decided to leave due to the unsavory character of the instructor and organization. The instructor eventually went back to Japan. Dave started his own school across from his father's bakery which was the place I originally went to.

GERALDINE HARRIS (Watson)

I can't talk about Dave without including Geri. When I studied with Dave she was always watching the class. Though she didn't do martial arts, when I got stuck on a form she'd yell out the next direction and move to me. A little know fact is that she had won first place in an archery competition while in school.

Dave was devoted to her as she to him. However she was a bit insecure and unfortunately made Dave promise that he wouldn't permit women in his class. This is a fact! It was not Dave's decision. This is why I started sponsoring several workshops for Dave. This way I was able to open enrollment to women interested in studying with him.



February 22, 1941 - November 11, 2009



Dave & Gene during our Taiji class.

All of us owe a great deal to Geri since she was responsible for all the pictures and most of the video's we have of him and his art. She tried to record everything. Sometimes being very obtrusive.

They both were very frugal and would be sure to fill up an entire VHS tape, on the 8hr mode, before giving it to me to copy. I was lucky in that Dave wanted me to have backup copies of all his tapes. To this day I still haven't had a chance to view all of them but I was smart enough to digitize them. He also gave me permission to sell them if there was interest. My online collection are some of those tapes.

Knowing Dave since the early 1970's I had the privilege to see his progression in teaching over the years as well as his skill advancement, in addition to him getting softer and lighter. I also was able to witness how his art moved from technical to amazing effortlessly-scary. When I could only see him monthly, he'd be leaps ahead of the last time I touched hands with him.

I remember getting to a level where, though I couldn't do anything about it, I could feel the technique coming. Then, all of a sudden he'd totally blow my mind by having three techniques, or possibilities going on at the same time. Then he'd move to the point where I couldn't feel him at all.



Workshop for Bernie

The only three people I've ever seen get the better of Dave were Masters: Yueng, Tchoung Ta Tchen, and Sid Woodcock. Master Yueng would tie him up in knots to the point where he couldn't move at all. Yueng would just play with him like a little child, just like Dave played with us. Woodcock would manipulate his balance using leading techniques and kiaiitsu. Both skills which Dave picked up and used often.

Before one of our Taiji class started, Dave was showing me some trapping hands movement. Tchoung noticed us from across the room and came over. He looked at Dave and said, "you try?" The

minute they touched hands Dave flew into the wall. The third time Tchoung said, "I let you try." Dave tried to do a move and again was thrown into the wall. At that moment I decided to make Taiji my primary study. Whatever Tchoung did was effortless.

Tchoung had much respect for Dave's skill and asked him to do a presentation of sticky hands at the 1996 Taiji Conference. As I helped Dave it was fun to see Tchoung and other masters (Victor Fu, Xu Gong Wei, Daniel Lee) on the side carefully studying what he was doing. Some miming his movements.



Dave & Tchoung 1996

MEETING MASTER YUENG

I don't know the year but Dave was already teaching karate when he met Mr. Fook Yueng. A friend of Dave's asked him if he was interested in meeting his kung fu teacher. This teacher taught in China town and he'd be willing to introduce Dave to him. (Master Yueng was Bruce Lee's kung fu uncle, teacher, and mentor. He was also godfather to Lee's children.)

Of course Dave said yes, being interested in all martial arts. After greetings, Dave said Mr. Yueng took this deep cat stance with his butt only 2 inches from the ground. Yueng asked him what kind of attack would he use for this posture. Dave told him that if he saw a man, Yueng's age in such a low stance like that, he'd run fast in the opposite direction. Mr. Yueng laughed and accepted him as a student.

Mr. Yueng worked as a cook so he taught late at night. When I first met him he taught 1 AM Monday mornings. Too late for me since I was in high school.

Dave said one of the forms he learned was a 7 man weapons fighting set with each person using a different weapon. Though there were several students in the early days, Dave became one of



1960's Yueng & Dave

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Yueng's top students. Talking with Dave's older students they saw the change and influence Yueng had on Dave from the beginning. Moving from hard, stiff karate-like movements to smaller, more fluid ones.

One of the forms he taught Dave was the Yang Taiji 108 form. After learning the entire form Yueng told Dave that if he wanted to refine it and learn more he should visit his friend Raymond Chung, a Taiji master that lived in Vancouver BC. He immediately went up to visit Master Chung. Dave convinced Raymond Chung to begin commuting and teaching in Seattle.

STUDYING WITH WOODCOCK

I don't know how Dave heard about Woodcock but in the 1960's he would travel to Richland WA to study with him.

Dave mentioned that Woodcock would always be testing them. In the changing room, once in a while, he'd throw a knife along the floor to watch students reactions. He did this once when I was studying with him in Seattle. In the early 1970's Woodcock started teaching twice a week at Dave's studio to a select group of students. After a year Woodcock wasn't able to continue classes due to his other ventures! *See stories or Woodcock chapter.*

When Dave's dojo moved to the Phinney Center, Woodcock started showing up and teaching. At that time Dave would visit my Taiji and Bagua classes often. Woodcock's presence started interrupting Dave's classes. He'd bring various guns and knives to show and demonstrate use and disarming techniques. Dave felt his students weren't interested in what he was teaching anymore and was thinking about closing his school. Dave was very depressed during this time and would come and practice with us.

Geri steps in!



Dave promised Geri that he wouldn't allow women in his class when they got married. This was true. Geri was suspicious of other women. As Woodcock's classes continued he'd invite his secretaries and other women to join the class. At one point it was too much for Geri to handle. She confronted Woodcock and told him to find another place to teach if the women were to continue in the class.

Woodcock moved his class elsewhere and sadly a few of Dave's student left with him.

ALZHEIMERS

Though Dave was a very conversational and sharing man, always with a joke or story, he was also a very private man. I know he had a brother who owned a large piece of property with a lake on it that passed away, Dave inherited the property. There wasn't much talk about his family or growing up aside from working at his dad's bakery and his U.W. days. Geri also handled all the finances, Dave had no clue as to what they had.

When Geri started showing symptoms of Alzheimers he either didn't notice, ignored it, or kept it to himself. As it became more apparent I'd ask Dave how he was doing and if everything was alright. The answer was that all was just fine and then onto another subject. Geri's cousin, Ramona, whom they'd see once in a while finally brought up the issue with the result being Dave and Geri not having anymore contact with them. As things got worse Dave retired from his job to be home for Geri.

In the last year Dave and Geri would come by my nursery to visit and she would spend time petting our shop cat as Dave and I chatted.

They would also show up in the evenings at my dojo and Dave asked if I would teach Geri a simple Taiji form. It was clear at that time Dave was in denial. He thought that Taiji would help her focus and think clearly. As I started working with



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her it was clear that she wasn't doing well and getting worse. I started first showing her basic movements from the form but she couldn't follow or understand. Eventually I had her just moving her arms and following me. Basically cloud hands.



Dave - Yueng - Jessie

During this time Dave would sit and chat with one of my students. I encouraged them to go visit with him and ask him any questions they had. Also for him to show them applications, which he loved to do. He really needed the time out. Eventually I'd just let her hold my arm and we'd go for a little walk. She's ramble a bit and say she wasn't safe but I was safe. Sometimes Dave would practice his Taiji as I distracted Geri.



Sid Woodcock

As highly skilled Dave was at art and martial arts he and Geri weren't caretakers or homebodies. Neither cooked so they always ate out. Geri just kept getting worse since she wasn't seeing a doctor. Being out of his

capability and range, apparently Dave kept sinking into a dark hole with the situation. I remember talking with him the night before he took his life. Things seemed like always. He told one of his corny jokes in order not to answer or talk about how he was doing. I volunteered to walk Geri anytime of the day if he needed to get away or take some time off.

His memorial was attended by Masters: Fook Yueng, Sid Woodcock, Jessie Glover, Steve Smith. Jessie (Bruce Lee's first student) said that Dave was probably the most skilled martial artists the world didn't know.



Me - Steve - Jessie

After Dave's death Geri was admitted to a hospital by her cousin Ramona. The first few months she seemed to improve under the medication. When I visited her she recognized me and we were able to have a short conversation. She turned for the worse

after a couple of months and didn't recognize me at all. Then she started to become violent toward the other patients to the point they had to keep her medicated. She passed away a year later.

STORIES

When Jay and I were getting ready to open Emerald City Gardens Dave and Geri would stop by often. On one occasion, as we were painting, they came by and Dave gave us \$500 in cash. He and Geri hoped it would help cover some of the paint costs.

Pic #1: Dave was holding a phone book. Woodcock was able to punch and decide which one of us would feel the punch! He'd whisper into Geri's ear who, punch, and sure enough it worked.

Dave studied art at the UW. One of his classmates heard that Dave knew Karate. Dave rounded a corner to see this guy attacking with a fireman's axe. Dave hooked a stool and kicked it at the attacker putting his front teeth out.



Steve - Yueng - Me - Angela

While Woodcock was teaching at Dave's there were certain visitors from Central America visiting. He recruited some of the class to help train them. Sid was an ex- OSS/CIA operative and would take trips often to Central America. He was one of the primary investigators in the Oklahoma City Bombing.

While closing his school, on the way to his car, Dave noticed he couldn't find his car keys. Grabbing a flashlight he started looking at the ground between the school and his car. Three jerks from the body building gym started hassling him. One tried to punch him and he dispatched the first, second one he hear a snap of some kind. The third stopped and

Dave told him to take his friends to the hospital.

A Tae Kwan Do guy came to watch Dave's class having heard of him. Calling him a fake, Dave invited the guy to attack. Dave evaded and had the guy cowering in a corner. Dave stopped, the guy stood up claiming it was all fake and left.

When Dave's school moved to the Greenlake area, Dave would arrive early and go to the Starbucks down the block. Some Bruce Lee fanatic saw him and challenged Dave. Dave responded: "I'm in my 70's, false teeth, out of shape, and legally blind." "If you beat me you've picked on an old out-of-shape senior citizen." "If I beat you, you'll have been beaten by an old fart!" The guy left saying he didn't look like Dave was any challenge.

During one of our after class visits, Dave gave me a quiz to take. This was from his creative thinking class. The questions on this quiz plotted, on a graph, how an individual sees and learns. What the strong and weak points were.

After taking the quiz he explained my strong points. In addition, it was important for me to translate what I was taught by traditional teachers into a way I could understand it. This, I believe, has helped me in learning in school and martial arts, as well as being a good teacher. Try to translate what they say into your language.

You give a child a bike, not assembled, for Christmas.

- ◆ First kid opens the box and talks about how cool the bike is and all the exercise he will get and where he can go.
- ◆ Second kid opens the box and lays out all the parts and starts following the directions.
- ◆ Third kid opens the box, pulls out all the parts and starts trying to put it together. Extra screws? Didn't need them.
- ◆ Fourth kid opens the box, looks at it, and builds a unicycle.

The four basic types

What I Learned:

Think outside the box

To be polite

Not to judge

Keep an open mind

Always learn

Kindness

Patience

Humor

Sharing

Family



Dave Harris Thought He Could Do It All - And He Almost Could

DAVE HARRIS

June 20, 1939–Sept. 10, 2008

Artist-Teacher

Dave taught at the art department of North Seattle Community College during the day, and then taught martial arts in the evening. He was very low key, one of those guys you might see and never recognize the skill and talent hidden beneath. Dave lived in two separate worlds: One as a brilliant artist and art teacher, the another as an internationally known martial arts expert. Dave grew up in the Phinney Ridge neighborhood, working in his parents' bakery on Greenwood Avenue and attending John B Allen Elementary School (now the Phinney Neighborhood Center).

In his youth, Dave began intensively studying the martial arts, opening his own school in 1963 on Greenwood Avenue, in the same block as Ken's Market. He never stopped teaching martial arts, moving his club to the Phinney Neighborhood Center in the late 1980s.

A year after opening his school, Dave married his sweetheart Geraldine, on Feb. 14, 1964 —Valentine's Day. The two of them were inseparable. Dave was a devoted husband and Gerry was his biggest fan. Though Gerry didn't study the martial arts, I remember her at many of the classes and workshops he taught. She videotaped every workshop and seminar of his since the early 1980s. She documented not just Dave's classes but also many masters visiting Seattle. I'm honored they shared them with me.

My nickname for Dave was Dumbledore. He moved fluidly and performed like a magician. His skill in the martial arts was so high that it never was apparent what was happening. And though he was recognized as an expert in Taiji, Bagua, Aikijitsu, and Wing Chun, he had moved beyond the stylized art forms and was known for his own personal style. Sometimes called Yueng Quan after his primary Kung Fu teacher, his personal style was formally Shoshin Ryu Aikijujitsu (beginner's mind techniques of harmony and softness). He referred to it as Improvisational Eclectic Chinese Hand Dancing" or Jazz. Dave's pursuit of the art was to have fun and play, not to fight, but to study energy in movement and the dynamics of balance, intent and momentum. Dave



touched many lives in so many ways. Of the most important were his love, skill and creativity, whether he was teaching ceramics, visual thinking or the martial arts. Those who knew Dave also knew that each time you saw him he would start with a joke - not always a good joke!

Many of his college students and colleagues were surprised to hear that Dave was also a martial arts teacher. Dave didn't mention it except to close friends. The reason for this is that Dave achieved notoriety for his skill in the martial arts world during the late 1960s. Like in the old west, challengers would pop up now and then. There was no question of his ability to apply his skill. I personally witnessed two events, while in his class, when someone would barge in, pretending to ask about the class, and try to sucker punch him. Inches away, I couldn't see what happened, but the individual was on the floor in pain. In one incident, Dave had scooped off the guy's glasses before dropping him. I know one incident where two attackers had to be taken to Ballard Hospital by the third. Dave didn't like hurting people, which was one reason he kept quiet about his school.

Three years ago Gerry began displaying symptoms of Alzheimer's. Devoted as Dave was, he retired from teaching this year to take care of her. As skilled as he was in other areas, the job of caretaker was just too much for him, contributing to his untimely death. It's important for all of us to recognize when we're in over our head and to accept or ask for help. There were several friends and students offering help, but sadly Dave thought he could do it himself. Just to hear one of those bad jokes again!

-- Andrew T. Dale, friend and student of Dave and Gerry since 1970.

Dave online memorial: [www.wuji.com/Harris Sensei/tribute.htm](http://www.wuji.com/Harris_Sensei/tribute.htm)

PHINNEY RIDGE REVIEW Winter 2009