

My Journey with Hapkido-Founder

Shin-Son Nim Ji, Han Jae

These days, the title “Grandmaster” has become somewhat cliché. There is a long-standing joke in the U.S. that “there are more Grandmasters in New Jersey than in all of Asia”. Hailing from New Jersey, I find this somewhat saddening. Truth be told, the same could be said for most states or territories in the US and or Canada, and many other countries as well. The trend over the past couple of decades has been to ‘create’ one’s own art (usually by making a silly play on the wording of an already established art) and/or to simply promote one’s self. Sad indeed. What ever happened to patience and integrity? What about virtues such as dedication, loyalty, and *the others related to the martial arts?*

The first true “**Grandmaster**” that I came to know was the founder of Korean Hapkido, “DoJuNim” Ji, Han Jae. It was the mid 1980’s and as we called him then, ‘Grandmaster’ Ji had just moved to the United States. I was a young Blackbelt, dojang owner, and full-contact fighter. Little did I know that my true journey through the martial arts was taking on a new beginning. In those days, Grandmaster Ji spoke little-to-no English. This however was not a hindrance as his techniques did all of the talking. His tone was always swift, to the point, direct and painful.

While Grandmaster Ji had first landed on the west coast and resided in California, he taught seminars throughout the country and world. It was

on one of his earliest east-coast seminar tours that he and I met. I had traveled to upstate New York for a large martial arts symposium. As a “martial arts orphan” (my instructor had stopped teaching), this was a great way for me to continue my own growth and development. There were a number of high-caliber and famous martial arts superstars on the ticket for this four-day event. When I first saw Grandmaster Ji, there was something about his aura that drew me in.

Despite the fact that I was fairly well-read and had a deep appreciation for all things Korean and martial arts, the name “Ji, Han Jae” was unfamiliar to me. Even with this, there was something about his face and persona that seemed familiar. As it turns out, it was Grandmaster Ji’s starring in the iconic “Game of Death”, Bruce Lee’s last film that made him recognizable, and yet few westerners knew anything of him. Once the break-out training sessions began, I chose his first.

As Grandmaster Ji taught that first seminar session, I watched in amazement. His movements were unlike anything that I had ever seen or felt. Terrifying and torturous are two words that come to mind. A physically small man, Grandmaster Ji was destroying the opponents that stood in front of him with obvious ease. The product of a strict upbringing, I would like to note that adherence to manners and protocol have always been a part of my makeup. None the less, I was about to learn a valuable lesson in cultural misunderstanding. For all intents and purposes, Grandmaster Ji had come from another world. In his world, including in both government and military service, a subordinate does NOT ask a superior a question, as it would disrespectfully translate into a direct challenge. Not knowing this custom, I asked Grandmaster Ji the following question: *“Sir, would that technique work on even a large opponent?”* His eyes burned a hole right

through me. His translator (who may have sold me short) uttered a few words to him. I realize now that what he heard was: *“That technique would never work on me”!* With that Grandmaster Ji made a bee line across the floor and launched an attack upon me. If I remember correctly, and I do, it was a #21 SinMoo Kick (“Knee Sidekicking”), and he drove his knee sharply downward to the top of my thigh / quad area. My right leg was immediately paralyzed and my blood pressure rose rapidly. I was sure that he had fractured my right femur. A moment later he struck again, this time with a #3 SinMoo Kick (“Charlie-Cow”). He buried his heel deep into the side of my left upper-leg, and clear to the bone. DoJuNim Ji still recalls that interaction fondly, and reminds me that the color of my face following those kicks was that of a ripe tomato. As the seminar progressed, I had earned my place as his number-one victim. This was a dubious honor indeed, but one that would serve me well in the long run. At one point he had applied a painful “Z-Lock” to my right wrist, dropping me to my knees. Still holding firmly he asked in his trademarked broken-English, “You have patience”? Naturally, and knowing fully that ‘patience’ is a primary martial arts virtue, I replied “Yes Sir”. With that he cranked harder. He ask again, “You have patience”? Of course I answered appropriately “Yes Sir”! After the third time he threw me back in disgust and walked back to the center of the mat. I was pretty sure that he didn’t like me. I later learned that when he asked whether I had patience, he meant *“can you take the pain”*. Unknowing, I had answered ‘Yes’...again seemingly challenging the Grandmaster. That day like most was full of powerful life lessons.

Finally, the first class session was over. Most of the folks in the crowd were relieved to escape Grandmaster Ji’s painful grip, and looked forward to something a little softer or more entertaining. I thought

about where to go next. Whether it was destiny or insanity, I decided to take Grandmaster Ji's class again, and then every session he offered for the rest of the symposium. When he saw me that second and each subsequent time, he would clench his teeth, give me a stern glare and utter a grunt, much like the chuff of a discontent tiger.

On the final evening of the event, Bill "Superfoot" Wallace, Joe Lewis and others had invited me to join them to the movies. As you can imagine I was excited to go. It was late that night as we returned to the hotel where the symposium had been held. Most of the martial artists had left for home. Sitting there on the sofa in the vast lobby was Grandmaster Ji. His eyes locked onto mine. He pointed at me and gestured that I approach. I looked to see that he was really signaling to me. He was. I thought to myself, "Oh no, what will he do to me now"? I was already pretty broken up from the many hours of training. He invited me to sit down across from him. He asked me, and again in broken-English, "Why you come my class"? I answered "Yes Sir. Because I like your technique and I want to learn your technique". For the first time, I saw a slight smile come across his chiseled face. He replied "I know. Last night, I sleeping time, big dream. I dream that you my teacher in other life. Our destiny, we must together". With this he placed his hands together and looked deeply into my eyes. Either this was the best sales pitch ever or his dream had really occurred. Sensing that it was the later, I believed him. We have been together ever since.

Having started my own training in Judo in the late 1960's, traditional Korean Hapkido and ITF-style TaeKwon-Do had been my life's pursuit since the mid-1970's. I thought that I was pretty good as a practitioner, competitor, and as a teacher. After this first weekend with the

“Grandmaster” (aka. DoJuNim Ji, Han Jae), I realized that I had a lot to learn...and I was hungry.

A wise man once told me that life is like driving a car, and in my case, a racecar. The rear-view mirror is centered, however quite small in comparison to the much larger windshield. The rear-view mirror is for looking back...reflection. The windshield is for seeing what is before you in the present, as well as what lies ahead. Both are important.

The Past: A brief look into Hapkido’s rich history:

Ji, Han Jae was born in Andong, South Korea during those turbulent years of the Japanese occupation. It was 1936 and a future icon had arrived. A schoolboy at the age of thirteen, Ji, Han Jae started his training in 1949. Ji’s first martial arts teacher was Choi, Yong Sool. Originally sent to Japan as a slave-boy, Choi found himself living with an affluent Japanese family. Because he was said to have been both cute and charming, and able to sing and dance, the family was soon enamored with the young Choi. For this reason he was raised as a son rather than a slave. Having lived most of his life in Japan, Choi had learned Yawara and Daito-Ryu AikiJutsu from the great Sokaku Takeda, and finally returned to his homeland of Korea following WWII. Now back in Korea, he did the only thing that knew in order to make a living...he taught martial arts. In the early days of Choi’s classes, the young Ji, Han Jae was one of the youngest in the class. The techniques Ji learned at this time were primarily joint locks, throws, low kicks, and sword techniques. He trained directly under Choi until moving to Seoul in 1957.

Like many of **the early masters**, Ji, Han Jae had more than one teacher. The first had been Choi Yong Sool. The second was to become “Lee Do-Sah”, or “Wiseman Lee”. Lee’s father was an herbal medicine doctor who had treated Ji’s mother while ill. Lee’s age was approximate to that of Ji’s father. Lee, now known as “Lee Do-Sa” was Ji's ancient-arts instructor. **Ji** used the term "Taoist" (“Taoist Lee”) when he first arrived in the USA because it was the closest word he could find to describe Lee Do-Sa (*NOTE: The history of the ancient arts and warriors of the **Baekje Kingdom** / 3-Kingdoms era will be presented by myself in a later article*). Lee Do-Sa trained Ji primarily in mediation, the use of the Jang-Bong (6' staff), the Dan-Bong (short stick), *and* other traditional weapons. Lee Do-Sa also taught Ji the complete kicking arts of the ancient **Baekje Warriors**, in some ways similar to those found in Korean Taekkyeon/Taekgyeon. Now with the myriad of kicking techniques, high jumping and striking techniques from Lee Do-Sah, Ji, had a perfect complement to the grounded techniques of **Yawara** and **Daito-Ryu AikiJutsu** as taught by Grandmaster Choi. Being a strong patriot, Ji’s thoughts were already stirring on the development of an all new and all-Korean martial art. Ji was quite the fighter in those years. It was common for him to travel from village to village, and from dojang to dojang challenging and fighting other martial artists, fighters, and gangsters. He knew that if he and his martial arts were to be the best in the world that he would need to prove it to *everyone* (*Sidebar: The great Washington DC-based TaeKwon-Do Grandmaster Jhoon Rhee once explained to me over breakfast at a Chuck Norris “Kick Drugs Out of America” event in Chicago that in Korea, everyone knew Ji, Han Jae’s name. He was greatly feared and greatly respected as the best fighter in the land. He was a legend and folks feared him. Coming from such a reputable source, this made me proud!*). In addition to the important martial aspects of training, Lee Do-Sa had also begun Ji on his mental

and spiritual training, along with a broad base of breathing *and* meditation exercises. Ji trained with Lee Do-Sa for almost five years while living in Tae-Guek City. It was years later, and after moving to Seoul, that Ji continued his training with one of Lee Do-Sa's teachers, "Grandma", or "*Hal Ma Nee*". The person known today only as 'Grandma' was reported to have had special powers. Ji would spend hours with Grandma at a temple / holistic healing complex in *Yo Ju Ee Cheon City* for terminally ill individuals. He spent about 3 years with her and considers Grandma to be his spiritual teacher. Much about "Grandma" remains a mystery, although several of her disciples went on the greatness. More will be documented in my coming book.

Because of the lingering tensions between the Koreans and the Japanese, many of Choi, Yong Sul's students did not like the idea of propagating Japanese martial arts. It was another of Choi's earliest students, and classmates of Ji's named Suh Bub Su who suggested the name **Yu Kwan Sool**. It was back in Andong that Ji, then a 2nd Dan, opened his first dojang at the age of twenty-one, which he then called Andong Yon Moo Kwan ("*Andong Military/Martial Art-Exercise/Practice Institute*") and taught Yu Kwan Sool. After approximately nine months in Andong, Ji decided to relocate back to the much-larger and capital city of Seoul. When Ji, Han Jae left Andong, he gave his dojang to Yu, Young Woo, and old friend from middle-school who was also Ji's martial art student. Ji was confident in Yu's skills and was confident that he would maintain the dojang. Yu, Young Woo was later the instructor of Oh Se Lim of the KHF (*Sidebar: GM Scott Yates and I were introduced to GM Yu at a hospital in Andong, South Korea in 2010. It was an emotional reunion between he and DoJuNim Ji, Han Jae, as GM Yu was very ill and nearing the end of his life*).

Ji relocated to Seoul in September of 1957. For part of his time in Seoul, he lived in a house that he had built for himself. He worked for 10 months as an architect/road and bridge engineer for City Hall. He also stayed in a boarding house in Wang Shim Ri. The son of the owner of the boarding house, Hwang, Duk Kyu, was his first student at this dojang, called Sung Moo Kwan where he taught *Dae Han Hap Ki Yu Kwon Sool*. While fully adopted later, it was in this year 1957 that the name 'Hapkido' was first appeared. As history has shown, Ji, Han Jae was the first to coin the term and thus, the rightful founder to the 'Hapkido' system. One variation as termed by Ji, Han Jae in 1957 was 'Dae Han Hapkido Hwe'. Among other similar definitions, the name / term "Hapkido" can be literally translated to "the way of coordinated power".

In 1958, Ji moved his school to Joong Boo Shi Jang where he continued teaching until April of 1960. It was during this period that Ji continued to piece together the Yu Sool (Yu Kwan Sool) teachings of Grandmaster Choi, with the methods of meditation, the kicking and weapons techniques of the ancient Baekje Warriors as learned from Lee Do-Sa, along with the spiritual training he received from Grandma (aka. "Hal Ma Nee"). The product was "**Hapkido**." Ji had originally thought of calling his fledgling martial art "HapKi-Yu -Kwan-Sool". While descriptively sound, he soon decided against that name, feeling that it was too long and would prove difficult for people to remember. Ji used the model of other martial arts he had heard of, such as TaeKwon-Do *and* Dang Soo Do, in which the word 'Do' means 'the way', a path to follow, or a way of life. He liked this rather than simply 'techniques' as implied via the term 'sool', because it gave a better idea of the depth and variety of techniques found in Hapkido. It is interesting too that

even at this time much of the emphasis of Hapkido was on kicking. This is still evident today in Korea where most true Hapkido schools emphasize kicking, in addition to the plethora of other techniques and skills found in the art.

Because Grandmaster Ji had many dojangs and students under his care, he was recognized widely as an excellent instructor. Because he had developed and trained so many strong and talented instructors, including those who taught law-enforcement and military personnel, he was recognized widely as a true master. Because he had developed and trained so many strong and talented master-instructors, he was recognized widely as a true grandmaster. Later and because so many others had erroneously claimed the title of grandmaster, Ji was known to his loyal followers as “Chung Kwang-Jang Nim” (‘Honorable Highest Grandmaster’). As pointed out early in this writing, these titles have been so-often misused. Because of this, Ji was named “DoJuNim” by his devoted students. This title translates to the “Honorable Founder of the Way”. To this date, “DoJuNim” Ji, Han Jae has only ever allowed one other person to bear this title. I know this because I was there, and we have spoken of it in confidence. His name is Dr. He-Young Kim of Korean Han Mu Do.

DoJuNim Ji Han Jae went on to ‘found’ most of the larger Hapkido organizations still found in Korea today. Their leadership are all comprised of DoJuNim Ji’s early students. He is widely known to have been the last teacher to his friend, the late-great Bruce Lee. DoJuNim Ji was featured in four (4) martial arts films: “**Game of Death**” with Bruce Lee; “Fist of the Unicorn Palm”; “Hapkido” (aka. “Lady Kung-Fu”) and; “Dragon Tamers”. He was also a teacher to many of the stars of the

Golden Harvest films of that era. Coming in the 1980's, the evolution of DoJuNim Ji's Hapkido art is SinMoo Hapkido, or just **SinMoo** ("Higher Mind Martial Art") at the higher levels. In addition to founding the arts of Hapkido and SinMoo Hapkido, Ji's most notable accomplishment may have been his service to his country's President Park Chung Hee for eighteen years as a prominent member of the presidential bodyguarding staff. DoJuNim Ji, Han Jae's list of accomplishments are far too vast to name in this piece. For reference sake, a definitive history of both Ji, Han Jae and Hapkido can be found in my November, 2014 cover-feature article in TaeKwon-Do Times magazine. The SinMoo Hapkido book series will also be coming next year.

"Far be it that we dwell too much upon the past, for we may miss the beauty and opportunity found in the present".

The Present (2010 ~ 2015):

In the summer of 2010, DoJuNim Ji and I planned a large week-long seminar to be held in South Korea. Already the president of the 'World SinMoo Hapkido Federation', I knew that this would be a huge undertaking. The location was the Sun-Moon University in Cheonan, near the headquarters for Samsung. While there have been a number of the popular "International Hapkido Summit's" held annually in Voorhees, New Jersey since that time, this event known as the "Handing Down of the Techniques Seminar" was thought at the time to be the last. DoJuNim had been ill and feared that his time was short. Devoted Hapkido leaders from around the globe attended. The level of training was high. DoJuNim Ji was proud of his loyal Hapkido family. The highlight of the week was the elevation of DoJuNim Ji's top

grandmasters to the unprecedented level of 10th Dahn. Grandmasters Merrill Jung (Hong Kong / California, USA), Juerg Ziegler (Switzerland) and I (Kenneth P. MacKenzie) were appointed to this rank, and burdened with the 10th Dahn 'Gold Belt'. There are few words to describe that moment. The magnitude of the responsibility placed upon us was massive.

The event was unprecedented and a great success. This success was in despite of a well-known situation where someone actually attempted to leverage politics and finances to purchase a 10th Dahn from DoJuNim (an attempt that is often made even today by unscrupulous individuals). At that time DoJuNim Ji created the "Supreme Grandmaster's Council", and named the three of us (MacKenzie, Jung, and Ziegler) as permanent members. Much like the Knights of the Roundtable, we had much work to do. While DoJuNim Ji had initially claimed that there would be no more elevations to 10th Dahn, several other strong Hapkido leaders were publically named to that rank in the ensuing years. These included: GM Masson Ghorbani (Iran / Ireland) who will oversee SinMoo Hapkido in Ireland and the entire Middle-East; GM Geoff Booth (Australia) and; GM InWan Kim (Korea / Florida, USA). These and others have formed a unique 'Brotherhood' in which mutual respect, support, and a desire to further the art are at the center.

Two of the many "Movers & Shakers" and supporters of DoJuNim Ji that must be mentioned here are GM's John Godwin and Scott Yates. Grandmaster Godwin has hosted over three hundred (300) active seminars with DoJuNim. The owner and operator of seven dojangs, and traveling the world teaching SinMoo Hapkido, GM Godwin has impacted tens of thousands of students in a positive and lasting way. GM Yates is my top-ranking student, and has become DoJuNim Ji's favorite seminar co-instructor and demonstration partner. Along with

myself, GM's Godwin and Yates have logged more on-the-mat training hours with DoJuNim Ji than anyone in the world or in history.

The past five years have proven strong for Hapkido and SinMoo Hapkido. With the support of Hapkido's best, DoJuNim Ji and I (and/or GM Godwin and Yates) have taken our '**World SinMoo Hapkido Federation**' seminars and training to many areas including: North America; Central America; South America; Africa; Asia, Australia; Europe; Eastern-Europe; Scandinavia and; beyond.

Held every autumn, the 'International Hapkido Summit' continues to be the world's largest gathering of SinMoo Hapkido leaders. This is a must-attend event for any serious Hapkido enthusiast. SinMoo Hapkido has also been spotlighted at several Hall-of-Fames, as well as the world's leading Korean martial arts events: the 'KMAM HOF' (Korean Martial Arts Master's Hall-of-Fame / GM's Rudy Timmerman & Ken MacKenzie); the 'ITS' (International Training Seminar / GM Geoff Booth); the 'KMAF' (Korean Martial Arts Festival / CM Thomas Gordon); and Austria's 'Budo-Gala' (GM Perry Zmugg) to name a few. Given SinMoo Hapkido's awesome repertoire of techniques, and with DoJuNim Ji being the only surviving founder of a 'tier-1' Asian martial arts, the demand remains high.

Future:

Having been together now for nearly thirty (30) years, I look back at my time with DoJuNim Ji with great joy. While the journey continues, each moment and memory are like pieces of a puzzle. As the pieces are laid out upon the table of life, the picture becomes clearer, and the beauty more vibrant.

From the start of my first dojang, so much of the focus has been on the positive development of youth. Children are the future. Hapkido is the best vehicle for training the young in mind, body, and spirit. SinMoo is the standard for all of Hapkido as-per-the-founder, DoJuNim Ji, Han Jae. The honor of inheriting the leadership and helm of SinMoo Hapkido cannot be expressed in words. I am fortunate to know DoJuNim Ji, Han Jae as both my teacher and as my adopted-father.

This year, DoJuNim Ji, Han Jae will be known as Shin-Son Nim...*and there is only one!*

I look forward to the future with great optimism and vision. It is my pledge to maintain the high standards and mission of the 'World SinMoo Hapkido Federation'. They are as follows:

World Sin Moo Hapkido Federation

MISSION STATEMENT

- To preserve the true art of Hapkido / Sin-Moo Hapkido in its entirety, ensuring the art's ability to serve humanity well beyond the 21st century.
- To serve and guide the leadership of Hapkido / Sin-Moo Hapkido worldwide and to serve as a resource to the larger Korean martial arts community.

- To put into practice those principles and teachings of Hapkido's true founder, DoJuNim Ji Han Jae, as a vehicle to enhance the quality of life for all who practice the art.
- To maintain the rich traditions of Hapkido / Sin Moo Hapkido while, at the same time, utilizing modern and cutting-edge technologies, thus allowing the art to forever expand.

Written by: Grandmaster Ken MacKenzie. A martial artist since 1968, MacKenzie is the Heir-Apparent to Korean Hapkido-Founder Ji, Han Jae's systems. Receiving his 10th Dahn (Golden-Belt) in SinMoo Hapkido in Cheonan, South Korea in 2010, MacKenzie has been given the title of "***Chung-Kwang Day Son-Sah***" (this title supersedes all Dahn levels), as well as permanent President for all of SinMoo / Sin-Moo Hapkido. MacKenzie is also a 'Master-Instructor' in traditional ITF-Style TaeKwon-Do. While operating his chain of dojangs in southern New Jersey, MacKenzie serves as the President to DoJuNim Ji, Han Jae's "World SinMoo Hapkido Federation", serving thousands of dedicated martial artists worldwide. For more information, please e-mail the headquarters dojang at: MacKenzieHapkido@comcast.net or see www.WorldSinMooHapkidoFederation.com