

CALASANZ

Karate, Kung Fu, Kickboxing & Physical Arts



Calasanz

A Lifetime of Lessons

Detailed events and interesting perspectives in the life, history and philosophy of Martial Arts Expert:

Calasanz

Creator of the Calasanz System, which is widely regarded as one of the most innovative and effective martial arts systems of the past several decades.

This is his story...





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Introduction

I came to the United States in 1979 and established one of the most successful martial arts schools in the country. While many schools struggle to keep their doors open, my business has grown every year since I emigrated from the Dominican Republic. My success has not been by accident or stroke of luck. It took a lot of hard work. I had to prove myself as a martial artist and make a name for myself in a country where I was unknown.

From the first day I stepped into a martial arts club, I knew that I was not going to be a competitor in the traditional sense of the word. I knew in my heart that I had a gift for the martial arts and that I was going to devote my life to practicing and teaching. “What if I don’t compete?” I asked myself, “Will I still learn how to fight?” I knew I had to be real and as you will see by my story, went to great lengths to prove it.

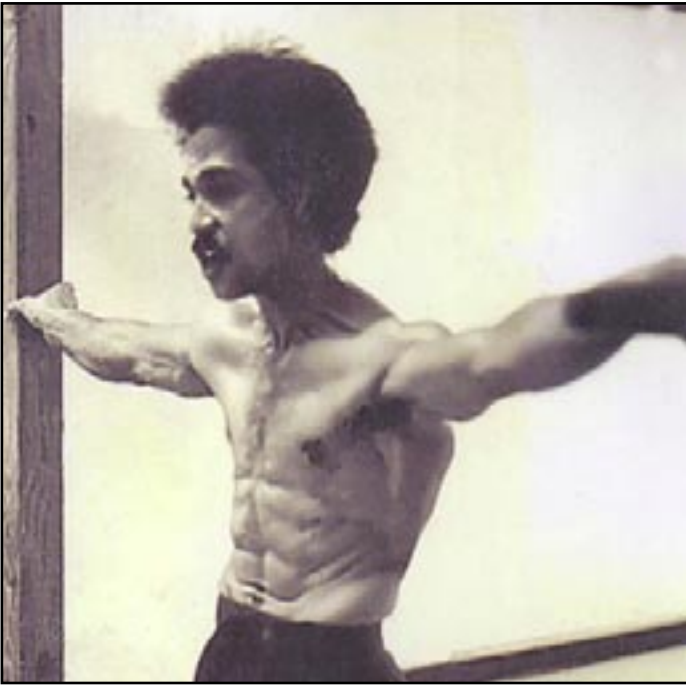
When I came to the United States, I would hear some martial artists’ claim that Bruce Lee “couldn’t fight his way out of a paper bag.” This is just plain jealousy. If you read Bruce Lee’s Fighting Method Volume 2: Basic Training (a book I highly recommend and have reviewed on my website), you will see that he is a real fighter. These insults regarding a great man made a great impression on me. My goal has always been to prove that I am a real fighter and not one that is manufactured by the tournament circuit. That’s why I made it a point to prove this in my career, even going to the extent of stepping into the ring and fighting a boxer who was sixty pounds heavier than me. This has become part of my teaching philosophy

Those who have followed my career over the last twenty-six years are familiar with my story and reputation. New students however, have lots of questions and tend to ask the same ones over and over again. This is my attempt to give my new students an understanding of where I came from and who I am. I am writing this for the benefit of a new generation of Calasanz students and as an introduction to my history and martial arts philosophy



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The Early Years



I was raised on a farm in the Dominican Republic. One of my earliest memories of the fighting arts was through my father's fascination with boxing. I remember how he used to get excited every time his favorite boxer landed a punch. My father wanted me to be a boxer. He and some of his brothers were considered the strongest men on the farm. He noticed the same family traits in me and encouraged me to go into boxing. He saw at an early age that I had natural talent and power. He even offered to sponsor my career in it. Although I didn't take the path of a boxer, my father respected the fact that despite my power, I was not a bully. Being exposed to boxing as a young child, I always knew that I wanted to be a fighter but I didn't see the point of two people getting into the ring to fight for no reason. The mission behind my desire to be a fighter wasn't about titles, trophies or glory. It was about self-defense and defense of others. It was about sticking up for the underdog. It was about survival.

As a kid, I was very creative and liked to entertain people in town by singing and dancing. I was also a very hard working farm boy and my family and neighbors took notice. So did my classmates who were very jealous of the attention I was getting in the neighborhood. I started having problems in school and knew that at some point, I was going to have to stand up for myself. I didn't tell my parents what was going on and resolved to deal with the problems myself. While part of me was scared, another part of me was very excited. I had always identified with the underdog and was a defender of those who were picked on or unable to fight back.

I remember one day when I was ten years old, my father sent me downtown on a horse to pick up a 200-pound bag of rice. As made my way back home, I noticed a man insulting one of the women in my neighborhood. I yelled at him to leave her alone, but he yelled back "Listen little rabbit, you are too small to tell me what to do." I jumped off the horse and went after this guy who was about three times my size and age. I fought as hard as I could. Finally someone broke up the fight. I thought I was going to choke him to death!! My father found out about it and told me never to do that again, especially against someone who had so much physical advantage. The woman never forgot what I did for her that day. That was the greatest reward.

It was at this time that I also realized the power that could be generated in the legs. I was milking one of our cows, which was in a particularly bad mood that day. So she kicked me! I got so angry that I got up, took a step back and kicked her in the stomach, knocking her down. My father saw what I had done and gave me a spanking. Even though I was being punished, I couldn't believe what I had done.

I recall another incident where a friend of mine was being picked on and he was too afraid to stick up for himself. Again, here was someone larger than me, but I didn't care. Some of my friends wanted to help me fight him because we were so unevenly matched, but I wanted to take him on myself. I used my legs, kicking him relentlessly. When my father heard that I was yet again in another fight, he was angry until he heard that I won the fight!!

One of my first unofficial students was my little brother. He was being challenged to fight by one of the local bullies. I told him to drop back after the kid started fighting and punch him with all his might. He did just what I told him and knocked the guy out. All the work with the cows taught me not only the power of the legs, but also the advantages of a powerful and speedy counterattack. I incorporated this philosophy into my system, which is largely based on effective deflecting blows and followed with counterattacking techniques.

While my father did not approve of the fights I would get into, understand that I was never the aggressor. I didn't start fights needlessly, nor was I a bully. When I fought, it was to defend another or myself and in some instances, to prove a point. Where I grew up, it was part of the male culture to be strong and not back down from a fight. So while my father didn't condone fighting, he admired my skill and courage.

I left my family farm and went to Santiago to continue my academic studies. It was there that I was first exposed to the martial arts after seeing a karate demonstration, lead by a man named Rafael Martinez, who would later become my good friend and teacher. I took my first class where I was taught high, middle and low blocks, reverse punch, and a front, side and roundhouse kick. I took these few movements and practiced them for three months straight before I went back to the school again. It was during this time that I focused on developing my power. Three months later, I returned. With just the few techniques that I had mastered, I was able to successfully spar my classmates and gain their respect despite the fact that I was three times smaller than anyone else and that most of them were black belts. These were not your average karate practitioners; they were killers. While martial arts today are more of a recreational sport, back then, you had to fight for your life. There was no referee, no rules, and no pads.

I also learned something about myself in the course of my three months of training. I knew that I had a natural talent for the martial arts. I believe that when you are given a natural talent, no matter what it is, that you should pursue it. I was determined to take the gift that I was given and develop it to the best of my ability. I also knew that I could not abuse my talents and that I would only put them to good use. That is one of the reasons why I decided to make martial arts my business.

I was fortunate at the beginning of my martial arts training to meet and train with some exceptional teachers. I trained with Pacheco, Rafael Martinez, Victor Loraine, Lizardo and my teacher Tamajoshi Sakamoto. I put most of my earnings into my training in hopes that my investment would pay off one day. A lot of my training was private, but I would often join classes for the purpose of working on my sparring skills. Sparring in a traditional martial arts school was not like it is now. We had no protective gear, no mouthpieces, no one to stop the fight, and a room full of guys who wanted to beat the daylights out of you. If you try to do this in this in the United States, you immediately expose yourself to lawsuits and your students will drop out in droves.

I remember one day when I was in class and Rafael called me to spar with him. I had not been in class for about two months. I think he may have been under the impression that I wasn't training and that he was going to make an example out of me. He was shocked when we started fighting. I held my own during that match and gained even



more respect from my fellow students. Rafael was a formidable opponent. He weighed 190lbs, held a black belt in Goju Ryu and was a professional boxer. That night, he came to my house and found me training. He watched me work out until 2:00AM. He could not believe the amount of effort and dedication I had.

Victor Liriano is another man who was one of my greatest Goju Ryu mentors. He was one of the first teachers I had that put a lot of emphasis on developing good counterattacking skills. I told him about the experience I had with the cow and how I reacted immediately. We both agreed that reaction without hesitation is essential when fighting.

Lizardo, the star of the group, decided he wanted to spar with me. During the match, he was very careful to keep his distance. I was so conscious about conditioning and developing power that some people were afraid of my power. One day when Lizardo and I were sparring, he asked me if I would take it easy on him. Lizardo became one of my teachers and also a good friend. From that point on, I couldn't fight with him any more. It's always been hard for me to spar with someone I liked and respected.

Santiago is a tough city. When I first arrived, I had to quickly become accustomed to surviving in an urban environment. There are two stories that stick in my mind to this day that involved two local tough guys. One was named Calier, the other, Dario. Calier was so bad that the police didn't even want to deal with him. I remember he tried to fight me one day. I hit him with a right and he went flying over the hood of a car. I was surprised because I barely put a lot of power into the punch. This altercation turned into a nightmare. I was concerned about his bad reputation. Fortunately, things cooled down after a while. The other guy, Dario, thought he was above the law and demanded respect from everyone. Dario was one of the most accomplished mechanics in the Dominican Republic. He worked on racing cars and was the manager of one of the biggest body shop in town. I had gotten a part-time job with him in order to make some extra money. Dario was determined to pick a fight with me. One day he got his wish. Unfortunately for him, he found himself on the ground with two broken teeth. The next day, over 25 neighborhood kids, including two of Dario's brothers, came to see me and start taking classes with me.

Two months after I started my martial arts training, I was asked by some friends to come to a town called San Jose de Las Matas to perform for them and their girlfriends. I was just a white belt at the time and all I focused on was martial arts, work and school. I put on a comedic martial arts demonstration and even had some black belts come and watch. My performance was very aggressive and funny, and no one even bothered challenging me. I would go on to do many demonstrations in the Dominican Republic and in the United States, including my Super Breaks.



One of my closest friends, Felo, had come with me to the first karate demonstration. He started training in karate on the same day I started. He couldn't continue his studies, so I became his teacher. Four months later, Felo was fighting black belts. There was a local martial arts club that needed a teacher. Now Felo was in competition with me and wanted this job badly. Felo challenged me to a fight to take place at the martial arts club. Felo was much bigger than me. We started by teaching a formal class. We then had a sparring session where the students fought each other as well as with us. Finally, Felo and I were left standing. He came after me as if he wanted to kill. I threw one of my favorite kicks. I threw an extremely hard kick that landed on his head. His mouth, ears, and eyes started to bleed. Felo retired from martial arts after the match. I had used this kick on an earlier challenger who came after me with the same vengeance as Felo. He was smart enough to quit after he saw me throw the same kick.



As a martial artist, I had no desire to compete in tournaments. There were plenty of opportunities in the Dominican Republic, but I wasn't interested. I wanted to become a real fighter. This meant fighting without pads, rules or referees. I upset my teacher once when I refused to enter a karate tournament he was sponsoring. I took it upon myself to find out who won the point-fighting category. I was determined to prove a point. I didn't believe in using gloves. I found the winner, challenged him to a match and beat him.

I learned early on as a farm boy that when you have a job to do, you do it to the best of your abilities. My father regretted sending me to the city to study because it was hard for him to trust anyone to take care of his land and animals. I was determined however to get the best education I could and that meant moving to the city. My goal was to become the best-educated man in the Dominican Republic. I would spend hours studying in the park. People who knew my father would tell him that I was insane because I spent so much time on my lessons.

In order to help with tuition, I got a job working at a cigar factory. I put the same kind of intensity in rolling cigars that I did in my work on the farm. I made in one day what most of my co-workers did in a month. I worked so hard in my classes that I was able to student teach after a short while. I was a business major, so I taught mostly accounting, shorthand and typing. This brought me to the job that would be my ticket to the United States. It was this job that gave me the opportunity to study at the University of Bridgeport and make my living teaching martial arts.

I worked at Banco Popular in the checking department processing checks. I was taught a lot of banking procedures and was required to absorb them within a short period of time. In my spare time, I practiced martial arts and studied in the park. I did very well in school, except for literature, which was not one of my favorite subjects. Students who wanted to be eligible to work for the bank had to pass all their classes. I eventually passed literature, which required committing numerous biographies of famous historical figures to memory. To accomplish all that was required of me at this time took a lot of concentration and 100% dedication.

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It was during this time I saw Bruce Lee's movie, Enter the Dragon. Seeing this film inspired me to take my martial arts career to the next level. Despite all the classes I had taken, I now knew that this was not the path for me. I wanted to devote my life to teaching martial arts and making a movie. My next step was to get the bank to send me to the United States to study English as a second language. They agreed to send me to the University of Bridgeport. Once I was on American soil, I knew that this was where I had to stay to make my dream come true.

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Martial Arts American Style



I arrived in Bridgeport on June 15, 1979. My first introduction to this country was not a pleasant one. While I had studied English in the Dominican Republic, I had a lot of trouble understanding the language. I met this guy who seemed trustworthy at first and helped me translate and showed me around. Unfortunately, I became very trusting of him and he stole \$2,500 from me. This was of no surprise to my family. The one character flaw I had to work on was being too trusting of people. I had been taken advantage of many times in my native country because of my trusting nature and it was starting to happen here. After this experience, I worked very hard at perfecting my language skills and depending less on others for help.

I had no desire to get into tournaments when I came to the United States, even though they were very popular and great emphasis was placed in participating in them. I did like sparring with well-known instructors and their best competitors. I went to take classes at this one school where three huge guys were teaching karate. I started training with them and they asked me to help teach. Later I thought about how crazy I was for going to their school in the first place and risking getting beat up!! The next day I scheduled a fight with a martial artist who had a very good reputation. We were supposed to fight in one of the basements at the University of Bridgeport, but my opponent refused to fight me. His excuse was that he forgot his uniform. I won the fight without fighting, just on the reputation I was starting to build in the area.

The first thing I did when I came to the Norwalk area was to find a job. I went to Victoria Station in Darien. Victoria Station was a steak house designed like a train station, which even included a few authentic train cars. I wanted a job as a waiter, but none was available. They did however need a busboy and dishwasher, so I was hired for those positions. The first day I started work, I had to do the work of three people who all called out. I worked so hard and so fast that the Mike, the general manager, asked me if I knew how to write English. I said yes. Within eight months I was promoted to waiter and eventually to bartender.

I worked very hard because I had to fund my martial arts training. It was the money that I earned at Victoria Station that made this possible. I bought my first car in 1982. I remember taking a ride through Darien. The police

stopped me and I asked them what I did wrong. I told them that I worked at Victoria Station and they let me go. Eventually, these police officers would come to know me as the crazy guy who jogged on the Post Road wearing a t-shirt in below zero temperatures or jogging barefoot wearing leg weights in the summer. To this day, many of my older students, including law enforcement officers, remember my jogs through lower Fairfield County.

I had earned the reputation of one of the best waiters at Victoria Station. I was quick, courteous and efficient. One night, I served a table of twenty-five and worked my tail off for them. When they were finished, they got up from the table and went into the bar. They left me a tip of \$5.00. I went into the bar and asked if they were not pleased with the service because they didn't leave me the customary 15%. They were so obnoxious and condescending that I lost it. I grabbed the biggest guy by the hair, brought him to the ground and pressed his face into the carpet with my fist. The police were called and immediately five cops were pulling me off of this guy. Because I had become a fixture jogging through the streets at all hours of the day and night, the police were kind enough to convince the restaurant to return this parties money so that they would not press charges against me.

It was now time to get started on my original plan for coming to the United States. I wanted to become a well-rounded martial artist. My first plan was to spend at least two years of hard work on my Goju Ryu forms, since this was the primary martial art I had devoted the first half of my life to. I next planned to extract three to four concepts from a group of carefully selected disciplines-Wing Chun, Cheng Chuang Long Fist, Hapkido, American Boxing and dance. I made it very clear to all my teachers that my main style was Okinawan Goju Ryu and while I had great respect for their style, I only wanted to learn some basics.

I heard that some of the best martial artists and boxers were in New York City. I was curious to see how my skills would match up against boxers, so I trained at Gleason' Gym for a while. I also studied tai chi from a master who lived there. As a sign of respect for this man, I paid him \$4,000 to come to Connecticut to correct my form. I also studied Cheng Chuang Long Fist and wanted to learn four forms very well. My teacher however, didn't understand. He was interested in teaching me over ninety forms!! This would take a lifetime and was not part of my plan. While I respected his skill and what he taught me, we started having philosophical differences. Another instructor would call me into his office every two weeks and badger me about my training. I explained where I was coming from and that our deal was that I pay in exchange for lessons. Once I achieved an advanced rank in his school, he started giving me problems. He was under the impression that I wanted to teach his style, but this could not be further from the truth. I wanted to learn some basics. I had already envisioned how my system would look like and I didn't want to be confined by one style. I shook his hand, wished him well and haven't seen him since.

I then went to study with Moyat, a Wing Chun master who also had a school in New York City. Challengers would come to the school from time to time to fight Moyat's students. Many of his students, even those who had been with him for many years, were not allowed to use the wooden dummy. The wooden dummy is a martial arts training tool that is indispensable in learning how to fight. I was not about to back down from a challenge. I went on to fight some of these karate practitioners who wanted to challenge the Wing Chun system. Wing Chun is a very practical martial art and a lot of these guys learned how effective it was when we took them on in the name of our school. Moyat saw my skill and told me that I could be teaching Wing Chun within four months if I applied myself to intensive training. I accepted his offer.



I also enrolled as a student at a martial arts school in Darien where I experienced one of the biggest challenges of my career. One of my more experienced classmates kicked me. As a got ready to challenge him in a sparring match, someone stopped the fight. Even though I was considered to be a very powerful fighter, I saw this incident as a big wake up call. I was determined to get even. I started an intense training regime. I did up to 10,000 kicks per day, sometimes training for hours. All the rigorous mental and physical training, as well as the counter attack skills I developed with one punch and side kick, were my reward from this incident. This man and I never fought again. He and I became good friends and I won his respect by improving myself. This is what I mean by winning without fighting.



Something similar happened in the Dominican Republic. My classmate, Alejandro kicked me with a hard spinning kick. My teacher stopped the fight because he knew I would retaliate. Alejandro was getting ready for a tournament, so he was using me as a practice target. The next time we fought, I was determined to give him a run for his money. I hit him so hard that he started bleeding from his ears, eyes and mouth. My teacher was furious and almost threw me out of the school. I later spoke to Alejandro and explained to him that while he had to get ready for a tournament by trying to kill me, I had to get ready for him. My teacher never did kick me out of the school because aside from my determination not to lose a fight, I was a helpful, devoted student.

I wanted to look good in the execution of my martial art techniques, so I was willing to “humiliate” myself as a man and study dance. The humiliation turned to fun when I found myself in a class of twenty women!! I studied ballet, jazz, and tap. Dance training paid off because it taught me poise and self-expression. I have incorporated many of the stretching and training techniques I learned there into my martial arts classes. To this day, new students will often ask my more senior students if they ever studied dance. I tease my students, especially the men, by telling them, “Do you know you’re learning dance techniques without having to take dance lessons! You don’t have to do a pirouette in front of twenty women. I did it for you!”

My training in different schools, both here and in the Dominican Republic, has taught me that a martial artist with true skill doesn’t have to fight. He can win respect by his skill and confidence. If you have skill and confidence, you don’t have to lift a finger. Let your training speak for itself. I had another experience in that same Darien school. I had another classmate who I sincerely believe could have beat me if we fought prior to my intensive



kicking training. I was able to take on anyone in the class in a full contact challenge now that my legs were super strong and fast. I have to admit however that I would probably lose at point or Olympic fighting, which is a very common form of sparring in most martial arts schools. I was used to full contact fighting, so fighting for points made no sense to me. While I have great respect for those who train hard to engage in point fighting only because I admire their dedication to training, I sometimes think that they are lulled into a false sense that they can really fight full contact.

An aikido practitioner came to class and challenged me to a fight because he heard that I was very strong. He was much bigger than I was, but that didn’t bother me. I grabbed him and he wasn’t able to move my hands. I executed a takedown and sent him crashing to the floor. I had him pinned to the ground

and he called the head master of the school, a very talented martial artist. The teacher told him how to get out of it by going with my power instead of going against it. I was very impressed with his answer, but I was angry at this guy for calling the teacher over in the first place.

When I worked as a bartender there was a tall, strong customer who was curious to see how strong I really was. I politely turned him down, but everyone kept encouraging me to do something. One day, the bar was full. He started challenging me again, so I gave in. He grabbed me and I have to admit, he was pretty strong. I could barely move my wrist. I took a deep breath and was able to twist his wrist so hard that everyone in the room heard a “crack.” I ended up breaking his thumb and he had to spend four weeks in a cast. I felt really bad about it, but he just wouldn’t let up.

I eventually got very tired of working in a restaurant. There were a lot of rude, nasty customers to deal with. I remember this one guy who was treating me like dirt while I was waiting on him. He left me a tip that was so paltry it was insulting. I was so insulted I followed him into the parking lot and stuck his tip into his mouth. This was a nightmare for my employer, since this guy was a big shot who later complained to the headquarters. Surprisingly enough, I was not fired from my job. My general manager told the headquarters that he didn’t want to fire me because I was too profitable to the restaurant. In retrospect, I know that I over reacted. I just got so frustrated. It was also a message to me that maybe it was time to move on. I had been getting increasingly frustrated with the customers. I knew that it was time for a change. One of my friends encouraged me to open my own school.



4

Teaching the Calasanz System

I earned my reputation as an instructor by training about 25 street fighters. I was new to this country and interested in creating a name. I chose street brawlers because they had the confidence and endurance to fight. It was my job to teach them martial arts techniques and self-control necessary for tournaments. It took me about 3 months to get them ready to fight under my school's name. They impressed everyone who saw them fight or perform. People wanted to know who their instructor was. This was the first step I took in creating a reputation. It was the beginning and helped draw more students to my school and win me respect in the community.

In 1986 I rented space out of a hardcore bodybuilding gym called George's Gym. It wasn't the easiest environment to be in. Some of the bodybuilders were obnoxious and believed that a body built by steroids was all they needed to be good fighters. I had no doubt however that it would not take long before everyone respected anyone wearing the Calasanz logo. I told my students that within a few weeks, we would attract a lot of business from the gym. One of the bodybuilders who came through my door was a 6'4" bully who invited everyone in the gym to come to my school and watch him beat me up. I aimed a kick to his hipbone and disabled him in 15 seconds. After this incident, our school was constantly training bodybuilders. The people who witnessed the fight that day and the bully himself sent us business! He even went so far as referring his victims to us. He would tell them "go train with Calasanz so he can teach you how to fight!" By the way, we sold a lot of clothing bearing the Calasanz logo because my school had earned such a good reputation that people wanted to wear our logo. The purpose for wearing our clothes was that no one would mess with you if they thought you trained at Calasanz. This was the name I created.

While I enjoyed training street fighters, it was now time to expand my system to society-at-large. My new philosophy is to meet the student where he or she is and find out what it is that they want to get out of the martial arts. I always ask a new student, "do you want to learn how to fight, are you interested in fitness, self-defense or competition?" Whatever the answer, I tailor a program that will suit a student's needs. Regardless of the program they choose, I balance their curriculum so they get a complete taste of the system, while focusing on their particular goal. We always work with a goal in mind. I have found that students who train for hours with no particular goal end up getting bored or frustrated. Every time you walk on the floor to train, you must think about what you want to get out of it. Training goals should also be adjusted from time to time to reflect a student's new interests, lifestyle and abilities. This way, training always has a purpose.



Regardless of my students' goals, I always like to give them some techniques they could use on the streets. My private training in Wing Chun was the reason why I have incorporated this philosophy into my system. I was not happy with the fact that some of my classmates had spent close to ten years training and had no street survival skills. Many Wing Chun students spent all this time throwing punches without a purpose or sense of how they would use it in real life. For instance, our Wing Chun classes emphasize bringing your elbow to the center, which helps your punch get very hard and learning how to get grounded. I was fortunate enough when I began my Goju Ryu training that my teachers promoted self-defense skills and I have passed these skills down to my students.

Schools that promote black belts too quickly or don't teach self-defense often trouble me. What troubles me more is the aerobic kickboxing craze. Unfortunately, they give people a false sense of security in believing they'll be able to defend themselves with a dance routine. Understand that organizations that certify personal trainers often offer short-term courses or clinics that will teach you how to teach kickboxing. This is an insult to all of us who have spent many years training in the martial arts and a scam on the public. In some cases, students who have taken the aerobic kickboxing classes have been injured because of inadequate teacher supervision. While I train students who only want to learn kickboxing for recreation, I always incorporate some realistic movements so they can walk away with something useful. No one leaves my school without at least some basic knowledge of street survival. The Calasanz System is very simple. Simplicity combined with skill allows us to take the best a student has to offer and improve on it. An example is training women. Because my style of fighting was always unsuited for tournaments, I found that I had to send "messages" of my skill to those who challenged me because I was not a competitor. My favorite type of message was asking a female student to do kicking drills with an obnoxious male! While women's upper body strength cannot compare to that of a man, women do have naturally strong legs. I take that ability in women and teach them how to capitalize on it. Some of the best messages given here at the school were by women who embarrassed arrogant men!



Teaching a diverse population requires a lot of patience and natural skill. You can train someone to be a teacher all you want. If they don't have it inside of them, they will never be effective. In this business, you have to help not only the talented and coordinated, but also the uncoordinated, the slow learner and the student with a variety of challenges. It is also a challenge to teach those who are very intelligent. I had this one student who was very smart and had spent twelve years training in a well known martial arts school. I was training him in kickboxing and trying to teach him how to protect his head when fighting at close range. He told me "Calasanz, all I have to do is pick up my hands. This would cause his opponent to look up, and then I could kick him." This guy with twelve years of experience just demonstrated the skill of a white belt. I recognized was why his instructor had a hard time with him. This guy thought he knew it all and didn't need help or correction from anyone.

Many of our messages have been directed at students who are very good fighters. One of the messages I have to give over and over is that you don't have to brutalize yourself in order to become a good fighter. I don't believe

in this type of training. I think that an effective fighter has to train “smarter.” Sending a message or teaching a lesson to a student does not require that you physically injure them. I’ve never had to physically injure a student in order to get my point across. Why? You train in the martial arts to be able to defend yourself. Survival is not dependant on knowing thousands of techniques, but rather on your balance, grounding, power and most of all, heart. Courage and intelligence will go farther in self-defense. This is the key to surviving a life-threatening situation. This is the philosophy behind many of my messages to my students.

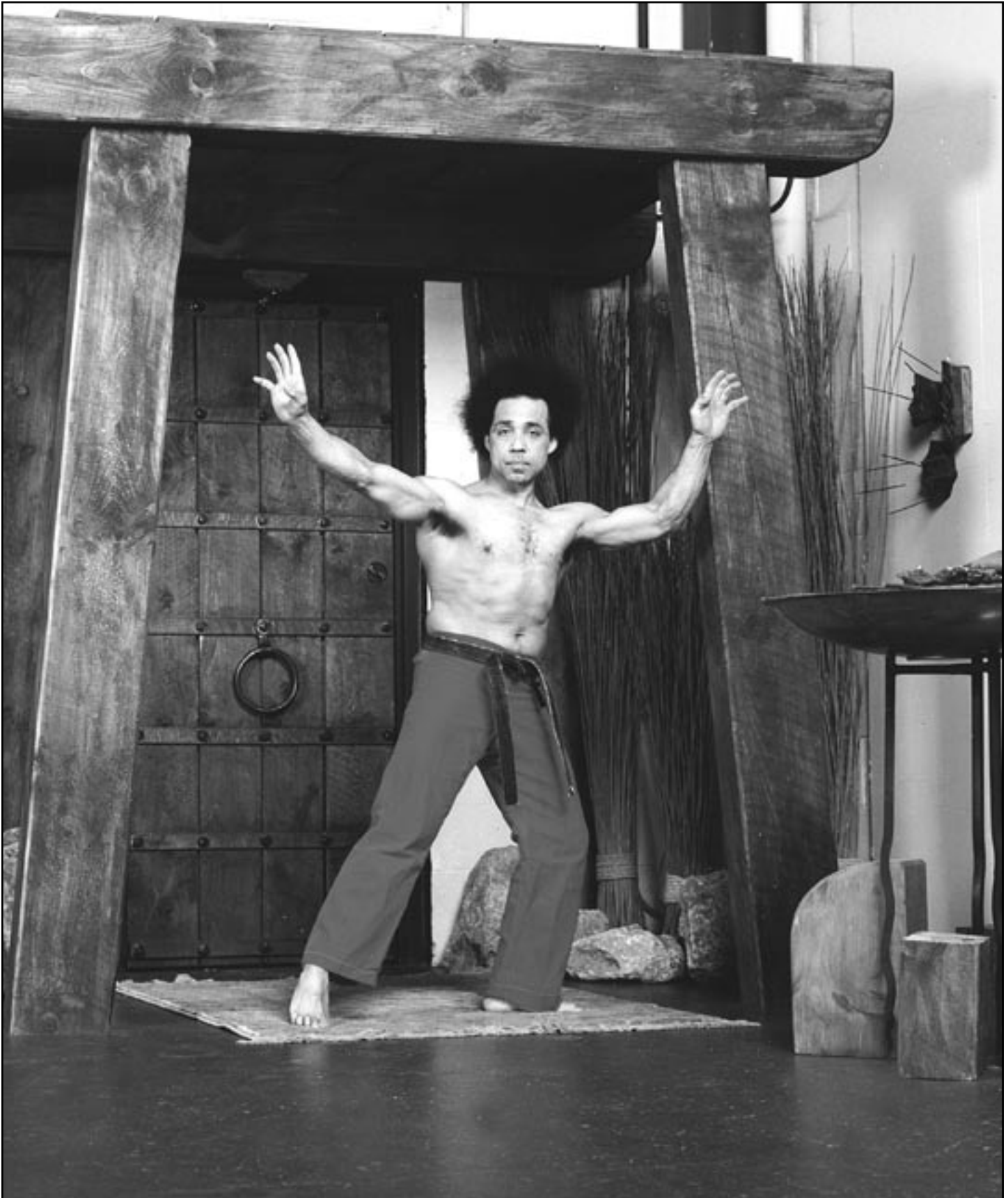


I have taught many high rank students from other system, some of them have been very talented martial artists. I enjoy teaching students from other systems because they bring their own special talents. The one thing that does frustrate me sometimes is getting them to make the transition from their style to the Calasanz System. I have designed this system to be practical. With that in mind, I have done away with the tradition of teaching hundreds of techniques and forms. Unfortunately, many students are more interested in quantity, not quality. They haven’t even practiced a front kick to the point they can deliver effectively and they are asking, “What am I going to learn next?” My philosophy is learning a few things, learn them well and make them as automatic as possible. When you are confronted with a life-threatening situation, I promise that a lot of those fancy techniques will go right out the window. In addition, an attacker on the streets is not going to engage in polite cooperation. He’s not going to let you take your time while you respond to a wrist grab.



I have created a course called Street Survivor that teaches simple defensive techniques. I can teach you some effective fighting skills within a relatively short period of time. I once had a man training with me who was hired as a bodyguard for a well-known politician. He was required to train as part of his job, so he was sent to me. While he didn’t understand the difference between the different styles of martial arts, he understood the basic techniques I taught him, especially, heavy leg training and kicking. I programmed him to counter attack with great ferocity. One day, I put him to spar with a Thai boxer from Cambodia. Regardless of the attack this Thai boxer delivered, this man was able to counter attack and hold his own. I finally had to stop the fight because the Thai boxer had taken a couple of heavy kicks to the leg and I was afraid that any more kicks could lead to an injury. The Thai boxer was humiliated and couldn’t eat for two days. This sent a clear message to him. He came to my school with the attitude that he knew it all and that he wasn’t going to learn anything from anyone. I told him after this fight that he really needed to stop being so arrogant and try to learn something so that he could be as effective as the bodyguard. I purposely gave two messages that day; one to the bodyguard and the other to the Thai boxer. A message is more effective than giving a lecture to a student.

I sent a similar message to two other students who had come from another system. They had a lot of techniques, so I decided to put them to spar with a student of mine who at first glance looked heavy and out of shape. They were both hurt by this guy. They couldn't believe it! This was done with training simple techniques and making counter attacks automatic. This is what we create at Calasanz.





Training the Beginner



I tell my beginning students to stop focusing on how they look and concentrate on how they feel. Do they have more energy? So they have more confidence? This is what is important. If you stick with something long enough, you will eventually see the physical results. But within a few months, you start to feel more secure in that you've learned something about defending yourself.

Our first job with beginners is to work on their coordination. New students sometimes come to this school with misconceptions about martial arts training and their own abilities. For example, I have had many new students who have only worked out on machines. Some of them have a hard time making this transition, especially when they have to rely on their bodies to do the work. I had one woman who enrolled in the school after having spent several years working with machines. She told me that she wanted to take the traditional approach to studying the martial arts. It took me many months to work on her coordination. She was studying for her green belt and had to break a board. She was nervous about this so I arranged for a black belt instructor to help her get ready for the break. Her training required that her instructor to swing at her, she would evade it and then strike the pad with her shin. The next day she came into my office and complained that she had a tiny bruise on her shin. She was very angry and I was even more upset that we were having this conversation. A tiny bruise is inconsequential to what she had learned. I told her that a tiny bruise is nothing in comparison to what she learned here at the school. I reminded her of all I went through just to teach her the basics. She was now coordinated and able to train on her own without equipment. She didn't want to hear it. She left in the middle of class and didn't return.

We've had many students who have trained here because they couldn't train anywhere else. We had the patience to work with them and help them develop skills that they never thought they would have. Once they learn how to control their bodies, they go off to other martial arts schools or take up dancing, yoga or some other type of physical activity. Now we have trained them to adapt to any physical activity. We get a lot of students who end up coming back because of the amount of attention we pay to their training. When they return, they find they have forgotten what they worked so hard to attain. Some of them don't understand that it is the skill of the instructor and their commitment that can help them maintain a healthy body for the rest of their lives.

6

Training Students from Other Systems

One of the biggest challenges I have found in my years of teaching is dealing with students who come from other systems. It is much easier to teach a student who has come to you with a clean slate because they have not become accustomed to a particular style. I do however, welcome people from other systems and don't want them to lose what another teacher has taught them. What I do want them to do is to learn my system and appreciate it for its simplicity and practicality. We often have to prove ourselves to students from other systems because they are expecting lots of complicated techniques, one-step, two-step sparring routines and long and involved self-defense maneuvers. For example, we had a guy train with us who was considered a super martial artist from Europe. He had a lot of fancy techniques. I paired him up with a student who had good endurance, hard shins and a good roundhouse kick. After they sparred, the guy from Europe with all the martial arts experience couldn't understand how a guy with only one good technique was able to hurt him. Once you send a message, then you can get back to the business of training.

A highly ranked instructor and student of Ninjutsu came to train with me. He was very good, but didn't understand our method of endurance training and conditioning. It is my philosophy to prepare you for an attack and to counterattack using the strongest part of your body-the leg. I paired this experienced guy with a student who was a bit on the heavy side and had big legs. My student had good basic techniques. I let the two of them go at each other. My student threw one of his hard kicks and dropped him to the ground. He now understood the meaning of our training.

I enrolled this one guy who had trained in a very traditional school for over 12 years. He told me that he hadn't trained in a long time and wanted to get back into shape. He came to the group class and all he did was question everything we were doing, claiming that there was a better way and that his instructor would have done it differently. I left him alone for about 4 classes. Each time he refused to learn anything and interfered with class. Finally, I decided that he needed to be taught a lesson. I paired him up with a man who had been training with us for just about 5 months and was 3 times smaller than this guy. I asked them to do roundhouse kicks using a pad. He made sure to tell us that they did the roundhouse kick differently in his other school. I then told him to kick his opponent with his roundhouse kick. All of his kicks were blocked. It was impossible for him to hit his opponent with the roundhouse kick he was so proud of. It was particularly embarrassing when his opponent kicked him and he almost was thrown to the ground. While this guy was very good in his particular system, he had no endurance in his legs and arms and could not survive in a fight.

This story had a good ending. He finally understood and didn't interfere with his classes. He participated and opened his mind to learning something new because he had to experience the value of what we were teaching first hand. We ended up becoming good friends and had an understanding that any disagreements he had with my instructors would be addressed to me after class. I appreciated his years of training and acknowledged that he had a lot to offer. By having a dialogue with me outside of class, I was able to explain why we did things differently in a way that did not threaten him into thinking that we were contradicting the system he had studied for over 12 years.





In another case, a guy who was a third degree black belt visited me and enrolled in one of our Street Survivor classes. I paired him up with a 16 year old who had been training with us for only one month. I had them do some practical drills and the 16 year old got the best of him. He kicked him in the shin and dropped him to the ground. He got up from the floor and started crying when I told him that the kid who just knocked him down had only been training for one month!

Another problem with training students from other systems is that some lack the basics. There are many good martial art schools out there. The way I can tell if someone has had a good teacher is to look at their basics. Do they have a strong foundation? Can they throw a punch? Can they throw a kick without losing their balance? Are their stances strong and grounded? Some students from other systems know a lot of techniques, but that doesn't necessarily mean they know their basics. It is just a house built on a very shaky foundation. I had one woman come to my school who failed to mention that she had a black belt from another school. She told another one of my students of her rank., who later told me. I thought training her would be easy. Wrong. I gave her three techniques and asked her to put them into a sequence. Start in a front stance, switch to a horse stance and then switch back into a front stance. It took me 10 minutes to get her to do this right. It should have taken a well-trained black belt 3 seconds to do this properly.

Some experienced students started training in a style that was not particularly suited for them. For example, I have had some students over 40 who started training in a style that emphasized a lot of high kicking and jumping. Other styles demand low stances or too much snapping when kicking. It is no wonder that they come to me frustrated and feeling that maybe martial arts is not for them, even though they really enjoyed it. Any style can be practiced by anyone. It is up to the instructor to tailor the system to fit the student. Unfortunately, many schools have a "one size fits all" approach. This means that you have to keep up with the class with little or no special attention. I like to tailor the techniques to the particular student.

One woman enrolled in my school after 10 years of training in another system. She lacked confidence, could not fight and wasn't very street smart. I personally trained her for 3 months and saw her confidence and skills improve dramatically. After the 3-month period, she decided to take the group class. I paired her up with another woman who was fairly new and had not had any martial arts training. This bothered her. I was hoping that by putting her with someone new, it would remind her how far she had come in her training. When she first started, she could not block a shin kick without experiencing pain in her leg. I told her that this would soon change and it did. Experienced martial artists who come to train with me are very often asked to assist with lower ranked students once we have taught them the basics of the system. Because there are students with different ranks, everyone learns

from someone else. I also expected someone who had trained in martial arts for over 10 years to understand the importance of learning how to teach and assisting lower ranks. She could not see this. All she saw was that we put her to train with someone who was not as good as she was and this upset her. She had a lot to offer and the higher ranks had much to offer her. This is one of the ways we help students improve their skills. Unfortunately, she couldn't understand it no matter how much we explained it.

This brings me to the case of a student who came to me after he had been hired by the sheriff's department. He was having a problem dealing at job in controlling the people he was either arresting or transporting. He had taken martial arts classes for a long time and even though he was a good kicker, he had no concept of the streets. He asked his instructor for help and his response was "you're smart enough to put it together." So he came to me. I worked with him for 2 weeks. He had a lot to offer, he just needed someone to help him translate it into something practical. His teacher was not willing, but I was. After the 2 weeks, he never had a problem again. This man went on to become a police officer and trains with us to this day and has referred countless numbers of law enforcement officers to this school.



Tournament Fighting or Training for the Streets?

While some like martial arts competition, I believe that it creates a false impression of one's fighting skill. As a martial artist, I never wanted to be accused of being a phony. I hated hearing people accuse Bruce Lee of "not being able to fight his way out of a paper bag." On the contrary, Bruce Lee was for real. Read any of his books and you will see that his philosophy made sense. Does the fact that he didn't spend his martial arts career in the ring mean that he was not a great fighter? I was never interested in tournaments, so I chose other ways for people to understand my skills. It seems that a lot of martial artists are under the impression that you can't fight unless you have a bunch of medals and trophies. There is nothing farther from the truth. Some of the best fighters in the world have never set foot in the ring.

One of the ways I proved my skill in the Dominican Republic was to fight the winner of any tournament in the local park or at his home. When I came to this country, I noticed that people put a lot of emphasis on tournaments, so I thought I'd try one. I was watching this point fighter who got beat up so bad. The most disturbing thing was that he won. All the judges and referees were his coaches. This guy had no skill, not even enough to play the game of point fighting. He walked out of there with a six foot trophy with all of his friends congratulating him!!

I talked myself into competing at a point tournament, and it reminded me of playing pool or dominos. It wasn't about fighting. In order to play, you had to know little tricks. I got in the ring with this guy, threw a technique and waited for the call of the judge. My opponent caught me off balance and hit me. When I was ready to continue fighting, the fight was over. I had no clue what happened, but that was not a fight, it was more like a game of tag. I was so angry that I couldn't sleep that night. The next day, I found another tournament and the same thing happened. It was the most ridiculous experience I ever had. I thought long and hard as to whether I wanted to continue wasting my time. I decided that I was not going to try to play games. I had come to this country to make a movie and become a well rounded martial artist. I wanted to be real and express myself as did Bruce Lee. I didn't need to prove anything by winning a trophy. If I wanted to fight for real, like I did in the Dominican Republic, it was not going to happen through point fighting.

I had a friend who came from Brazil and taught Capoeira. He invited me to one of his shows where he asked me to help put on a demonstration. One of the guys who was there was a point fighter from a well-known demo team. He had lightning speed. I'm talking very fast. I learned a lot during my first point fight, so I was ready. We squared off. I closed the gap so fast that his head banged into my block and he almost knocked himself out. This is how you use skill versus flashy techniques.



In 1989, I wanted to test my skill against a boxer. I arranged a fight with someone who was in the top ten of his weight class at Gleason's Gym. Because I was keeping such a grueling teaching and training schedule, I had to cancel the fight. I was training at 3:00AM and teaching from 5:00AM to 11:00PM. (That's why boxers need sponsors. Running a business leaves no time for rest and recuperation.) I still wanted to fight a boxer, so I arranged a fight with someone named Vito, who was planning to turn pro. No one in the audience saw him land a punch. Vito was a very tough guy and weighed about 205 pounds as opposed to my 145. He also had fought 100 amateur fights and was never knocked down. I did this to prove to myself and to my students that I wasn't a point fighter and I could withstand a fight with a boxer.

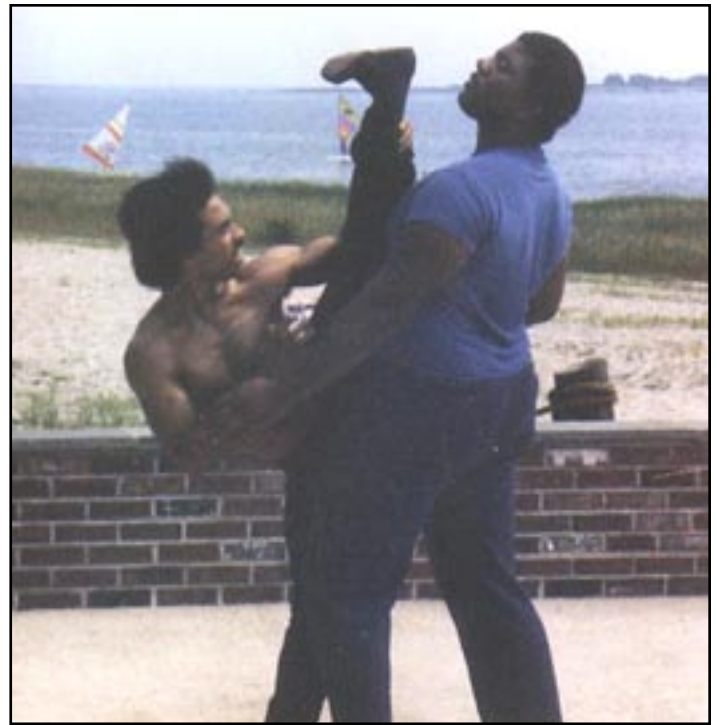


Another way I proved my skill was to train police officers. I took my first police officer student and taught him how to move like a black belt within one month. He spread the word as well as encouraged me to put an ad in the phone book advertising a Street Survivor course for law enforcement officers. The program was very successful and to this day, we continue to draw police officers, body guards, and security professionals to this school. These are people who put their lives on the line everyday. The fact that they trust us to train them and that we get repeat business from them is the best recommendation we can get for the Calasanz System.

Anyone who runs a martial arts school for any considerable length of time has had to prove himself just because of the nature of the business. People very often come to the school with the desire to fight you because they have to prove something. One day, a crazy Thai Boxer came through the door. He was about 22 years old and told me that he had many fights. While he had great technique, he lacked shin conditioning. He had a trial lesson and he threw a kick to kill me. Luckily, I always trained to protect my head, so his kick didn't connect. I then took a deep breath and we touched gloves. I took a Chinese boxing stance and he came to hit me even harder. I closed the gap and threw a punch to his head that could have broken his neck, but I let the strike pass through so it wouldn't connect. He was as pale as a ghost. That was the end of his trial lesson. He came to the office and signed up for a month of private lessons.

Another group of visiting kickboxers came through the doors in 1990. They were a couple of big guys who wanted to throw their weight around. The bigger of the two wanted to fight one of my students. I watched him fight for a while and he was the type that didn't like to block. He just would take blows because he thought he was tough guy. I put him to spar with my student Tony, who I had been training for three months. Tony delivered a heel kick to his stomach that almost made this guy throw up. He walked around, got back his wind and then came at Tony like he was going to kill him. I jumped in the ring and told him that he needed to use defensive techniques; that offense without defense did not work in this system.

Some of my students enjoyed competing in tournaments and I have supported their desire to compete over the years. My school participated in competitions and demonstrations for about 15 years. We've taken a break for the last 4 years, but from time to time, we send groups to compete in fighting or kata. It really isn't a concentrated



effort on our part. We just send them without any special preparation, just the regular training that they get here. Even in this relaxed atmosphere, our students placed 1st and 2nd in a variety of categories against one of the best schools in the world. The katas we teach here are some of the best for competition, even though our system is not dependent on kata.

I have prepared many students for competition, who could survive a real fight with a street fighter. Not all students however, are able to do this. This doesn't mean that they shouldn't train in martial arts. By training, they increase their chances for survival in a self-defense situation. They can also enjoy the martial arts as physical fitness, mind development and as the study of an ancient art. When I mentioned point fighters earlier in this piece, I indicated that real fighting and point fighting are really two separate issues and that successful point fighters shouldn't fool themselves into thinking that they are reality fighters. This does not mean however that point fighters and other competitors are not true martial artists. It takes a lot of discipline and self-denial to train for competition. Tournament training also takes facing your fears and becoming your own personal best. These people have a place in the martial arts.

I had a few students who came to me with the intention of becoming tournament point fighters. Their names were Mark, Dave and Matt. Because of the reputation I had built with my street fighter competitors, these guys were immediately matched up with opponents who were instructors! I made a deal with one of their mothers and promised her that if she agreed to drive her son to the competitions, I would make him #1 in New England in his division within a year and a half. It happened. Within that period of time, he was #1 in New England and 4th in the nation in sparring and in kata.

As I mentioned earlier, I earned my reputation by training street fighters. They fought not only in the streets, but I also sent them to tournaments so that I could prove myself in the martial arts community. Many of them became popular competitors. When they first started, they would get disqualified because they were accustomed to street fighting. I decided that if we were going to continue going to tournaments, we would have to learn to play by the rules. So I taught them how to play the game. I trained them to score at least 12 points before their opponent scored 3. Eventually, many of them started winning. They did as best as they could, considering opponents went to tournaments every week and they were just competing on a part-time basis.

It was a common practice to match my students with some of the toughest competitors. Sometimes it was even hard for them to register in advance because they would purposely try to stack the deck against us. I had tried point fighting myself and gave up on it because it was more of a game to me than a fighting art. If you learned the little tricks of playing the game, you could win. What I feared about engaging in point fighting, was that my fighting ability would suffer because I would develop bad habits. Point fighting rules that require you to pull punches and make no contact with your opponent are directly opposed to the skills you need to learn to survive on the streets. One guy who trained with me for point fighting tournaments earned the nickname “Flash” because his moves were so fast and fancy. While he was one of the best point fighters, he had a problem when he tried to engage in hard fighting because of the habits he had developed.

I was often asked by some tournament promoters to come and help out with judging and giving my famous Super Break demonstrations during intermission. When I helped with judging, I saw that a lot of cheating was going on. Judges would show a lot of favoritism and ignore the scoring of points when it didn't benefit their students. I was very careful to capture every move and to score fairly. I was also very fair when my own students fought and would award the points to the one who deserved it.

At this one tournament where I was a regular, the promoter had tremendous respect for me, my system and my students. I remember the first time they were introducing all of the masters and of course all of their ranks, some included 5th, 6th and 7th degree black belts. Then they called me and I just had a black belt. Everyone looked at me and expected that I would have some high rank. I never pursued a higher rank because I wanted to be a well-rounded martial artist. I didn't want to get locked into one system for the rest of my life. I wanted to see the whole logic behind the martial arts. In addition, I am of the opinion that a lot of these ranks are artificial and self-created. I remember one guy who claimed to be a Grandmaster of Wing Chun. I found this hard to believe considering he was only 29 years old. He took out an ad in a local newspaper where he applauded himself for being elected Grandmaster of Wing Chun by an association that he started himself!!!

As an instructor, I am constantly asked about my school's tournament participation and how many trophies I myself have won. I'd like to start off by saying that I have great respect for martial artists who devote their time to training for kata and point fighting competition. It takes a lot of discipline and hard work to pursue these goals. What I object to is the public's perception that the sign of a great fighter is winning lots of tournaments. Unfortunately, today's martial art tournaments look more like gymnastics and dance routines. Some instructors who do well at tournaments, but have no street fighting experience try to convince their students that they can teach them how to protect themselves on the streets. A person would have to train for many years in a traditional martial art before he would be able to use it on the streets. Growing up in the rural areas of the Dominican Republic gave me a lot of street fighting experience when I wasn't even looking. Part of being a man were I come from meant that you didn't back down from a challenge. This went on even after I started taking martial arts. Men would always challenge each other to knock down, drag down fights. In 1975, one of my first instructors, a brown belt killer, who was twice my size, wanted to fight me despite the fact that I only had a few lessons in karate. Finally, he convinced me to fight. Because of my experience in street fighting, they had to stop the fight by pulling me off of him. No matter how many belts, stripes, degrees or trophies you have, nothing beats the experience you get on the streets.



In 1995, I started making my movie, so we weren't very focused on sending people to tournaments for about 4 years. Several opportunities did present themselves and they were too good to pass up. One of my students, Jim Calvi, had his own school called Force Three Tae Kwon Do. I was interested in proving my skills as an instructor. I trained a group of 12 students to participate in the 1996 Olympic trials in both kata and fighting. Because we were not a tae kwon do school, we competed under the Force Three name because the competition was limited to practitioners of Tae Kwon Do. Some of my students ended up having to fight each other for the gold medal. I didn't care that they weren't fighting under my name. All I cared about was to prove a point and that my skills as an instructor could be applied in a variety of areas.

In the 1990's, we moved our school to 507 Westport Avenue. I purposely wanted a school with a high ceiling so that we could have boxing and kickboxing competitions. We started promoting our Fight Nights on a regular basis. One day, an instructor from New York City sent two of his students to my school to take private lessons from me because they were scheduled to fight some of my people at Fight Night. I was more than happy to have them as customers, but the problem was that they were not interested in learning anything. Their teacher had sent them to me to learn something about my system, instead all they could say was that they could knock anyone out. On the day of the fight, they ran into some trouble. One of them got knocked out 8 times and kept getting up. I gave him a lot of credit. The other guy left here on a stretcher to Norwalk Hospital and was in a coma for 4 hours. He was so arrogant during the fight that he purposely took off his headgear and that cost him an injury that he is still paying for to this day. The most embarrassing part of this story is that he was 34 years old and my student was only 16!



Another incident took place just before our first event. A friend and fellow martial artist came to my school one day with a group of his best students and his challenge was that any of his students could beat mine. I was surprised at his behavior because he and I were good friends and I even helped him organize his martial arts school when he went into business. I had one of his guys fight a student of mine who only had one arm. During the first fight, my student almost killed his opponent. I personally trained this young man in the art of counterattack. He trained hard and absorbed what I taught him. His opponent had been training in karate for 10 years.

In another fight, a couple of my guys were matched up with competitors who participated in knockdown tournaments on a weekly basis. My students were not competing regularly. They were teaching classes and doing some light physical workouts to stay in shape. Both of my students were defeated in this tournament. People started criticizing my school and gloating about this defeat. My goal now was to put an end to their celebration. I challenged them to a rematch and told them to give me three weeks to get these guys in fighting shape. Three weeks later, my students sent one opponent after the other to the hospital. Some even retired three well known fighters and instructors. My mission with these fights was to prove that I could use my skills to correct the mistake of letting students fight who were not personally trained by me.

One match that stayed with me was the case of a young Japanese man who was being trained by one of my students who claimed to be an authentic Thai boxer. I let him take control of the situation and assume responsibility for this young man's training. On the day of the fight, this young man was beat up because of the poor training he received. After the fight, I went into the office with the other instructors and asked for 3 weeks to train this man myself. This would cost me over \$4,000, but I didn't care; my name was at stake here. Three weeks later, he was able to defeat his opponent in a rematch.

I had to do this again against a group of Kung-fu stylists. I had mismatched my students with this group, partly because their instructor used to train with me and is even in one of my commercials. I let my personal relationship with this guy get in the way of good judgment. My guys lost, which made their opponents very happy. I went through the same challenge. Over the next 2 events, I retrained my students and they were able to retire the Kung-fu instructor and his students. In another fight, I trained a 14 year old student to go up against a guy who had been training for 8 years with 2 excellent boxers. I trained this kid privately for one month and he was able to defeat this guy with 8 years of experience.



Summary

I hope this booklet has given new students some insight into my evolution as a martial artist and as an instructor. I am also hopeful that it has explained the philosophy behind The Calasanz System. I have incorporated the fundamentals of what I learned over the years into this system, sifting through what worked and what didn't, so my students would reap the benefits without having to walk in my shoes. Understanding the roots of my system is essential in appreciating its practicality and effectiveness. My legacy in this lifetime is a practical martial arts system that will endure long after I have left this earth. I consider each and every student that has passed and will pass through these doors part of the Calasanz lineage and part of that legacy.

Calasanz





A Lifetime of Lessons

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