



Chayon-Ryu,

CHAYON-RYU IMPACT ON MY LIFE

Martial Art is for health and longevity. Chayon-Ryu “Natural way” Martial arts was designed for life, and for everyone. And the results are astonishing. Many thanks to the founder, GrandMaster Kim Soo.

*Natural Way Martial
Arts.*

Chayon-Ryu Martial Arts Impact on my life

Since 2011, the year I joined Chayon-Ryu Martial Art, my point of view about martial arts has changed. It's no longer just about hard punches, high and nice kicks, aggressive sparing or making points over my opponent inside dojo or in a competition, but it's also about my daily lifestyle, longevity and well-being. Before I share my Chayon-Ryu experience for the past 3.5 years, I would like to dive into my little Karate-life story.

In my early teens, I had a classmate, in 6th grade, whose older brother took Karate classes, and he would show his little brother some show-off moves. The later would come to school and tell us that he can whoop everyone at the whole elementary school since he knows Karate. Kids feared him and gave him whatever he asked. The fact of the matter is, in country side, karate was seen as for bad guys. Our parents would teach us to watch out for those who studied that evil practice as it teaches bad-guys how to kill and do worse things to good people! So, having that in mind, kids would imagine what our dear classmate would do to them should anyone confront him.

Until 1960, in Rwanda (Africa) -where I was born and raised- fighting was part of the culture. Those who knew how to fight were considered real men. But by fighting, they meant warriors; those who know how to use traditional weapons such as spears, swords, arcs, sticks, and grappling. Those warriors would risk their life for country during war times against the enemy. They would help conquer more lands, expand, and protect the country. But in the 1970s, a few years after the country's independence (1962), Karate was introduced to the country by few young men who studied in Asia and Europe, learned Japanese and Chinese Martial arts, and then returned back home. Those prime Rwandan Karatekas, were not allowed to teach empty hand fighting as the idea was perceived to be against the culture. The Karate teaching ban was also politically motivated as the government feared that such practice might bring about the formation of private army groups that could cause insecurity or start a rebellion against the government. So, they started teaching in hidden places; unfortunately, thieves and vagabonds learned the skills and started using those skills for malevolent actions. These new students would then teach their comrades and followers in jungles, or other places where authorities would not find them. The outcome of such practice was that good parents would cast away any son or daughter participating in such evil activity. Therefore, it was a curse to learn Karate in those days.

Nevertheless, going back to my classmate story in elementary school, as a skinny kid, I always wanted to be able to keep my classmates and siblings from pushing me around. I wanted to be cool and confident like him. Fortunately, in 1992, I went to high school, far away from my home town, and there it was... Shotokan Karate class! At this school it was acceptable to join karate class as long as you are in 9th grade and mature enough for self-control. But since I was only in 7th grade, I couldn't wait two more years to begin! During my first semester, I made a friend who just started the 10th grade and had joined the Shotokan Karate-Do class for almost a year. Every morning at about 5AM, we would wake up (before the rest of the dormitory) and go to the gym where he would teach me whatever he knew. We practiced

at least 30 minutes every day for the next three semesters. At that time, there were no rank tests or belt exams as the highest rank in the dojo was blue belt, for the instructor, and yellow belt, for his assistant instructor; everyone else was white belt.

When I finally joined that Shotokan club, in 9th grade, I had enough skill to defend myself during my introduction to the club. By introduction, I mean that the teaching was brutal. Every Karateka had to be strong; Capable of sparring with full contact while protecting one's self against an opponent. On your first day, you would have to spar an advanced white belt to demonstrate that you are tough enough to take the Karate class. Many new students would get injured on their first day and never come back. Some were dismissed as incapable of learning Karate. Thanks to the instruction from my best friend I was ready and strong . I was able to protect myself, hold my ground, and safely spar my opponent. From that point on, I aggressively studied Shotokan for the next year. Myself, my fellow students and instructors, had a different understanding of the purpose of Karate from our parents. Our parents believed that Karate was only for bad guys. So, we trained to fight bad guys on the street; to protect ourselves and our loved ones. Injuries were not a concern for us during our Karate practice as we were ready for significantly worse injuries out on the street. But, for me, that was a million-dollar secret. When I returned home for school breaks, my parents and siblings were not to notice that I practiced Karate as I could be banned from going back to school or cast out of my family. I would tell them that my injuries, all the scars on my arms and legs were from soccer practice!

In April 1994, during our Easter break, the genocide against Tutsi occurred in my country and most of my fellow students were killed; among them my best friend, Emmanuel, who had privately introduced me to Shotokan. My high school was destroyed along with much of the infrastructure across the country. A year and a half later, after the genocide, I was transferred to a different school on the other side the country. There, I met Sensei Sinzi, a 3rd degree black belt who taught Wado-Ryu Karate-Do, another Japanese style, at the National University of Rwanda and surrounding high schools. A couple other students from my previous school and I, joined Wado-Ryu Karate-Do. Although the style is somewhat similar to Shotokan, our Wado-Ryu instruction was a little less violent and more technique-oriented. Most of the time, we would learn from our fellow student who was brown belt and assistant Instructor to Sensei Sinzi. All techniques, Katas, and other learned skills, were all copycat from our instructors or higher rank students. For the next four years, I heavily practiced Wado-Ryu but at the end, I couldn't go any further as my knees had swollen to the point where I couldn't practice any more.

In 1999, I received a scholarship to USA to attend La Roche College in Pittsburgh, PA. There, I spoke with one of the university doctors and asked her what I should do with my swollen knees which have been hurting me for over a year. She advised me to go back and slowly start exercising, paying attention to my knees and joints, until I regained my regular speed and routine. I decided to immediately join Kyokushin Karate-Do at the same college under direct teaching of Shihan Dan Sollar, 5th degree black belt, and the VP of La Roche College at that time. Shihan Dan Sollar helped me regain my strength little by little for one year. It was there in Kyokushin Karate-Do where I started using my mind to control my own body in order to avoid injuries. But at the end of 2001, I left Pittsburgh to Bakersfield, CA.

It wasn't until 2009, when I reconnected with Shihan Dan Sollar, via email, and I told him that even though I no longer practice Karate, I still have and use Karate Spirit in my daily routine. He responded to me saying that it's great to hear from me after so many years, but it's also good to keep my physical in sync with my mind and spirit. That sentence became a lightning bolt in my heart. I responded, "Thank you Shihan, OSU". From that day, I started searching for a more traditional Karate School in Bakersfield, California. For the next two years, I couldn't find the right school as I didn't see the traditional substance of martial arts in several schools that I visited in a quest to find my new Dojo. All I saw was about competition where students' goals are winning more trophies! I spoke to one of the schools instructor and he told me that he can guarantee a black belt and trophies within one year if I sign a one-year contract!

In 2011, I found Bakersfield Kim Soo Karate, under Chief Instructor Sabomnim Michael Moore, a direct student of GrandMaster Kim Soo. I sent him couple of emails and he invited me to come in and test it out for few days and see if I like it. Well, I loved it! Mr. Moore briefly told me about Chayon-Ryu philosophy and right there I was like, my quest is over. I joined the class and started learning more about GrandMaster Kim Soo, his journeys, his background, his teachers, his [Chayon-Ryu] system and its philosophy. I had two concerns in my mind: Will I be as strong, sharp, and fast as I was 10 years ago? Will I be able to keep up with this new style in my thirties? Well all those questions were based on my past experiences where Karate was about being young, furious and competent.

After six months of training, I started to understand the real meaning of Chayon Ryu, the Natural way: the use of natural body movements, the concept of using mind, body and spirit, with every technique, every move, and above all, the use of proper breathing. This philosophy changed my life and my point of view of martial arts. I don't have to injure myself in order to perform a weird or complicated move or technique. If a body part, such as my leg, cannot naturally turn in a certain angle, I cannot kick at such an angle. However, if I can use my mind and body to naturally turn my leg towards that particular angle, then I can kick there. I don't have to break my arm blocking a hard kick, but I can simply avoid and conserve that energy for a good use, being offense or counter attack. I learned that Karate is about art. Artists use their mind, body and spirit to create great objects that look beautiful to observers. Therefore, a martial artist should also do the same during every move, technique and form. As I was new to Chayon-Ryu, the Natural Way Martial Arts, it was not easy for me to transition from an old mechanical way of martial arts to natural way martial arts. But Sabomnim Michael Moore and GrandMaster Kim Soo were there to help me empty my cup and fill it up again. Thank you, Sirs.

Outside the Dojang, my personal life has dramatically changed as well. At my work, I use breathing techniques to relieve my stress. Every time I feel pressured or under stress, I step out to catch some air and do a few in-and-out deep belly breaths. That always helps me to get back to work with a fresh start. Also, I now consider Chayon-Ryu practice as a cure to many of the health issues that I incurred in my previous practices such as knee issues, muscle cramps, blood clots, etc. While performing a technique, whether it is a kick, a punch, or a block, a combination of breathing rhythm and natural body movement preserves my body's well-being and energy. I don't burn out or get injured. I have extra energy available to throw a punch or a kick while keeping additional energy reserves to maintain my body. And those are refilled as they are emptied; energy cycle. That control of energy keeps my health in

balance. As a result, I have more energy to do my other chores outside the Dojang; being home, work or any other physical activity.

In Chayon-Ryu, we learn techniques with an open mind. A student has to think about what he/she is doing with that technique and how to properly execute it using his/her natural body motion in order to avoid injuries. This is the concept that I never encountered until I joined Chayon-Ryu, and it has played a big role in my daily life outside Dojang as I mentioned above. Every activity I do, I always apply the same concept or philosophy of natural body motion, and the incorporation of mind, body and spirit to avoid injuries or deformation of my body. I wish I knew this several years ago. I learned how to enjoy everything I do, in or outside the Dojang, as long as my whole self is naturally acting together; body, mind and spirit.

After all, I came to realize that Karate is not about being tough, violent, brutal, fierce, hard sparer, elegant, scary, malevolent, young, better than others, etc. It's about being an artist, confident, respectful, and a humble person, but at the same time able to protect myself, my family and my friends. As GrandMaster teaches it, Natural Way Martial Art is about health and longevity. Exercising is a natural cure to our body, and if it's properly done it can be for life. Anyone can practice Karate for the above purposes as long as they do it the natural way, the Chayon-Ryu way.

Thank you, GrandMaster Kim Soo, for founding such inspiring system, and for being the greatest and inspiring Martial Art teacher.

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