

Fist of Destiny - Memoirs of a Martial Artist

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by

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Published by Lancaster Publishing

through Createspace

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Dedication

I have so many people who I should dedicate this book to but if I did the dedication would be book length as well! So I will try and keep it to the few people who made a big impression on me one way or another but will break it up between four categories :-

Family - my father John, who I never had enough time with, my mother Elsie who was always there for me and my wife Trisha and our sons Joshua and Luke. Also the whole of the Sweetman family and it's offshoots and my stepfather Bob.

Friends - Steve Burr for the endless what if's, Stuart for the drinks and George for introducing me to the gym. Kay for being a friend for so long.

Martial art friends and colleagues - Noel Reece for being my friend and pupil, Dave Miller, Susan Miller, Phil and Jim Newcombe for great times. Colin Dunn (ex European champ) for being my friend and a dam good kick boxer, Bob Allen (ex world champion) for being a pain in the arse. Ed, Gary, Kevin, Adam, Ting, Andy Lee, Andy Denney, Shu and Errol for being my brothers and sisters and for all your help and support.

Martial Instructors - Sifu Lu Jun Hai for being the ultimate inspiration and teacher, Irvin Cleydon for cultivating a very silly young boy and for being my life long friend and Terry Parker for being a great instructor and good guy.



In Memory of

John France, instructor and friend and gone too soon

Brian Devlin, instructor and hard man

Harry, friend and fellow pupil of Sifu Lu

Foreword

Looking back, my earliest childhood memory is one of me riding a three wheeled bike down Church Street Market, Marylebone, just off the Edgware Road. A shame really, because I mentioned it to my mum once, and she was adamant that it never happened. So, like a lot of things its almost certainly a fiction, something I dreamed up and convinced myself was real. A lot of people do that, and martial artists are no exception.

What I want to do here in these writing's is to give a nuts and bolts view of a martial artists life. What drove me to do martial arts, who I idolized, what I liked, hated, what made me sad. And along the way I want to blow away a few myth's. I also hope to inspire others to try the martial arts, or to succeed at them, or even just to view their own chosen sport, or even just their life, in a different way.

Also, as I spin out my own story, I would like to enlighten the reader where I can. This may seem a little presumpcious for some, but my aim is not to 'teach my granny to suck eggs', but to enrich the basic martial artist and non martial artist's alike. I hope to do this partly with my own experience, partly by rehashing the history, philosophy and application of those arts I have been directly involved with.

I also want to recount some stories about martial artists I have known or who have had influence on me, be it all through a third or even 'forth' party. During the telling of this narrative I want to tell of some of the remarkable things instructors and great masters have done. But I also want to dispel some of the rubbish which has been put about. This last part may upset some people, and I will apologise now if I offend, it's not my aim, but it may be my duty to do so at times.

Karl Lancaster March 2009

Chapter One - The Big Boss

I was born (no surprise there then) on 13th November 1955 and, after some argument, named Karl Lancaster. My father wanted me to be called Charles, but my mother had other ideas, so they settled on Karl which is the Germanic equivalent anyway. Things did not go right from the off as my name was to be spelled with a 'c', the Scandinavian spelling, but the registrar mucked it up.

My father was John Patrick Lancaster. He hated the Patrick bit, his mother had been born in Ireland near Cork, but as he hated the Irish he

would never accept that she was truly a Celt. If you ever wanted to cause an argument you had only to bring up his celtic ancestry and he was off! As the name Lancaster implies the family was English and probably originally from Lancashire, although no one could remember back that far.

Apparently, according to my father, the more recent ancestors of the Lancaster family had been Fishermen and it was a family tradition to take a Scandinavian bride. However, as I allude to in my foreword, we often make assumption or even downright fiction fact. And I could find no record of fisherman or Danish brides when researching my family tree. Only that my great great grandfather (I think) was described as a 'gentleman', which, in those days was rare.

According to my father, my great grandmother spoke with an obvious Danish accent her whole life. And it was no doubt the Scandinavian blood (if it existed) that contributed to my fathers looks. On holiday he was always mistaken for German, a fact that peeved him off his entire life.

My grandfather Richard was born in Woolwich London in 1905. Hence the now family tradition of being an Arsenal supporter. Granddad Richard also decided to become a police officer. At six feet two inches and probably about 15 or 16 stone he was a big guy (although the smallest of all his brothers) and ideally suited to being an old time copper. He was by all accounts a total bastard and not someone to mess with. Apparently one of his past times was to start a fight in a pub, let it escalate in to a small riot and then call in the cavalry and nick the lot of them. He also used to carry a pistol. Its from Granddads time at least that the family have a tradition of fighting and of being handy with a gun. Unfortunately I never met my grandfather or grandmother, or indeed step grandmother as they all died by fifty. My grandfather dying the year I was born.

My father was one of three, the other two being girls. Like his father he grew up to be a powerfully build man and stood well over six feet tall. He didn't have such a good start in life, his mother died when he was young and his dad remarried. Apparently his step mum was quite well to do and he loved her but she also died young.

Dad was not a well child. He spent several years in hospital with childhood asthma. But at fourteen he became the second youngest recruit to join the Royal Navy. He spent ten years in the Navy, mostly as a submariner. During that time he boxed for the navy, shot for the navy (he was a marksman with at least three confirmed kills) and played water

polo for the navy. He also learned unarmed combat and more importantly, how to fight.

One thing my dad wasn't shy of was a fight. All through his life he was happy to accommodate. Even at nearly fifty he was able to knock a guy down with one punch.

In contrast to my dad who was big, blonde and blue eyed, my mother was short, dark and brown eyed. She was also shrewd, hard working and had a very bad temper! She once chased one of her sister around with a red hot poker. And on another occasion I watched her bury a fork in my fathers hand. They got on like 'Ali' and 'Fraser' and some of the fights were just as good but did nothing for me as an only child in a constantly warring family.

If my father's heritage was colourful it paled in contrast to my mothers family. Latin, celtic, French and Jewish were the predominant contributors to the blood line.

My maternal great-grandfather fought in the first world war as part of a cavalry unit. He was shot and gassed and eventually died of his wounds. My great-grandmother also died young. But that was my mothers family. My mothers fathers family boasted an endearing great grandfather who was virtually illiterate who was dominated by a self centred would be actress wife. Both lived well in to their eighties.

Both my mothers parents had a great influence on my life as I virtually lived with them until I was about eleven years old. My grandfather was domineering and quick tempered, but a typical bully who backed down when a more able man was about, funny but he never got on with my father. He was far more fond of animals than he was people and bred dogs, birds and fish. He was also a very selfish man. But he did have good points like taking me for long walks to museums and parks on a Saturday morning when my dad was working or in the pub, and my mum was out with her sisters and my grandmother down Oxford Street. The other good point was he enjoyed wrestling and every Saturday afternoon we would sit there and watch the likes of Kendo Nagasaki and Big Daddy pretend to hurt each other. Although totally bogus, but a lot more technical than the modern day American wrestling, it did give me some insight in to 'fighting systems' at an early age.

I'm sure it was due to my childish interest in wrestling that my father one day decided to teach me boxing. In his eyes boxing was the combat

art for a man, although he was vaguely aware of more complete systems of combat like judo and karate, but had no direct dealings with them other than through the minimal unarmed combat training he got in the Navy.

My boxing training started when I was about 14 years old and mainly consisted of my dad giving me tips on strength exercises, shadow boxing and sparring, during which he would thump hell out of one of my arms. To be fair we never used gloves and he was being pretty gentle, it just didn't feel like that at the time.

Unlike some of the kids today, by 14 I had already had my fair share of fights. At primary school I had both given and received a few good beatings. And out of school I was not the most popular kid on the block and this too resulted in a few good tear ups!

Things didn't change when I moved from Christ Church Primary to Rutherford Comprehensive. Rutherford had a reputation even then, and it endures now. I was never one of the big fighters at school, I was too shy and somewhat slight. But I did surprise a few people with my punch and stopped several playground opponents with just the one shot.

In about 1972/73 I got my first look at the new must see cinema craze, oriental martial arts film. If I remember rightly the first film I saw was 'The One Arm Swordsman'. The second was 'Fist of Fury' with the now legendary Bruce Lee. I'm sure by the time I saw it he had already come to an untimely end.

Of course I loved it, like any kid would. And my best friend Tony Christopher and I would spar and make up our own 'kung fu' moves. I was somewhat surprised that although he was bigger than me and a better playground fighter, I could hold my own against him and quite often get the better of him with my homemade martial arts.

Its fair to say that Bruce Lee and also David Carradine in 'Kung Fu' were two very big factors in my life at that time. I went for the whole martial arts things hook, line and sinker! I was so keen my mother brought me home a book on karate. And my father taught me the few bits of unarmed combat he knew.

At that time I knew only what I saw in kung fu films and in the TV series. Of course both, although having a basic element of the philosophy and technique, were wildly inaccurate but entertaining! I recently watched 'Fist of Fury' again and was not only appalled by the acting but

also by the technique. Even Bruce looked like an amateur. David Carradine at the time 'Kung Fu' was made didn't know any martial arts at all, although he has learned kung fu since.

But at that time I wasn't aware that David Carradine was a dancer choreographed by another, or that Bruce was more or less self taught with a minimum of actual kung fu training. All I saw was guys who could beat the shit out of other people and appear not only tranquil but also fully justified at the end of it.

Of course the fact they had good bodies and health was also another reason to idolise them. And being famous for kicking arse was yet another pull! Being hailed the best fighter in the world was bound to catch my interest too, even if Bruce wasn't. But alas, I couldn't find a nearby club.

Never one to give up I kept looking for kung fu clubs and lo and behold there was one just a ten minute walk away. But it wasn't cheap. At eighteen I left school and got a job as a clerk with the National Coal Board, working out of their HQ behind Buckingham Palace. I was on a reasonable wage for my age and upper most in my mind was using some of that money to join the kung fu club. But as luck would have it my martial arts career was about to take a totally different route!

I had only been working for the NCB for a month or two when I noticed one of the guys in my building had put up a notice about starting a martial arts club. It was something called aikido and apparently it used the force of the opponent against him. I had never heard of it but thought I would give it a go anyway. And so my kung fu training went on hold for about 25 years!



Chapter Two- The Way of the Harmonious Spirit

On a Thursday night sometime in October 1974 I donned a silly looking white suit, which was too small for me, and stepped on to a martial arts mat for the first time. I had no idea what I was getting myself in to!

Like all aikido sessions we started by bowing to the instructor, who on this occasion was a senior student of the actual instructor. After a brief explanation of what was going to happen we started a series of warm up exercises followed by an introduction to break falls.

One of the guys was a yellow belt and he looked so cool, even though he hadn't done it for long. I later found out his name was David Miller, we have been friends ever since. As it turned out, cool as he was that night, I actually got my first dan black belt about six months before him or in fact before any of the guys who joined around that time.

I met my instructor, Irvine Cleydon the following week. Within two or three weeks I was travelling to other clubs and before the year was out I was training up to five times a week.

At this point I would like to do a little potted history of aikido, and in particular my part in it. For those who know nothing about aikido it has its roots back in 12th century Japan and the rise of the Samurai and their many martial practices.

Daito Ryu Aiki jutsu was apparently founded by a Japanese prince. In reality its probably another case of attributing something to the royal family in order to make it look good and give it some sort of royal seal of approval. Anyway, whatever the origins it did become a well established and practical form of combat which survived through to the 20th century.

Morehei Uyeshiba learned the system, amongst others. And from this developed what came to be known as aikido. Now this is where I may upset a few people, especially aikido practioners.

It's long been held that Uyeshiba, a very good martial artist in his day, studied several Japanese martial systems, including aiki jutsu and used these to develop aikido. Aikido then went through several transformations before he held it up as a complete system. Of course Uyeshiba also claimed he went through a mystical revelation which also changed the emphasis of the art from purely combative to universal love. Here we go then, firstly not all aikidoka subscribe to the universal love bit. And secondly aikido has probably got a lot of Chinese influence in it!

Now I have your full attention, let me explain further. Aikido has several schools it has been split in to. Some of those schools or styles take Uyeshiba's later teachings as their lead. But some of the earlier developed schools like Tomiki and Yoshinkan aikido take the more practical and active combat elements of the art to heart.

Yoshinkan appears on the surface to be quite close to the 'home' style Uyeshiba finalised. That is until you attempt to practice it and find out how much more practical and violent it is. While Tomiki, or sport aikido, and its later branches have a more competitive edge, although in a lot of clubs retaining that combat edge to it as well. It is Tomiki that I was taught.

Most of the people I trained with in Tomiki style, and later in Yoshinkan style, were not your 'peace be on to you' types, all they wanted was an effective fighting system. And this attitude flies in the face of Uyeshiba's later ideas.

For those people with little knowledge of aikido it differs from other Japanese arts in several ways. Its circular, not linear like modern karate. The movements are quite soft and relaxed. And the use of internal force or ki is taught. None of these ideas are common to modern Japanese martial arts.

The probable reason for this was identified by T K Francis, an authority on Chinese internal martial arts, but also a black belt in aikido. As he rightly points out Uyeshiba was a good martial artist and also studied several systems, it seems unlikely that given the chance to expand his knowledge he wouldn't do so. And for several years, while in the army in China he had such an opportunity.

Francis is of the opinion that while serving in China Uyeshiba had the opportunity to see and practice some of the Chinese internal arts, some of the most sophisticated martial systems devised. In all probability it was

Bagua that Uyeshiba was exposed to and he incorporated some of the concepts in to aikido. This would fit with the aikido concept of leading ki (or chi) which is fundamental to the system but also at odds to other Japanese systems. The idea of leading chi is probably most familiar to practioners of Tai Chi Chuan when incorporated in to the 'pushing hands' exercise.

In practice, and when used as a proper combat system, rather than a vehicle of 'love', aikido is a specialised branch of ju jutsu. It incorporates mainly wrist, elbow and shoulder locks and throws to defeat an opponent. However, there other techniques incorporated including strikes but these are often not seen in the 'softer' versions of the art. Both Yoshikan and Tomiki aikido do retain these harder elements.

Like judo, aikido boasts that it uses the enemy's own power against them selves. Principally this means that if someone wants to push you, you don't resist you go with the direction of the push and the same goes for pull. By speeding up the persons attack and, or, redirecting it you can throw the opponent with ease. Similarly to several Chinese internal styles aikido uses circular movements to avoid, parry and counter an attack. The circles allowing for movement in small areas as well as large and also for the transmission of huge amounts of power.

As well as opened handed techniques, which can be performed standing or kneeling, there are also techniques with and against the knife, bo staff and sword. And many people do not realise that much of the fundamental footwork and movement is based on that used in aiki ken or aikido sword play.

In principle aikido is a stunning martial art, and there have been many displays by top masters which have impressed the martial arts world. But, note I said top masters. It is only Uyeshiba and some of his top pupils that have been able to capture the imagination in this way.

For the average student Aikido is very difficult to learn, let alone master. Even black belts can be little more than mediocre in their application of the art and few can use it in a full on combat situation.

That said I remember my early years in Aikido as being full of pain! My first and principle instructor Irvine Cleydon was very much in the old martial artist tradition. That said he was no street fighter, but nor was he a bully or a pretender. He was just a martial artist who believed in total involvement in his art and the extension of that art in to his daily life.

Irvine was one of two brothers, both gifted in aikido but in totally different ways. I was unlucky in that Peter, Irvine's brother, had left to live in Australia just months before I started. However I did meet him a few years down the line. Peter was the fighter, while Irvine the technician. Peter was a leader to Irvine's politician. Peter was a battering ram to Irvine's rapier. Peter was also the kind of guy that, when surrounded by several muggers, had pissed himself laughing so much at their attempt to intimidate him that they decided they had other things to do and bolted for it.

Of course in those days Peter wasn't the only nutty martial artist about. During the making of the James Bond film *You Only Live Twice* the film makers had flown over a dozen or so experts in Japanese martial arts. There were connections between our Aikido set up and them and apparently some of the Japanese were taken on a little pub crawl. It didn't start too well when, as they passed a club in Soho, a doorman made a derogatory remark about orientals and one of them went for him. He dashed back in to the club and slammed a wooden door shut, only to find a fist going right through it. On the same night, when the party split up, one of the Aikido instructors found himself with a Japanese exponent of Karate when they were confronted by a gang of skinheads. The unfortunate leader of the gang found himself on the way to hospital with two broken legs!

In Tomiki there are four distinct phases, movement practice, ki practice, kata and free practice. Peter excelled at free practice, which included various forms of sparring. Irvine on the other hand was just as good at kata, the basic sets of techniques which aikido and many other martial arts use to encapsulate the essence of the system.

Like I said Irvine was totally involved in what he did. And, just like the old masters, his teaching did not stop when the lesson did.

Most people who have never been involved in martial arts have the mistaken idea that it's adherents are pure in mind and body, that their body is a temple and disgusting substances, like alcohol and tobacco would never pass their lips....WRONG! Even the world renowned Shaolin Monks are allowed to drink (although in their case it was by special dispensation from the Chinese Emperor). There is even a fairly well known story about a Chinese kung fu master who was having a couple of drinks with friends while sitting on a windowsill, half way through a conversation the friends looked away from him and when they looked back he wasn't there, it was a one storey fall and they looked out

the window expecting to see him dead or injured below. As they did he strolled back in the room totally unharmed. In his intoxicated state he had leaned back, fallen, rolled and climbed back to the room he had fallen from all in a matter of seconds!

Maybe it's just me and I get attracted to the wrong people, but all the martial arts I have done are normally capped off with a visit to the pub. Aikido was no exception. In fact over the years we organised a few pub crawls. It was on one of these we felt Irvine's wrath for letting our guard down.

It was on the surface a pretty silly thing we did. About four or five of us chatted to some Scandinavian tourists who wanted directions, there were a few of them and they surrounded us as we gave them instructions of how to get to their destination. After they had gone Irvine went ballistic, pointing out how we could have been attacked from any direction! He was right of course and I paid more attention to his instructions on and off the mat after that. Even today I normally stay on the outside of a circle of people and I always sit facing the door of a pub or restaurant when ever I can.



Chapter Three - Growing up the Aikido way

I have already mentioned my life long friend Dave Miller in the previous chapter. Dave was from Edinburgh and had only recently moved down to London. His accent wasn't the worse one I had heard but still confused me at times. But he was a nice guy, if a total mess most of the time and a bit of a geek.

To be honest Dave was the first non English person I had really had any great dealings with. Having been brought up in an exclusively white area of London I had not come across many people other than white Londoners.

I can remember when I was about nine or ten years old playing in the playground of my primary school, Christ Church, when the whole of the school was stunned in to silence. We ran to the fence that surrounded the playground to watch one lone Blackman walk passed, for most of us it was a first! And even at my secondary school non whites were in a minority and tended to stick together.

So as a Scot Dave stuck out quite a bit, well for me at least. We soon became good friends, and because we were close together age wise (Dave being three or four years older than me) and also in our starting times in aikido, we soon looked for each other on the mat when we needed a partner.

At about the same time we started several other guys started including an even bigger geek than Dave called Neil McDonald. Neil was an odd looking guy with bulging eyes and the weirdest feet I have ever seen. But we hung out together for several years. Two brothers and a couple of friends also started within a few weeks of us starting, the brothers were Phil and Jim Newcombe. They would also feature in my life for the next few years, and Phil and Jim would go on to become high ranking aikidoka and establish them selves as top medallist's at the aikido world championships.

Back in those days life was simple. I spent all day at a job I hated sitting behind a desk trying not to let my brain dissolve. Monday to Friday I

spent doing aikido. And at the weekends I went to a pub, a club, or a party, or if it was a good oneall three!

After a few months of doing aikido under Irvine Cleydon at the National Coal Board club, BBC club and UCL club we added a further club at the civil service facility in Victoria. And then Dave and I pushed the boat out and started to visit another instructor Ahmeed Saeed. Although Ahmed was with the same organisation Irvine was, the Aikido Development Society, they didn't see quite eye to eye for several reasons. Ahmed had committed a great sin by leaving our organisation and training with another rival group, the British Aikido Association, in order to get his black belt. Although no where near as good at, or knowledgeable of kata as Irvine, Ahmed had trained with the likes of Ken Broom and brushed his randori practice to a high standard. He also trained in a slightly more traditional aikido manner when it came to developing free techniques. And it was because of this that Dave and I decided to train under him.

Ahmed was an Iranian but had an English wife back then and very much English values. He was a big guy, about six feet tall and heavy built and he used his strength when it suited him on the mat, along with a suppleness you didn't expect of someone of his size. And he didn't take prisoners!

Where Irvine would structure the class in a particular way, bringing several elements of aikido in to play on a regular basis, Ahmed was more free flowing and inclined towards free practice and randori. Ahmeed would push us taking us on individually and in pairs and exhausting us to the point we could hardly stand and, in the early days, without allowing us to throw him even once. I can remember distinctly on one occasion being so knackered and frustrated after 20 minutes of trying to throw him that I was nearly in tears but also just intent on knocking his block off before he halted the session. Irvine's lessons were of a shorter duration but just as painful. Several bits of teeth are probably still imbedded in a few tatami mat's because I didn't pick up on what he was trying to teach me quickly enough!

Not long after visiting Ahmeed I also started to train occasionally with another of the association's instructors, John France. John was a real character and fun to be around. But he was also a very strong aikidoka. He was also one of those enquiring minds who was always looking for a better way to perform a move or a train a technique. This quest for something more took John to Shorinji Kempo (the Japanese version of

Shaolin kung fu), several styles of aikido, jodo (Japanese stick fighting), iaido (the art of drawing and cutting with the Japanese sword) and kyudo (Japanese archery). I was lucky enough to be instructed by John in both jodo and iaido.

As I said, John was a delight to be around and he was always joking. But a real rough diamond, typical working class with a heart of gold.

So, there I was running around like a blue arsed fly five days a week, seeing as many as three different instructors and still managing to fit the pub and clubs in now and then. Well a bit more than now and then!

To illustrate a point let me taken you through a typical week in my first year or so of aikido. Sunday, first day of the week and, whoopee, no training. So, a nice lay in until about 10 am. Get up, bit of cereal, and about 1145 am a ten minute stroll with my dad, down to The Beehive pub in Homer Street. Five minutes of waiting for it to open, at which point normally joined by old school friend Dave Murphy and several other regulars. In to the pub where my beer was almost certainly already waiting in my own pewter mug. I would then beat Dave at darts before heading over to join my dad and cribbage partner at the card table. About three or four pints later we would head home for Sunday lunch, complete with a glass or two of wine.

Sunday afternoon would crawl by until about 645pm at which point I would head back to the pub, probably to meet Dave again and shortly be joined by my date who would have, at last, come out of an afternoon nap. More darts, crib or dominoes and another four or five pints and home again.

Monday...yuk...work. More soul destroying crap. But lightened a little by going to the canteen and then the bar with Neil McDonald and sometimes joined by Phil Newcombe, couple of quick pints and back to the grind. Then in the evening straight on to the Civil Service club for aikido and a few pints in the club bar after.

Tuesday work, bar, work, aikido, pub. Wednesday, work, bar, work, aikido, pub. Thursday, yep you got it, same again. Friday, surprise same again. Saturday....oops nearly kept going, but no aikido that day nor work!

Saturday was an interesting day. Up about 9am and then helped my dad prepare Saturday's evening meal. After that we went to the pub, four or

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