

AN INTERVIEW WITH SENSEI KEITH PACE.

Introduction.

The following was recorded during the compiling of the Broseley Goju Kan book. It is worth remembering as you read that the “interview” took place in Sensei Max Beddow’s dinning room accompanied by the background noise of several club members who had gathered prior to the nights training so the interview actually turned into more of a conversation which is how the text needs to be followed.
Mike

M.- Why did you start martial arts training and what age were you?

K.- I was twelve years old and somebody head butted me I swore he would never do it again.

M. - Did he?

K. - He tried!! Basically I’d moved down from Cheshire when I was twelve in 1962 and started at a local senior school and there was this local bully who decided he didn’t like me much. I was quite well built for a twelve year old and he head butted me. I’d never come across a head but before and I didn’t really like the idea of fighting. A friend of mine lived in Dingle and his father did Hungar he ran a pet stores in Lark Lane Dingle. I’d known Lee for years, since we were kids and it was his dad who told me about bringing your elbow up. Anyway the next time I brought my elbow up and the point of the elbow stuck in his eye.

M.- So how many clubs were about then?

K. - There weren’t a lot. I lived on the outskirts of Liverpool between Garston and Widnes in a village in the old part, there were no martial arts clubs about as such. Years later when I was probably a teenager, around 13 to 14, there was the red triangle in Liverpool. I saw an article on TV by Andy Sherry on Shotokan. He’d just taken twelve months out to go to Japan. There was some Jujitsu and a lot of Judo clubs in Liverpool but Judo didn’t impress me to much. In the mid 60’s there were a couple of karate clubs all Shotokan. I went along to Bob Pulman who at that time was a brown belt and there were a couple of black belts there as well. I didn’t know who they were but they went on to become internationals. Training was typically Japanese, dead boring, didn’t really tell us a lot but in fairness to them the instructors didn’t know a lot because the Japanese were tight with their info. Basic kicks, blocks and punches, I got a bit cheesed off with that. I did a lot of boxing and a bit of wrestling and went down to the YMCA at the town centre. Loved the wrestling, we used to get the Judo lads down, it was a bit of a mismatch really bit of wrestling bit of boxing and a bit of Judo no structured martial arts training, just training. I’d always been an athlete it was just sort of tacked onto that. Then I left school went onto college and stopped doing total sport, running rugby and all that. So about 1968-69 about 19m years old I decided I needed to do it properly so I went to jujitsu, John Steady, and did that for a while.

M. - What was the training like?

K. - 3 to 4 nights a week 3 to 4 hours at a time did a bit of Hungar with Lee and his dad sort of kept that up in the background, like a taster. Involved in wrestling which I really liked.

M. - Did you ever do wrestling competitively?

K. - Never reached the dizzy heights just enjoyed the training. Used to do things like a reverse bridge and then presses of 60-100lbs. At the time I was asked what have you done? "A bit of this and a bit of that" there was a guy with us at the time who was a silver medallist, do you know what a limbo bar is well we used to go as far down as we could then place our head on the floor and make an inverted bridge then press 60-100 lbs. We'd do 10 sets my first introduction was 30 lbs. The judo lads would come down and do 150lbs. It was a good laugh with them because they'd show us a few tricks but we'd wrestle out of them. Having said that they were really good at strangles. This was before 1970

M. - So that was roughly when Goju Ryu appeared.

K. - That happened in 1969 that when it came over here Garry came back from Japan at Terry O'Neal's invitation that well documented. He'd trained in Japan for nearly three years at Yamaguchi dojo and with Higonna, he'd travelled the path as the saying goes, from Australia. He was a wrestler and a doorman in New Zealand and a butcher by profession. He used to say he was capable of butchering anything. To my knowledge I don't believe he ever did but he was more than capable. He opened the first club in Southport with Peter McDow. Peter was my senior and his first student and officially recognised, by all of us anyway as the successor to the throne. It was probably in the early 70's, 1972 something like that he opened a club in Wallasey then Runcorn then Neston. The Southport club got prime time because that's where he lived.

I met him through a friend of mine the younger brother of a mate Tommy Herbert, Richi Herbert is now well established in his own right in applied karate. There's only him and Garry (Sands) officially graded by Garry to 4th Dan. Garry graded a lot of us in Gojo Ryu but in applied karate there was only Richi and Garry and he gave no certificates.

M. - Did he not why was that?

K. - No he didn't but by the same token nobody is going to falsely claim they were graded by Garry and actually didn't because there's too many know the history it was a close nit community still is really.

So I went up to see Richi and he said you got to come and see this loony. Richi was a big tall lad, tall and skinny, handy lad. Tommy was a bit bigger than me but heavier, a real handful I suppose we both were. Anyway I went up Manor road to a church, door was in the corner. Opened the big doors and there was this bloody lunatic in the middle of about 70 people doing what we later confirmed as a Moiri Hakka in this black gi, long flowing locks and beard, giving it all.

M. - That would have blown you away!

K. - Well it did because on the back of the gi was, all Japan karate club Tokyo, and his gi was enormous I could have worn it as an overcoat that's how big he was. In those days the class structure was different than it is now you didn't have beginners class's as such what Gary used to do he'd have his main class in 3 parts. He would have white belts, green, brown and black belts all training together but starting and finishing at different times. The black belts were expected to do it all. Jumping forward when we got to senior grade, brown and above we were expected to be there at 6.30 and didn't leave until 10.30.

M. - How many nights were you doing that?

K. - 6 and if he could get hold of you on a Sunday he would do. You would get the emotive words, "hello dig I'm in bloody Southport where the !?x* are you?" I was married then with kids and it got a bit wearing we used to train at Manor Road until about 8.30-9. Later on we stayed on in the church because I had been nominated to look after the key and we had the task of shutting up but we used to move into Neston then. So finished at 8.30-bearing in mind we started at 6.30 only a ten minute warm up then into kicking and punching. Gary's attitude was if you want to do callentics go to aerobics but if you wan to do karate come and do some kicking and punching. His attitude was, and still is mine, a thousand punches are worth more than a thousand press ups. Anyway we'd finish on the Monday night and hightail it to Neston we'd train at Neston from 9 to 10.30. Used to bomb down the motorway across the lanes-it'd be like driving from here to Telford- be there in 15 minutes drove like a madman.

M.- You must have put some hours in but what about the certificates?

K. - Oh yes!! Well I've still got them I'm lucky because none of the other kept theirs I've got all the bits of paper he ever gave me. He didn't do certificates he used to do grading forms and we used to wonder why it took ages for him to do them. It was all about comments, he used to put comments down on the forms like "take your time and things will come". I'd been training with him for about 5 months and he graded me to green belt and I've still got the form and it say's, "2 one of only 3 I've graded in this time". I was 1st Kyu in 15 months but you must remember we were training 4 nights a week for 3 to 4 hours. So in 15 months we'd done 3 to 4 years worth and the type of training we were doing was what I do now as against what some clubs are doing. It was very heavy there was no 2 hours training and one hours chat he wasn't into that and if he did want to tell you a story you were in Shikodatchi and when it burns it burns and if you moved he was like a teacher with that blackboard mentality. He'd walk away from you and then you'd hear "Mr P I can see you moving". Because he knew who was going to move as soon as he turned his back so he'd keep everyone there longer. We'd curse and beat the crap out of them later. It was nothing to stand in Shikodatchi blocking and punching for half an hour. We were wrecked you'd walk out drained but he was never cruel to the white belts and he couldn't tolerate bully's-wouldn't have it! Getting back to the beginning when the beginners came they'd watch for the first lesson.

M. -Is that what happened to you?

K. - Yes, when you watched he'd come over and talk to you personally and individually, if he didn't like the look of you you wouldn't last very long and if you started and got bullied there was always someone capable of sorting them out and that happened on more than one occasion. Later on we took over that position because we became the seniors. So if anyone started they had to get past us first and they were sorted out later. He used to make everyone who'd been there less than twelve weeks go down the back and he'd have somebody- a green or a brown belt just drilling basic kicks and punches, jodan, gedan, chudan. Kingeri, migeri, iesigeri, empi, empi was his tool of the trade, and that's what you did for 3 months, you never did anything else and they only came twice a week anyway.

M. - Was that his way of choosing those who'd stay.

K. - They didn't come , didn't last. Some would come in their ordinary togs or some would wear track suits or a keen one would buy a gi. But all they'd do is basics they'd never do Kata. Just blocks, kicks, punches and strikes including ??? empi which was his favourite probably because he was 25 stone and when that dropped on the back of your neck!!!! He was good at ?????? empi but it wasn't a technique I personally liked and I still don't like it now its not one I found useful but he was good at it especially from the side. You'd see this big arm coming across and slam people would fall over. Anyway that would go on for about 3 months and then just after that they'd come into the main class as white belts and then they'd do everything. He was big on tracking so once they'd learned to kick and punch they joined in that as well. Everything was done in twos partner on partner. Japanese, straight lines college mentality, Okinowans one on one, do everything in pairs. He was big on contact you had to touch.

M. - So how did the tracking work?

K. - We would go from one side of the hall to the other, it was much bigger than where you train in Broseley or our place. It was a big church hall 15-20 yards wide with a parquet floor we always seem'd to get nails in our feet. So start off in pairs facing each other on one side of the hall. Person with back towards centre of the room would walk backwards at normal pace, mouth shut tight, it had to be. Partner would do jodan, chudan, gedan punches and kicks. It would be touch and push, touch and push. Empi was always done in the same fashion so you felt the body and the body would understand what it was like to resist it so whenever they felt an elbow in the face it was no big deal. If you got clipped around the jaw or on the nose it was their turn next.

M. - And how much of that would you do?

K. - Oh hours and hours that took up certainly in the initial stages

M. - So all your timing would come from that?

K. - Everything came from that, I'll show you one day exactly what I mean because all you'd be doing was walking across the floor with your partner, touch and push, touch and push. You had to physically move the head if that was the target the same when the knee was used you physically had to touch them. They had to understand what it felt like. Because of his own career he made damn sure of that.

M. - A lot of painful moments then?

K. - Lots of em! Lots doubling up and trying to rub away the pain. If you were a black belt and you wore a box that was almost a sin. There was the odd black belt who wore one out of vanity but he could hear the click, he'd know! It worked in reverse as well because if you were a beginner and you didn't hit he couldn't hear the contact, he would constantly say "I cannot hear the box I want to hear the touch". We all knew what he meant and it applied the other way round if you were a black belt. If he saw the kick going in and heard the touch he'd say "you need to learn to defend well" his answer was simple you either took it or you weren't there.

M. - How hard was the grading system?

K.- Gary didn't have gradings and I follow the same format as him, we don't have formal gradings we do a days training. Gary used to do two day gaskus. You would pay for a days training and your grading was included in that figure. We used to get these grading papers off him, not certificates. There was not a lot of cost involved but always a minimum one day event a good eight hours and you sweated blood! Usually the senior grading was a two day event and certainly if it was a black belt the first day was to exhaust you the second day was to test your spirit and certainly (that was done) in the early days with the likes of Peter McDow, Stevie Forrester, Chris Woods how were all experts in our world because they were Gary's first black belts. I mean it was nothing to have two hundred people on a grading day but the black belts were expected to fight and fight and fight and he frequently used to say that if a black belt goes down he would not get the grade. There were a number of people who did not get the grade usually as a result of going down. Green belts always fought two on one, fight two people of equal weight. When you were a brown belt there were more higher grades against you, I fought Peter and Stevie for my brown belt and I got battered but as he said, "its spirit if you can take those two in here you stand a better chance outside, one on one you'd finish it!" We fought hard but the training was hard I've walked out black and blue because we were used to the contact.

M. - But then you'd go back the next night for more?

K. - What you have to do is get clever on your feet and keep out of the way. You would be jamming a lot so people would kick migeri, you'd jam it with the knee. At the start you weren't conditioned a lot and you'd wonder if the knee could take it but over a period of time the legs became conditioned and the bruising stopped. It only happened for a couple of months.

M. - Did the black belt grading involve the same philosophy two onto one?

K. - Yes only there was a lot of them and it wasn't just one fight. You fought everyone he wanted you to fight, that could be up to a dozen people because using the

round robin system when you changed partners you got two different people. You have got to bear in mind that half a dozen clubs were coming together and he had to test the spirits of all of them. So he would take some guidance from the club instructor but ultimately the decision and he was looking round the room and he'd say OK you got green belt last lets see how you do this. Gary wasn't one for a strict grading syllabus ninth, eighth, seventh, sixth you might be grading for your first grade, or 7th kyu or your next grade could be fourth or third depending on what your ability was or your understanding of what you were doing and he would grade you accordingly. I only got graded twice one at green belt and one at black. Gradings in between were not official because he never considered them necessary. He did not have regular gradings because he was not geared for them. What he was geared to was progress what he would do on a night he felt someone needed to be graded he would make sure that happened. But the gaskus happened every sixth months or so.

M. - And was there an expectation you'd be there?

K. - No excuses! If you did not turn up God help you the following time. People used to winge "I didn't get graded sensei" he would say "you weren't there and IF you turn up regularly you might be considered", then he would give them a really hard time. When we came in on the Monday after the Sunday(grading) and the guy would be fresh he would get some stick.

M. - I assume it was evenly spread every got some but everyone gave it as well?

K. - It was part and parcel you simply took it but it was never aggressive it was controlled. Its hard for people to understand that when looking at the no holds barred people where they appear to batter each other it's the use of control because if it wasn't they'd kill each other. Except of course when they are in the ring fighting for a title. Same with the Geoff Thompson now, Gary was doing the Geoff Thompson thing in the sixties he was making you understand what it felt like to be hit so the mind set was, OK he's broken my nose I'm going to kick him in the balls, not lift my hands up and cry, because mentally you were attuned and physically you were so robust. I've had some horrendous fights with friends on the night but then we've all gone to the pub. I've had black eyes, bruised lips, cut cheeks all in the name of training.

M.- So what was happening to you during that period and what does Goju ryu give you that that keeps you doing it, keeps you teaching it and if I'm not far off the mark makes it a major part of your life?

K. - It will always be a part of my life yes! It's a question I've asked students when they get cheesed off and they say to me why do you do it? To be fair if you analyse it its no one thing - "don't know springs to mind" I started with Gary right back in the early seventies, he came here in 69' so for 35 years I've been involved in Goju ryu in some form. Opened a club in 1974 so for over thirty years I've been teaching it in fact had a couple of other clubs but closed them down due to career and family commitments but I've always taught, every week I've never not trained in my life.

Q.- Every day?

K. - Not every day but not counting weekends certainly 3 times a week, even when I go on holiday I train I find a sports centre somewhere and have a look at what's going on. Going back, what's in it for me/If you look past the physical in martial arts you see this mental thing that the Chinese go on about and the Japanese who talk about the peaceful mind and the Shaolin thing of peace through physical effort and I used to think that was bull shit when I was younger but at 55 I can honestly say it gives me a confidence. When I see a gang of lads, doesn't matter how big the gang is they might take me but I will defiantly take one of them so which ever one comes at me is going first, I'm happy with that. But it applies to other things because I'm very at peace with myself I have no big issues and I'm not hung up about anything. I can play with a kata for weeks, months even years. I learned Superempi about thirteen years ago and I've spent that time just looking into it. I've been asked so many questions, " what can it do and what can it be used for?" Just studying the kata in itself, in my world, is part and parcel of the issue. There is a story, a fable, about 2 brothers. 2 brothers train an equal amount of time. One does lots of body conditioning, one does lots of kata. Usual thing both end up super fit in their own way but when it comes down to the fighting they're equal and they fought for hours. The whole point is it doesn't matter which way you train as long as you train. You end up physically attuned and in my world the kata is the one(method) I follow. I've always been strong on kata because it's not a good idea to constantly hurt your training partners, you'll have nobody to train with. Richie and I have been friends all this time and kata bored him so we used to cross train with each other, he had his club and I had mine. If ever he wanted his lads to learn kata he'd send them to me and if I ever wanted my lads to do bag work they used to go down to him. Gerry was one of them he'll tell you, that's how we did it I did all the intricate parts. Funny thing was though when it came down to the fighting and stamina my lads were always fitter because although his hit the bag they had to stop more often because they exerted so much energy. Whereas you can keep doing kata for hours regardless of how much effort you put into it, whether your doing it fast, slow, strong or hard or whatever your still doing it. Your muscles are starting to get educated plus you inevitably increase the fitness.

M. - An interesting phrase educated muscles it's like a more modern phrase muscle memory.

K. - It's because it becomes the automatic response and I don't teach specific responses to, that old fashioned phrase, the external stimuli. It's a way of doing things, I don't really identify it as such but it's about principals and that's what I teach. JKD(note: recording was hazy at this point so not sure of accuracy) started the principals of Bruce Lee, that's OK but he nicked them from Mao Ts Tong and his little red book and his Wing chun days He didn't do what nobody else had done he was just very, very good at it. But yes it's about getting my own peace, I have no hang ups, no issues, talking to Max a lot you can't learn when you're stressed.

M. - So did you ever wonder into meditation?

K.- Yes I do it a lot. I do a thing called NLP. Nuero Linguistic Programming which is like Daren Power the mind man on the TV who tells people what they think before they are thinking it. Its all about how your mind works and you'd have to really get

into it but in simple terms it's your mind controls everything you do, it's about right and wrong and observations. So if you do a thousand punches it will become an automatic response, much faster than someone who does a hundred, you train in a specific way to defend against a specific attack. In Jujitsu for example it's nearly always against a right hook because the vast majority of the population is right handed. They are clever though because they convert from right to left and make all their techniques work right or left sided. I've always thought I'll do a thousand punches and whatever comes my way the punch is going in that's the way I work it I'm not convinced about techniques. I don't really like teaching people how to block because if somebody fires a shot at your head, bring your hands up, bit like a boxer, why teach them to block? I'd sooner teach them to hit back. It sounds a bit corny now talking to you about it but hit them back first works for me. It was a phrase Gary used a lot, "the intention" because if you go back there is no first attack in karate. Its when does the attack start? Does it start with the glance across the bar? We've both been in pubs where we've felt uncomfortable, someone at the bar you don't know him you have no idea what he's like but there's something tells you stay away from him. So Gary's way of getting through it was hit them first, as he said if someone's stared at you for half an hour then walks over to you he's not going to shake your hand. So you smack him, you can always say sorry I thought you were going to hit me! His philosophy plays a big part in what I do. I wrote an obituary for him, it's never been published because I refused to let it go in the end. Harry Cook asked me to write it and Denise Martin did one for Combat which I felt was very impersonal, just a few dates. Having said that it was good because it gave the history and the way he trained and how Denis saw it from his perspective. He was my sensei, Richi Kim said you'll have many teachers but you'll only ever have one sensei. I will only ever have Gary Spiers as my sensei because he was the one who gave me everything that I class now as my foundation. Everything I do I relate back to his teaching because I felt it worked and it made sense.

M - Working on this idea of Max's which was to put something down on paper about the Broseley club made it obvious to me that things do or don't happen because of individuals. By that I mean Max learned it somewhere, whoever taught him learned it somewhere and so on?

K. - It keeps going back, right the way back. If you look at it in very simple terms it becomes Max, me, Gary, Yamaguchi and Higonna and a number of other Japanese instructors. The Japanese instructors learned from Miagi who was taught by Hiagonna(Igasso??) and Goju goes back into China and nobody knows the truth about that because it's never been properly told. Chinese mythology changes as they speak so what was fact today will be fiction tomorrow and that's the truth about the Chinese. Back to Gary he was big on people he used to say family first he was very understanding and he was very big on supporting people. He used to say its your club support each other and if anyone, a member of the club was having hassle people would help him. If people were unemployed he would let them train. I did the books for him a few years later, I didn't realise how little he actually made. He was great at sussing you out. If you were a wrong un' you never got past third grade and if he saw you turning into something he didn't want or abused what you had been taught or became bullies you very soon got sorted. It didn't matter if it took five weeks or five

months. As far as I know he never graded a bully, not to my knowledge and I saw most of them.

M. - It must be hard working even with ten people in front of you never mind 30 or 40?

K. - He had an incredible memory because he knew if you turned up regularly. It wasn't preferential we turned up rain or shine, it was for him because he was such a character.

M - We forget don't we that he personally was giving huge amounts?

K. He used to charge us a quid' it didn't pay his petrol for coming. Another thing, He was criticised by other people in Goju later on because he held people back in grading, not in line with this particular group, but the gradings were to his standard and his standard was far higher. Our belts can and will go anywhere. We went into a competition once and all four of us got disqualified and the funny thing was it had a kata competition and nobody had ever seen a Goju kata in Liverpool. He just said you all know what you're doing! I was disqualified in the first 30 seconds. smacked him in the nuts! I thought it was a good shot myself, but that was your training that was what you were doing, that's what you were being taught to do!

M. - So looking at training in modern clubs how does someone who's become a black belt cope with it on the street?

K-- I've worked with black belts who'd never known contact, who've done three and a half years training and they've been marmalised because the moment they got hit they hadn't the mental strength to stand up against it. Because Gary's training was physically demanding it demanded great mental strength. When you're training four nights a week up to four hours a night you had to keep going. That's how Peter McDow trained, we had been told about him and when we first met Peter this well built, clean cut young man walked in, nice fella'. Jesus Christ what a mistake that was!

M.- Did he stick it to you?

K.- Oh big style, he was a natural Gary just brought it out of him, he was more than capable. I had to fight him when I was a green belt and Gary said go on son in you go. So I've got my box on and he's stood casual so in I go kingeri. Next minute I'm in the air! I've been swept and dropped on the floor with this almighty ki and I've been thumped about ten times and I thought uuum! Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to try kicking him in the nuts and all the lads are laughing their heads off. So I learned the hard way. Later on we became good mates but he is still my senior and that will never change. On the training days I went to him we would talk about training knocking around suggestions. When Gary stopped teaching he took Peter to Ronnie Cauldwell and Mr Cauldwell was quite revered in our area, he's an older man now, he was a seventh dan in Shotokan, but he was also at that point in time seventh or eighth dan in Chinese Kempo. Gary was such a big man he had a way of imposing his

teaching methodology on you. I was small then, I'm still only five foot four inches and still only about twelve stone and I can't react so easily against six foot, twenty five stone. So anyway he took us to Ronnie Cauldwells, he was suited and booted the perfect gentleman but bloody hell what a nightmare!!

M - Why was that?

K. - Oh he's one of those men, you think to yourself he would kill you and he's well capable of it. Ronnie does not take prisoners people come into his clubs as "fit as a fart", its pop em', good bye and move them out the door. He was quite a little man but he "ran his clubs", very capable. I remember he taught how to kick on the inside of the leg, (femal??) artery, you felt the pain not a tap, not nice but he was great to his students.

M - Your talking now of people I don't know it's like opening up a divide between then and what happens now.

K. - But what your doing right now is talking to Gary, Terry O'Neil, Harry Cook they are all first generation. We are the first generation of the first generation. I was fortunate enough to train with Gary and everything you got was fresh. What he'd do is say anyone know a khion kata. So you'd stand up," oh you've been watching have you?" you'd never do it again

M. - How many came in thinking already hard I don't need this?

K. - Oh God loads, we went through thousands of people especially when you've got some little fella like Gavin whacking them in the nuts

Dear reader what you've just read is the transcript of a conversation which sadly had a lot further to go as we had just began to touch upon differences between the training of Keith's day, how he has continued with that legacy and the way it compares with the myriad of karate clubs and styles that populate the world of martial arts today. The conversation was cut short by a call to be "getting to the dojo". Even more sadly the conversation could not be picked up at a later date due to the untimely passing of Sensei Keith Pace early in 2008. I am sure he would have a valuable view on the way of things today!