

MARTIALFORCE.COM
PRESENTS
AN INTERVIEW WITH
JOHN GIORDANO, SENSEI
MARCH / 2016



"Remember if they can't hit you they can't hurt you."

Questions composed by William Rivera

Interview by Manny Saavedra

"If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind." Kahlil Gibran

My name is Manny Saavedra and welcome to Martialforce.com Online Martial Arts Magazine. What exactly does it mean to be a role model? For many, a role model is an individual who acts as a guide; a person who uses their personal experience to inform and help direct the life of others in a positive light. This positive attitude is extremely important for young people and others who may feel that nothing positive happens or will happen in their life, and need to hear and see how to achieve and succeed in spite of all that seems at odds in their lives. Role models possess qualities that we would like to have and emulate. John Giordano, Hanshi is that role model. He has had a great effect on many lives. Hanshi Giordano is a pioneer in the State of Florida. He is an Icon in the Karate landscape in The State. There are too many people whose lives have been enriched by him to mention. He pioneered the Nisei Goju Karate System into the State and was one of the most influential Martial Artist of his time.



Martialforce.com: You were born in New York, please tell me about that (tell me a little about what it was like, the culture at that time.

JOHN GIORDANO: I was born and raised in the south Bronx in New York City. I grew up in an inner-city neighborhood and gangs were very common in that environment. I was in one of those gangs, however, the Martial Arts got me out of that lifestyle.



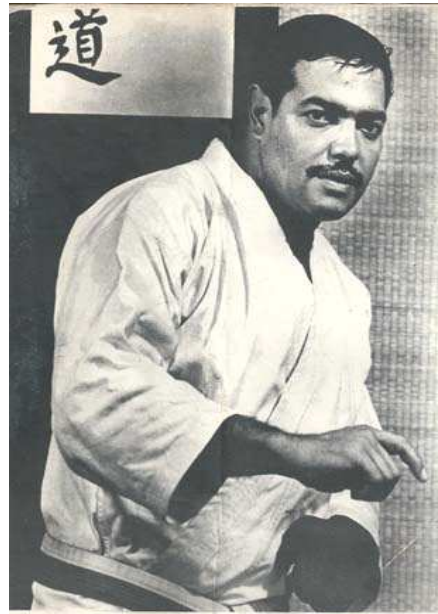


Martialforce.com: When and how were you introduced to the martial arts?

JOHN GIORDANO: I was 14 years old when I was first introduced to the martial Arts. My first Sensei was a judo and ju-jitsu instructor by the name of **Dennis Cann**. I also studied with **Grand Master Hara** from Hakkaryu Jujitsu and **Professor Vee** from Vee jitsu and **Harry Paz** Judo Sensei and **Kyoshi Nagabyashi** of Kodokan Judo.

Martialforce.com: You trained under the legendary Grand Master Frank Ruiz. Can you tell me a little about the classes, how he taught, and your perspective from that time-period before we knew the icon he would become?

JOHN GIORDANO: I was 16 1/2 years old and already a black belt in judo and jujitsu when I met Master Frank Ruiz. Ruiz was an extremely charismatic individual who exuded total confidence and demanded complete respect. He exposed everyone to his repertoire of views and theory: his classes were like a marine boot camp straight forward and powerful. Always very tough with much emphasis on the basic fundamentals and constantly drilled the basics into our heads. Master Ruiz was an artist of many talents. For me, his strongest point was in his motivational methods and the ability to move and inspire his students to greatness, which made us all champions.



Grand Master Frank Ruiz



Martialforce.com: What was the Kumite like?

JOHN GIORDANO: Most of the emphasis were geared towards self-defense, close to real fighting as one can get. Kumite was extremely hard. We did not use any safety gear and remarkably, for the most part, no serious injuries were inflicted. Most students had excellent technique and there was a sense of mutual earned respect during those years. There was not as much emphasis on kata. It was evident that the training during those years were mostly focused on basic foundation and Kumite. When I speak of this, I mean the deeper understanding of kata. The kata we were taught were Sensei Ruiz interpretation of the Japanese lineage system. Like many Goju system there were

slight variations in the forms; however still keeping the traditional Goju format.



Martialforce.com: Did you compete in tournaments?

JOHN GIORDANO: I competed in many national and state tournaments and placed or took first place in most of them. I also traveled around the country competing and coaching the Miami-Vice Karate team, which consisted of several world and national karate champions.



Martialforce.com: What was it like in formative years in the arts?

JOHN GIORDANO: The techniques were extremely difficult to learn. It was as close to real life as possible without afflicting bodily harm. You had to know the required katas for testing. All of the testing was overseen by Master Ruiz.

Martialforce.com: Talk to me about what you learned up to black belt level; was there kihon and kihon ido, what were the katas like at that time?

JOHN GIORDANO: I learned traditional kata up to black belt. Later on I learned the more advanced kata. For the most part all the katas were traditional with some variations.



Martialforce.com: Please tell me about your shodan grade, the when, what, how?

JOHN GIORDANO: For me it was another deciding factor in my martial arts career. I was about to move to Miami, Florida right before I was to be tested. Master Ruiz gave me a pre-test. Being that I was going to be his first black belt, along with Carlos Serrano, the only way that I could've earned the shodan was to compete in the two largest events at the time, Gary Alexander's Tournament in Madison Square Garden and Peter Siringano's event in Staten Island. I came in first at Alexander's tournament and second at Siringano's event. Grand Master Ruiz gave me my shodan and I moved to South Florida, ready to teach and continue my journey. Sensei Ruiz use to come down to south Florida and continued my training of the entire Nisei katas and entire curriculum with him.

Martialforce.com: Was what you learned comparable to the Japanese style of Goju?

JOHN GIORDANO: Absolutely, what Grand Master Ruiz did was to take the foundations of the Goju system and add to it the best fighting techniques that each style had to offer, as well as techniques from jujitsu and judo i.e. Sweeps, and close in fighting. All the controlling techniques were based on sound body mechanics utilizing your ki in every movement.

Martialforce.com: You're first Dojo, what was the name of it and when did you open it?

JOHN GIORDANO: The House of Karate Miami Beach Florida in 1965.

Martialforce.com: What was your association with Grand Master Peter Urban?

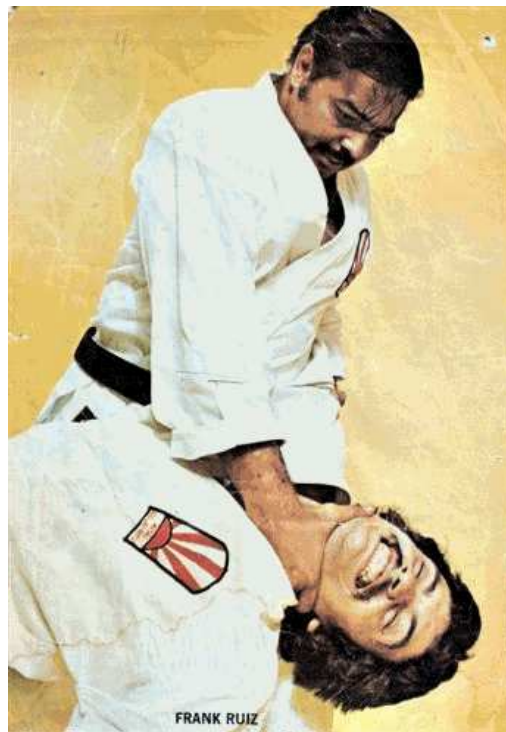
JOHN GIORDANO: Being a student of Grand Master Ruiz, I was fortunate enough to get some guidance from Grand Master Urban. As time went on (over 50 years), I became his personal confidant.

Martialforce.com: What was the idea behind the origin of Nisei Goju?

JOHN GIORDANO: Grand Master Ruiz felt that he needed to move on with his own philosophical views. He wanted to incorporate his own ideas and the fact that he wanted to take the best from other systems' fighting styles and create a hybrid system. No different than other Grand Masters over the century.

Martialforce.com: What makes Nisei Goju different from the other Goju based styles?

JOHN GIORDANO: Nisei was a more open system to change and it still maintained the structure and integrity of the style of Goju. The system was based on real world combat situations. A student was no stranger to pain, adversity, or improvisation as well as always being ready to never having to prepare to prepare.





Giordano and Ruiz

Martialforce.com: What is a Traditional Martial Art and do you consider yourself a traditionalist?

JOHN GIORDANO: Depending on what you call a traditionalist, I do consider myself a traditionalist in the true sense of the word, meaning maintaining the foundation of the art of Nisei Goju, including its philosophy and understanding of all its basics. Remembering that Nisei Goju had its own traditions the same as any other traditional Goju systems.

Martialforce.com: What you were taught, did it include the physical as well as the spiritual.

JOHN GIORDANO: Most of the emphasis in the beginning years were on the physical and very little on the spiritual. As time went on I understood that the Martial Arts were meant to create a better human being not just a fighting machine. What I mean by that is to have values, integrity, and an understanding with the God of one's understanding. Most important to help others grow into their full potential, including myself.

Martialforce.com: What styles have you studied and trained in?

JOHN GIORDANO: Kodokan Judo

Vee Jiujitsu

Hakkaryu Jiujitsu

Nisei Goju-Ryu

USA Goju-Ryu

Arnis/Filipino Knife Fighting





Martialforce.com: Does Kata (A pre-arranged pattern of movements which vary in rythum, timing and amount of movement) have relevance to self-defense or is it, as some would say just a Dance?

JOHN GIORDANO: Kata has relevance more than just for self-defense, it is the integrity of the entire style. It is movement, fluidity, proper breathing, power, agility, speed, focus, energy, and balance. These are all essential to any style, helps one to develop internal energy, along with discipline and proper attitude. Kata is meditation in motion. It is a way of getting in touch with your inner warrior and true self.

Martialforce.com: How important do you feel is the study of Bunkai, and at what level do you start teaching it?

JOHN GIORDANO: Immediately, It's the mirror reflection of your movement and the basis for it. In order to fully comprehend the application of a movement one must demonstrate its purpose through application.



Martialforce.com: What are the qualities of bunkai and what is your opinion to the thought that the practice of kata and bunkai does not prepare you for the spontaneity associated with self-defense?

JOHN GIORDANO: A good karate-ka is always ready, never having to prepare to prepare. Kata and bunkai train you for this purpose.

Martialforce.com: What is your favorite Kata and why?

JOHN GIORDANO: I have two: **Sepai** and **Saifa**. I love the feel for them and they fit my body type.

Martialforce.com: Some say 10 kata are all you need to learn others say the more the better. What is your opinion?

JOHN GIORDANO: The number of kata is irrelevant, it also depends on the technical difficulties of these katas, sometimes it can take a lifetime to learn and understand one kata. All Goju Ryu kata were geared to improve your proficiency in the art and take you to the next level of technical difficulty. When you understand kata you learn that each kata has different levels of interpretation: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. All katas always have hidden meanings, which is why there are three different levels of learning. The kata should always be the essence of the style, but are not to be taught out of sequence or rank proficiency.



Martialforce.com: What are the qualities that should be associated with Kumite to make it beneficial to a martial artist?

JOHN GIORDANO: Primary quality is intent, facing one's fears, staying in the present, more important than striking is a good blocking system, one must remember if they can't hit you they can't hurt you. Controlled breathing and good mental attitude along with never allowing your emotions to get the best of you, and learning how to be totally relaxed and being always ready to quickly seize an opportunity when it arises.

Martialforce.com: What would you say to the idea that the Goju taught by Grand Master Frank Ruiz was not a complete art? He did not learn the full style of Goju and in turn taught his students an art that is lacking in the fundamentals that would make it as the term goes "Traditional Goju" or "Real Goju?"

JOHN GIORDANO: I have been to China and Japan and even in these places their traditional platforms have been changed over time, from one master to another. In order for a system to grow and remain true to its nature, it must keep in tack the fundamentals that make up that system even though kata may have different variations, does not mean it's not traditionally based. Grand Master Ruiz taught these Goju-Ryu katas with slight variations in movement. Even with these variations, it was recognized as a Goju art form. One must remember there are multiple styles of Goju, but their foundations are all similar, even though their katas may slightly differ, along with that interpretation of their fighting style. This does not make any of them less traditional than the next.

Martialforce.com: What advice would you give a senior student who is confronted with the politics of an organization?

JOHN GIORDANO: First, you must ask yourself "Am I compromising my values and my integrity by getting involved with this type of behavior?" and: Is this beneficial for myself or the system I represent?" Second, one must remember that politics in any organization is about people's egos that are not fully developed. A good organization maintains harmony and deals with discord appropriately.



Wilfredo Roldan, John Giordano and Manny Saavedra

Martialforce.com: Is there a difference in the level of training from when you first entered the martial arts and now?

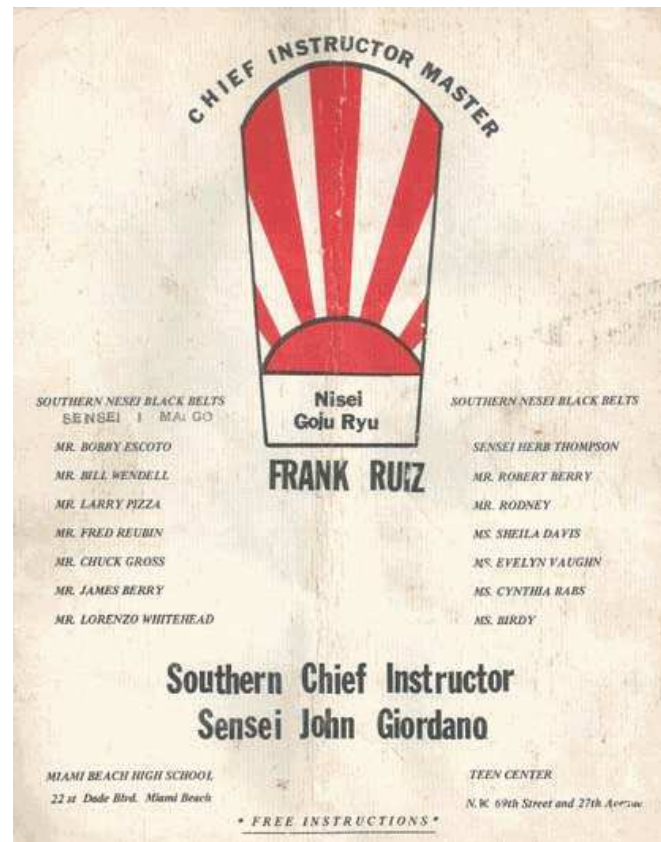
JOHN GIORDANO: Absolutely, the way it's taught today, in my view, it is a watered down martial art which focuses on looking good but not being good. Which means that the main focus is on winning tournaments and abandoning the basic foundations of the martial arts. Everything in life goes through a transition, whether for good or not, martial arts included. It's up to one's perception. But, there are still some that teach the true essence of the martial arts. Even though they may be far and few between, they still exist. I believe there is good and not as good in everything, and that everything has a purpose which we may or may not be aware of.

Martialforce.com: What are your thoughts on tournament competition? Do you feel it is detrimental to the essence or spirit of karate?

JOHN GIORDANO: I'm not saying that tournaments are bad or good. They may be a way to develop a person's skills. But today's tournaments are more of a game of tag, false confidence, and acrobatics, which is not the same as when I was being taught. I believe that the martial arts were developed for self-growth and a way of defending oneself. I fear we are missing the true essence of the martial arts and what it entails.

Martialforce.com: What makes someone an instructor? Is it the black belt?

JOHN GIORDANO: The man makes the belt; the belt does not make the man. He must have proper character and knowledge of his art, along with patience, discipline, and a passion for teaching, and a willingness to know that he doesn't always know.



Martialforce.com: Talk to me about the qualities of an instructor, what should one know, how should one be trained to be one?

JOHN GIORDANO: First, he must have full working knowledge of his art to the best of his ability. He must demonstrate proper character. Must be able to demonstrate proficiency in his art. Teach and treat his students with

respect and dignity. Learn all the fundamentals of first aid and CPR. And train much harder than his students. Therefore, setting an example both in the dojo and out. A good instructor understands commitment, sacrifice, and delayed gratification. The instructor needs to be an exceptional leader because he was first and foremost an exceptional follower.

Martialforce.com: You are a 10th Dan, you get together with a Master such as Urban, what do you talk about or learn, (you are a 10th Dan, and do you know it all)?

JOHN GIORDANO: We talk about Life, and one thing you learn is that you know that you don't know. And always remember to remain teachable and learn to listen.



Martialforce.com: What are your thoughts on tournament competition in the martial arts today?

JOHN GIORDANO: I think that most of the tournaments today are more about a game of tag and not about the experience of delivering a controlled lethal technique and the possibility of delivering a good solid point. We have gotten away from the true essence of the martial arts in the combat form. It's giving the student a false sense of confidence thinking that these techniques will work in the streets. If the technique is not considered a maiming, or killing, blow then what are these techniques they are calling a point.

Martialforce.com: Do you feel Kumite is necessary in the study of karate?

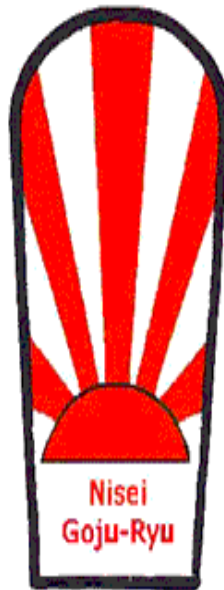
JOHN GIORDANO: Absolutely, Karate is a martial art and Kumite is an integral part of it. It's similar to a person reading about football but never playing in the game. Kata is the way to hone your skills and Kumite is the application of those skills. As well as facing one's fears in combat. Therefore sharpening ones mental attitude. We have a saying in Nisei Goju, a Karate-ka must be gentle in life and ferocious in combat. The warrior is proficient at his craft; he knows that untested skill is no skill at all.

Martialforce.com: How did your career as a teacher come about?

JOHN GIORDANO: My love for the art and what it has done for my life physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. I wanted to share this with others. Teaching is a big responsibility. You can only take people as far as you are, this is why a teacher must always remain a student in order to keep growing and changing for the better.

Martialforce.com: Is there controversy over the application of kata?

JOHN GIORDANO: There will always be controversy whether it's controversy over kata or technique. It all depends on your mindset. When egos get in the way, controversy takes front and center stage, and the truth becomes hidden.



Martialforce.com: Where is Nisei today?

JOHN GIORDANO: Nisei remains in the hearts of those who have trained in the system in the past, and of those who continue to train in the present and will train in the future.

