



Sparring with Col Handley, nine times Aussie Heavyweight Taekwondo Champion. TOP LEFT Meeting Sumo giant Konishiki. TOP RIGHT The home of grandmaster of Filipino fighting arts, Tatang in the Manila slums, where Andy spent many hours training. BELOW LEFT Taking on World Heavyweight Champion Gary Turner. BELOW RIGHT Meeting Daito Ryu Founder Sokaku Takeda's son, Tokimune.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF Andy Dickinson



A fixture in the martial arts community and founder of a leading Sydney dojo, Andy Dickinson has travelled the world to learn new ways of fighting, and of understanding. Even from his beginnings in martial arts as a bullied teen, Dickinson was drawn to the self-discovery he could achieve beyond the kicks and punches. Here, we present an extract and images from Andy's fascinating book ...

# STAND TALL

crowded that you only get snippets of the sky through the buildings masked by the haze. And the spaces between people. In Sydney, I could walk freely instead of in a mass throng of controlled movement that left me dizzy. It was the middle of summer 1992, and it was not long before I was riding the waves at Manly beach. As the hard skin and callouses on the joints from the training healed, I quickly slipped back into the laidback Australian lifestyle.

I decided that I would rejoin Qantas as a flight attendant, and continue to work and travel to Japan to continue my training. I also made the decision pretty quickly that I would open up another school and start to teach a style of martial arts that was more in line with what I had been learning over the past couple of years. Once removed from the protective bubble of the all-consuming Japanese experience, I started to enjoy my own training again, only this time I added a few more dimensions.

## NEW MARTIAL ART, 1992

This new school was the beginning of what would eventually go on to become my life's work, the system I now teach in Sydney: Northstar Ju Jitsu. But at that stage of my life and development, I did not have a clear vision of what my own system would look like. So I simply called the style "Shinbudo", which could translate to mean "new martial art". This was generic enough, and did not pigeonhole me to have to teach a particular style.

I started one afternoon a week in the back meeting room, which was originally the wrestling room at the local community centre run by the police at North Sydney.

Setting up my own martial arts system had its challenges, and it certainly attracted a lot of attention. Word quickly got around that there was a new and interesting way to learn martial arts. I made many new friends, and met many great like-minded martial artists. But there was also a negative. I had to make sure I was at the top of my game, as I was constantly having to prove the system was effective and worthy to take its place as a new and modern martial art.

Challenges would float in weekly, and if you were training with me back then you would know it was common for me to stop the class and accept the challenge. There were many times when I also accepted challenges outside of the dojo that most people did not know about. It was a great time to be training – exciting, but very scary. The techniques of Shinbudo proved itself against many Australian and world martial arts champions, and was also taken to the edge by many unknowns who had skills and incredible heart.

*There are no secrets or shortcuts in martial arts. The only way to get good is through dedication and hard work. That is also the same in life. ▶*

**M**anly Beach, 1992: Arriving home after 12 months of intensive training in Japan was quite a culture shock. After the experience with Kondo Sensei at the three-month mark, I was able to let go of my life in Australia. Other than contact with close family, I closed the door and cut all ties. I was living in Tokyo and began to love it. Other than a couple of other foreign students who were also in the dojo, I avoided contact with all Aussie expats. To get the most out of this experience, I wanted to immerse myself fully and learn as much about the martial arts, the language and the culture as I could.

I started to appreciate the beauty in the crowds. No pushing or complaining, just an unwritten acceptance that this is how life

works in Japan. Although you were living in a jungle of steel and concrete, you could turn a corner and enter a huge park where the beauty of the spring cherry blossoms live their short, but memorable lives, falling from the branch one at a time like a breath out, reminding us that we are all a part of the ever-moving, ever changing forces of nature.

My body and mind had changed in Japan, honed by hundreds of hours of strict and disciplined training. I felt I belonged in Japan, and was ready to live my life there. But first I needed to go back to Australia to see how I felt after a long time away.

The moment the plane touched down in Sydney, I was taken aback by the expanse of the blue sky. It was magnificent. Tokyo is so

## JUNIOR

One evening, I received a phone call from another martial arts instructor to let me know there was a member of one of Sydney's bikie gangs going around and testing himself against many of the local martial arts schools.

By the time I received the phone call, this bikie had managed to impress many of the local martial arts teachers, and was looking for his next challenge. This martial arts instructor who called me had just been visited by the bikie, and managed to talk his way out of a confrontation by kindly giving my details. So he was calling me to warn me.

Sure enough, the following Saturday we had just commenced training when this man mountain appeared at the dojo door in full bikie colours. He stood there and demanded to see Andrew Dickinson. He looked me squarely in the eye and said, "Are you fighting today?"

"I am now," I said. As he walked into the dojo, I discreetly locked the door behind him, ensuring that only the winner would walk out. This was often the one thing that separated me from the various challengers.

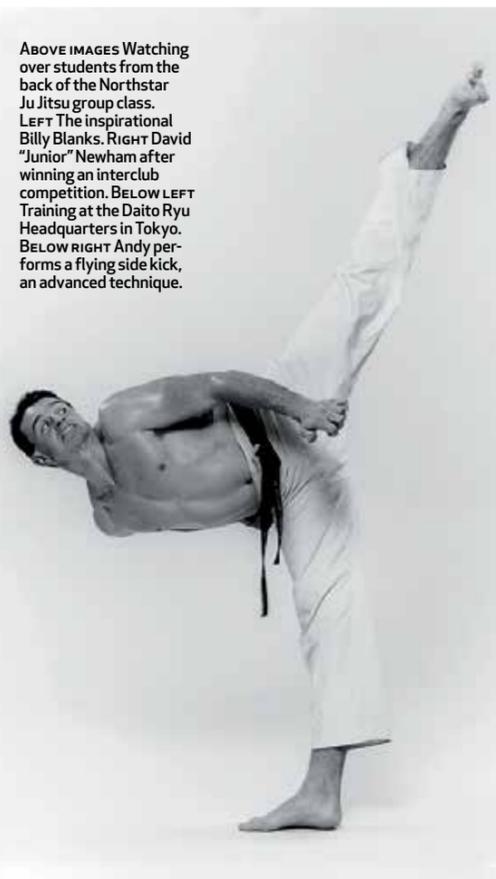
I was always deadly serious and willing to put it all on the line. "Junior" was the sergeant-at-arms for one of the larger bike clubs at the time. He was a massive lump of muscle, well over 190cm and weighing in at over 120kg. He had a red goatee beard and a plait of red hair that extended to his waist. He had a fierce reputation and was well respected by other bikie gangs, not to mention he had already mixed it with several other top martial arts instructors.

Seeing him standing there, of course I was scared. I could feel the mix of fear and adrenalin surge through my body. On the outside I was calm and relaxed, but on the inside I was screaming and wanted to run in the opposite direction as fast as possible. Fear is the protector. It is the natural defence mechanism set off by the body in order to survive. To NOT feel any fear when faced with danger is more of a worry; fear is never the problem. It is how you react to the fear. Some people let it cripple them, others can still function efficiently.

I simply said, "You are welcome to join us," to which he took off his jacket, shoes and socks and walked onto the mat wearing jeans and a T-shirt. As it was our regular sparring session, there was a range of belts. Junior joined the end of the line and made short work of several brown belts, literally picking them up and slamming them into the mats. I knew I had to put a stop to this, and I had to do it fast.

We stood in front of each other, and I could feel his fear. I knew he was unpredictably dangerous, and that this would be a dirty scrap if I let it go on.

I bowed. He stood and glared. As he took one step towards me, I launched a front leg turning kick that landed square on his jaw. The sound of my foot smashing into his face stopped the entire room. His eyes dimmed as he dropped to both knees. I quickly followed up by rushing him onto the ground and drawing his long plait around his neck continued to choke him with



ABOVE IMAGES Watching over students from the back of the Northstar Ju Jitsu group class. LEFT The inspirational Billy Blanks. RIGHT David "Junior" Newham after winning an interclub competition. BELOW LEFT Training at the Daito Ryu Headquarters in Tokyo. BELOW RIGHT Andy performs a flying side kick, an advanced technique.



his own hair. I clearly remember him trying to find my eyes with his thumbs as he slowly became limp.

When I finally let go of him, he was sound asleep. A minute or so later, as he was trying to crawl on all fours back to the door, my younger brother (also a black belt) said, "Oh no you don't. We have not finished with you yet."

Junior took a terrible pounding that day. He was very quiet by the end of it, and politely excused himself as we unlocked the door and let him out. The following Monday he was back at the dojo. I thought, here we go again. But to my surprise he was dressed in normal gear and looked completely different from the first time I met him.

He extended his hand and requested to become my student.

Junior had been looking for a teacher who could tame him, and he found that in our school. He was humble and respectful, so I allowed him to join as a white belt. Junior trained with us for five years, almost gaining a black belt. Though our worlds were different, we respected each other. I did not really understand what it meant to be a Hells Angel, and the only condition was that he leave that world behind when he came to train. I also made it very clear that he was not allowed to use any martial arts that I taught him in any fights with other bikies or anyone else outside of the dojo, which did become quite difficult to control.

Junior became my close friend. He was respected and loved by many in the dojo. Years later, Junior and I would often laugh as we would relive the first time we met. He would say he knew that he was in trouble the moment he laid eyes on me, which was funny as I thought the same thing. He never saw the kick, so he never knew what hit him. All he would say is that he had never been hit so hard.

One winter morning in 1998, as I was arriving back from Japan, I got the terrible news that Junior had been murdered. It was a huge blow to all who knew him. A seemingly unprovoked attack by a gunman who was intent on killing him. Junior kept us all well protected from his other world, so I never knew the depth of his darker side, though I had a healthy respect for his love of his bikie life. I loved him like a brother, and accepted him for his humanness.

*Learn one system, then learn the counters to the same system. Learn the moves of the boxer, then learn how to nullify the boxer by learning a new system. Turn the system back on itself and expose its weakness.*

## TRAINING EVOLUTION

Over my many years of martial arts training, I became an excellent kicker – strong, fast and precise. But there were plenty of fighters who were better. So if I sensed I was losing against a superior kicker, I needed to develop an immediate change in fighting strategy that

would cut the kicker to pieces.

I turned my technique against itself and looked for flaws and weaknesses within my kicking game. The main influence in the development of learning how to defend against kicks was Aso Sensei and his Submission Arts Wrestling (SAW).

The first chance I got to test my theory was against four-time world kickboxing champion and Commonwealth boxing champion Adam Watt.

I had known Adam for years, and we were good mates. He was training for the World Thai Boxing title against Dutch great Rob Kaman, and asked if he could meet and spar with me for preparation. I agreed. So every morning we would meet at the North Sydney PCYC in what was the original downstairs dojo and do at least six rounds of sparring.

To tell you the truth, I was completely outclassed in all areas of kicking, punching and general fitness. Adam was at the height of his game, and to be fair I had to play his game. My sparring had developed into a complete system of fighting that could mould itself based on the weakness of my opponent. So after a couple of days of having the stuffing knocked out of me, I asked Adam if we could do some no-rules fighting. Within a blink I caught Adam's long, powerful turning kick and slammed him down onto his back, quickly mounted to ground position three and applied a submission. Just to show it was no fluke, I did it again.

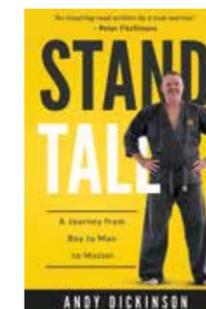
The next round Adam peppered me with fast head punches that I could not avoid. So to his delight I rushed in, only to be welcomed by a vice-like neck clinch and a barrage of knees I could not escape.

Round four I had a plan. I knew I could not escape his devastating knee assault, so I decided to embrace it. Adam had learned to keep his kicks down, but I was waiting for the knees. It did not take Adam long to cover the distance between us, but this time I welcomed him. He clinched both his arms around my neck and proceeded to go to work with the knees.

The first one I managed to block. The second one caught me right in the solar plexus, knocking the wind out of me. But I managed to grab his thigh above the knee. I wrapped both my arms around his knee, and while he was

hopping on one leg and hitting me at the same time in the back of the head, I waited and got my breath back, which took about three seconds. Then with one explosive action I palmed Adam's leg so that instead of me being front-on to Adam, I was now side-on, at the same time sweeping his standing leg out from under him. I quickly took control on the ground.

I appreciated that Adam allowed me to try some different types of sparring, and it was indicative of the great champion that he was. ■



Stand Tall: A Journey From Boy To Man To Master. Self-published. \$29.99