

Frederick dentist embraces martial arts

Travis S. Pratt | Posted: Friday, May 10, 2013 2:00 am



Harvey Levy throws a kick over training partner, Paul Schiller, while working out at the Frederick Fight Club. Staff photo by Travis S. Pratt

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By Nicholas C. Stern News-Post Staff | [2 comments](#)

On his first day of classes at Lincoln High School in Brooklyn, N.Y., Harvey Levy walked toward the school dressed in a nice outfit with a tie.

Levy, 64, a local dentist for more than 30 years, said two large upperclassmen approached him. One grabbed and held him while another took out a pair of scissors and cut off his tie, saying, "No one wears a tie at Lincoln High."

That year, being relatively small, smart and Jewish, he said he was bullied many times.

Then he decided to take free martial arts classes offered jointly by the Black Panthers and the Jewish Defense League in Brooklyn, Levy said. As he grew older and moved to college, or grad school or his residency program, he said he started to learn a new form of martial arts, from Chinese to Japanese to Italian and American styles.

"It gave me the mental discipline and fortitude to walk away from aggression," he said. "The best defense is a good pair of sneakers."

Still, one may be wise not to threaten his loved ones, he said, in which case he would be forced to respond.

"You can't bully me," he said. "I can't be intimidated."

Today, he has a third-degree black belt, which essentially means he's an instructor in three separate martial arts disciplines: Tang Soo Do, a Korean form that focuses on punching and kicking; Ryukyu Kempo, a form that concentrates on pressure points; and Hapkido, which is a form of up-close combat.

He teaches and learns from other black belts at the dojo in his house, dubbed the HarLen Martial Club, and has competed in tens of thousands of sparring matches, won trophies and gives karate demonstrations.

He trains in Brazilian jiu-jitsu at the Frederick Fight Club twice a week, works out at a fitness center in Boonsboro twice a week and practices kata, a memorized series of self-defense maneuvers, at home.

Each style operates on universal principles, such as utilizing mechanical advantage and manipulating complex torque, though they may emphasize different techniques like punching and kicking or grappling.

These principles have also proved useful in his profession.

Levy said he has instructed many dentists in how to use body mechanics he learned from martial arts to extract teeth in such a way that the dentists' wrist, elbow and shoulder will not be taxed. Also, using the hips, legs and bigger muscles of the body, the techniques can reduce the average percentage of broken roots during extractions from about 15 percent to less than 3 percent.

He also teaches dentists how to manipulate the body's pressure points after they're given permission to get difficult patients, including those with disabilities, to comply with opening their mouth.

Martial arts have also been a part of his family life.

"Everything in life is interconnected," he said.

When his two daughters, Ariel Levy and Rebecca Friedman, were children, he asked that they earn a black belt and 1,000 new words before they graduated from high school.

Friedman said she and her sister both earned their black belts.

"In terms of karate, we kind of view it as insurance; you hope you don't have to use it, but it's a good skill to have when you need it," she said.

Fortunately, she said, she hasn't had to use her martial arts prowess aside from family roughhousing.