

Professor Wally Jay (June, 1917 - May 29, 2011)

This past week in emails, by phone, and across the internet, there were in-memoriams for Professor Wally Jay. My voice is one of many so I won't attempt to convince anyone of his excellent technique, his smooth execution, or his pleasant personal demeanor. Others will have enough to say about that—and Professor Jay deserves all the adulation he has been and will be given. I have another thought on his passing.

There are many senior and many more not so senior martial artists who did not get a chance to train in a Wally Jay class even though, for a good part of his later career, he travelled here, there, and everywhere to offer his Small Circle Ju-jutsu to followers and the uninitiated alike. He was a master who was more accessible than many federations' senior instructors. Welcomed by most open-minded martial artists, he was also invited in by some whose minds were barely ajar. He not only suggested that you could mix his material in with your own, but also that he was not the only master instructor in town with a different point of view. For a decade or so, he traveled with Remy Presas (Modern Arnis) and George Dillman (Tuite), a sort of three musketeers/rebels with a cause traveling show. He reached out to meet martial artists all over the world in a confident, polite, respectful manner where many masters are settled in their dojo, waiting for the world to reach out to them.

Now here is my point: some did reach for his knowledge and skill, some did not. Do they now wish they had? It reminds me of a famous poem by e. e. cummings, titularly about Buffalo Bill, but really about a subject more common to us all.

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Buffalo Bill's
defunct
    who used to
    ride a watersmooth-silver
                                stallion
and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat
                                           Jesus
he was a handsome man
                                and what i want to know is
how do you like your blueeyed boy
    Mister Death
    
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I never got to see Buffalo Bill, having been born in a different era. Young martial artists of today, their minds on mixing grappling and boxing until someone bleeds, have never gotten to see Professor Wally Jay (who, by the way had experience in both judo and boxing, as well as ju-jutsu). Do they wish they had? Perhaps not—after all, their minds were not on efficient standing ju-jutsu as self-defense. Okay, even a professor with over 60 years experience can't teach everyone's favorite class; but what about the martial artists training in the 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s? Many of them could have sampled a Wally Jay class, but did not. Perhaps they were restricted by their styles or their sensei. Perhaps they were more interested in sparring than in learning about "two-way action" (one of Jay Sensei's discoveries). Now they will not be able to sample in person what he had to teach. Thank goodness for videos. He produced several and he was kind enough to do one of his first for me,

starting my career in video with the first half of the very first video we produced. He even said it was his favorite video of his work.

Ever think of leaving the TV screen or computer monitor and taking a seminar? Ever think of inviting a master you might admire to teach a seminar in your dojo? Quick. Act now. You have already missed Remy Presas and now Wally Jay, as well.

YouTube will have a few sets by Professor Jay, but I can tell you from personal experience, that watching, as enjoyable as it is, is not the same as doing. And doing without Professor Jay's demeanor and corrections will never be the same. I never joined Wally Jay's federation, having first operated the Kamishin-kai International and then my own Bushido-kai Kenkyukai, but there was a period of time from the 70s through the 90s when I wouldn't miss a local Wally Jay event, even when I was familiar with what he was teaching and could correct students in his seminars almost as easily as I correct my own.

Your era starts now. It's 2011, the second decade of the new millennium. Write or call a teacher you always wanted to learn from and ask him or her to teach a seminar for you, or encourage your own sensei to do the same. Do it now before you are looking up, asking the great dojo in the sky how it likes its blue- or green- or brown-eyed master instructor, only to find yourself relegated to watching onetwothreefourfive of his clips on your iPod justlikethat.