

A Global Grassroots Martial Arts Ambassador

Grandmaster Clifford C. Crandall Jr

By Eric Stalloch

Many individuals have represented the philosophy and skills of the martial arts, but it is Grandmaster Clifford C. Crandall, Jr.'s personal involvement with martial artists in small cities and towns around the world, from schools of 22 students to 2,200 students, which have distinguished him. He has connected with the martial arts community's grassroots in a myriad of ways. He has hosted martial arts television programs, appeared as the child-safety spokesman with Ronald McDonald, worked as a stuntman for 20th Century Fox on *Only the Strong*, and this list barely scratches the surface. What forged him into a grassroots martial arts ambassador with so many opportunities? As he describes, it began in a small town.

"My father was the head of the math department and the summer school principal. He was an awesome teacher but a strong disciplinarian for courtesy and manners," said Grandmaster Crandall, in a warm but serious tone. "I was small for my age. As a result, every time my father disciplined someone, I would later end up running into them and had to work out *their* problem with *his* discipline. Basically, I became a fighter with a short-fused attitude.

"I wanted to gain control over this attitude and physical aggressiveness. Fortunately, I saw judo as a means to do this. So, judo became my initiation into the world of martial arts. Once I could settle into one geographic area professionally, I fulfilled my belief that you should develop loyalty to a single school, instead of jumping from school-to-school, as I was forced to do when I moved."

More than four decades have passed, and the sum of Grandmaster Crandall's experiences is greater than these few words. Regardless, certain elements were essential and contributed to his becoming a grassroots martial arts ambassador. A cornerstone of his ability to interact and reach people of so many diverse cultures has been his professional background as an educator. He earned his Master's degree from St. Lawrence University and taught history, geography, sign language, and Braille in New York State for several years. Eventually, he moved into administration and served as principal for both an elementary and high school before becoming a superintendent. This educational background, combined

with his years of training under Masters Kum Chun Kim and Raymond P. Arndt, helped prepare him for his role as an ambassador.

Being an ambassador for the martial arts requires more than personal dedication. It requires time. This meant that he would need to become a full-time, professional martial artist. His love for the martial arts and a once-in-a-lifetime

opportunity pulled him from the education profession. At the time he was both an instructional director for a martial arts organization and a superintendent of schools. He wrote to Master Seikichi Toguchi, head of the Okinawan Goju-Ryu, and expressed a strong desire to train in the traditional format of the Okinawan style, including the tonfa. In response, Master Toguchi extended an invitation for him to train at his home in Tokyo, Japan. He was about to leave the security of the education profession for an uncertain career in the martial arts.

"It was scary to know I was giving up a secure income, health plan, and benefits. But, at the same time, there was no doubt in my mind that it was the right thing to do," he recalled. "Fortunately, my late wife, Jill, traveled to Japan, stayed with me throughout my training, and was extremely supportive of that decision."

Grandmaster Crandall lost his wife to her battle with cancer in 2002, but he often speaks of the many times that she traveled by his side, a skilled martial artist in her own right, and a powerful partner filled with an enthusiasm for all that life had to offer.

He returned to the United States resolved to make a contribution to the martial arts world, and he began by publishing a video and authoring a book about the tonfa that he dedicated to Master Toguchi. He has since produced several instructional videos on topics including the naginata, women's self-defense, gun and knife techniques, and more. Additionally, he has authored four books.

As his experiences converged, they allowed him to make a decision that propelled him around the world. He created, produced, and hosted the *Martial Arts Today* television program, focused on martial artists and their schools around the world. It aired on

NBC affiliates to over eight million homes for 12 years, and he covered the martial arts in 22 countries including Belize, France, Aruba, Guatemala, England, Japan, and numerous others. He interviewed martial artists including Fumio Demura, Tadashi Yamashita, Raymond Arndt, Bill Wallace, and many others.

His background and respect for the "old ways," taught to him by individuals such as Seikichi Toguchi, Kum Chun Kim, and Tsuneyoshi Matsuno, helped him realize that an American style was more than viable; it was necessary for the United States, as a comparatively young nation, to take its place in the larger historical context of the martial arts' continued growth. As a result of this belief, he formulated the American Martial Arts Institute, which teaches his style, American Eagle Style. From its inception, this style was literally an open book that could be evaluated and criticized by individuals who felt they were skilled enough to do so.

