

Getting Into The House

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I have been very fortunate to be able to travel to different dojos and events with my Sensei, Prof Robert Hudson. I started off by following him on his visits to Northern California many years ago. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet sensei and students from other dojos. I was able to see what other schools looked liked and get a feel for how they run their clubs. I made many connections and friendships that I value highly. Often I felt like a lucky fly on the wall as I absorbed the conversations between my Sensei and his senior students. And of course the training was superb. My Sensei is always great but when he goes on the road, everything ratchets up a notch. And from sutemi to shinyo there are always new insights and deeper dives into the core principles of our system.

Those early opportunities to accompany my Sensei on the road are what inspired the Southwest Region Dojo Junkets. A couple of times a year our region brings in a professor to tour around and visit the different dojos in Southern California. It is like a press junket for a politician or actor, but for a jujitsu professor. We use regional funds for travel and let each dojo take care of the host duties for their part of the tour. The great thing about the junkets is that they are an opportunity for students to have a professor come visit them in their home dojo setting. It is a low risk situation for the students with no travel, no fees, and we hope no excuses not to come. This is particularly important for our newer students to have an experience they might not otherwise get. It is hard in the beginning to make the commitment to travel to an event. So we bring the event to them.

The dojo junkets provide students great training on the mat and have a chance to spend time talking to the professors in social settings after classes. The professors are more accessible and the students are more inclined to talk to them. I remember being a kyu rank and not wanting to talk to the professors for fear of bothering them. Of course, I later learned they were very much interested in hearing from us all, from white belt to black. Another great benefit is that the sensei have a chance to spend time one-on-one with the professors to get their insights and advice about advanced training and how to teach the art and run their dojos. And finally, the professors have a chance to get out in the field, so to speak, and see first hand how our art is being practiced. They are able to address issues at a local level and hear directly from the sensei and students. Our goal amongst the local sensei has been to bring every willing and able professor to the SouthWest Region and we are coming very close to accomplishing that goal. We felt it was important to make sure that our students had the opportunity to meet and learn from all the professors as each one of them has their own unique perspective and teachings to offer.

More recently I have had the opportunity to interact with people all over the country, not just inside my home region. I made it a personal goal to visit every one of the seven regions to attend at least one of their major events. This past August, I finally completed that goal at the Rocky Mountain Regional Convention in Bailey, Colorado. Last year I attended Camp Kodankan Midwest in Minnesota. Before that, I attended the Northeast Regional Seminar at Rutgers in New Jersey. I have been to Camp North at Prof Ball's Ranch, Palmetto Jujitsu Clinic in South Carolina and to dojos in Hawaii. I have even visited dojos in Spain and England.

Each place I traveled to is unique in their environment and emphasis but the differences are by far outweighed by the similarities. There is a common thread. We all practice this art of Danzan Ryu that we love. Everywhere I go, there is a strong commitment to learning and practicing our art. Everyone is attentive and curious. Cups are all empty, ready to be filled. Instructors are knowledgeable and patient. When anyone needs help, someone lends a hand. When someone is in pain, someone lends an elbow.

In the end whenever I travel, I get a strange sensation. I feel like I go thousands of miles only to return home. That is what each event and each dojo feels like. They all feel like home. The sensei always kindly welcomes me and the mat is filled with familiar faces. Conversations are started up right where they left off, even though months or sometimes years have passed. The new people I met quickly became my colleagues and friends. The reason for this phenomena is that we all have something very important in common. And it is not something trivial. It is unlikely that I would meet some of you in my "regular life". But we when we get together on the mat and in the dojo there is something special present, isn't there? We are connected on a level that people outside our art will never quite understand. And it is something unique and wonderful and expansive and can help us be better people. What more valuable treasure is there?

Our Danzan Ryu house is mighty and far reaching. Most importantly it is home. I suggest exploring it to its fullest. Take advantage of the opportunities you have to train in your dojo, at regional events and, if you can, travel further to see for yourself what our art has to offer. Get into the house.

Hillary Kaplowitz is Sensei of Pacific Jujitsu Kai in Santa Monica, CA and holds the rank of Godan in Danzan Ryu Jujitsu under Professor Robert Hudson, Shihan. In addition, she has a Masters of Science in Instructional Design and Technology. ✨