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Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood.

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O sir, to wilful men/The injuries that they themselves procure/Must be their schoolmasters.

— William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

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One ought to seek out virtue for its own sake, without being influenced by fear or hope, or by any external influence.

— Diogenes Laërtius (early 3rd century)

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— A. Bartlett Giamatti, President, Yale

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— Minna Antrim (b. 1861)

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— Susan Lapinski

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Oh the nerves, the nerves; the mysteries of this machine called man! Oh the little that unhinges it, poor creatures that we are!

— Charles Dickens (1812–1870)

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Experience comprises illusions lost, rather than wisdom gained. — Joseph Roux (1834-1886)

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The tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach. — Benjamin E. Mays

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Fame sometimes hath created something out of nothing.

— Thomas Fuller (1608–1661)

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Large streams from little fountains flow,/Tall oaks from little acorns grow. — David Everett (1769–1813)

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Winning means outlasting everyone else. — Mason Cooley

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— Marina Tsvetaeva (1892–1941)

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— F. Gonzalez-Crussi

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...those who have the urge to apply knowledge usefully have
...often made significant contribution to pure knowledge....
— Warren Weaver (1894–1978)

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The Dojo Files





There are endless sufferings to endure
and endless lessons to learn.
— Chinese proverb

Preface

“**L**ifeLessons from the Martial Arts” was the subtitle of the first volume of these true tales, *Tales of the Dojo*, most of which were first published by the now defunct *Inside Karate Magazine*. While I was pondering how, or even whether, I should submit the stories to the then editor, John Corcoran, I was trying to forecast how many there might be. I was hoping to keep the column going for at least a couple of years and wanted to have ten or so tales in the chute so as not to have to rush for a deadline. To outline the stories, I thought of as many martial arts related incidents as I could that made even half an impression on me. Then I tried to understand what those incidents had taught me both as a martial artist and, more importantly, as a human being.

I was convinced that martial arts could provide a positive difference in one’s self-development which means that martial arts, properly taught and well-received, could change one’s life. But no one had really told me *how*. Years later, I was to write a book called *The Road to Mastery, An Explication of the Benefits of Budo* in which I systematized, to the degree I could, how a person develops technically and psycho-spiritually through a long, serious study of *budo* (the Japanese word for “martial ways,” implying a way of life through the marital arts). Until I wrote *Road to Mastery*, all I had was a series of edifying incidents that had occurred in the *dojo*, in seminars, while learning, while teaching and while listening to



other martial artists. In fact, many of the incidents did not happen to me at all but to others who were kind enough to share. These became the magazine column *Tales of the Dojo*, later renamed *The Dojo Files* by a new editor, Paul Maslak.

I called these “pasted” true stories. For the sake of coherency and a smooth read, I sometimes put two or more incidents together to create a lesson. Otherwise, that lesson would be drawn only in the mind of the person who actually experienced the incidents, especially if the incidents occurred twenty years apart. All the parts were true, to be sure, but the truth did not always come as a whole. As the storyteller, that was my job.

In this second volume, I take a similar but, in some ways, inverted tack. Instead of thinking of martial arts incidents that made an impression upon me, I began by thinking of little, sometimes trivial, every day incidents that made an impression on me. Then I looked for a martial arts parallel.

If the *dojo* (the Japanese for “place to study the way”) truly represents or, at least, *can* represent a microcosm of life, then it stands to reason that martial study should contain some parallels to those lessons life teaches us. This should be no surprise — living people actually study, have studied, and will study the martial arts. What is surprising, I think, is that so few martial artists bring their hard won common sense to the dojo or try to bring their hard won dojo sense back to the commons. This is probably because, as beginners, they are told they must empty their mental vessels to learn well. Well, I probably cheated at that lesson. I suggest that if the true tales told here seem to resonate in you, you did not empty your mental vessel any more than I did. Maybe you just set up a separate dojo file for the new knowledge.

Now you are a little more mature, a little more experienced and it is time to move on — just a little. In the process of getting ready for the move, you knock over both life files and dojo files and the contents gets mixed. When you finally pick up all the folders and papers, you find you have something completely unexpected. You have this book.