



Pacific Jujitsu Alliance

PO Box 1881, Phoenix, Oregon 97535

www.pacificjujitsualliance.com

Memorial Issue

William E. Gessner
Yodan – Danzan Ryu Jujitsu

By Professor Barb Gessner, his wife



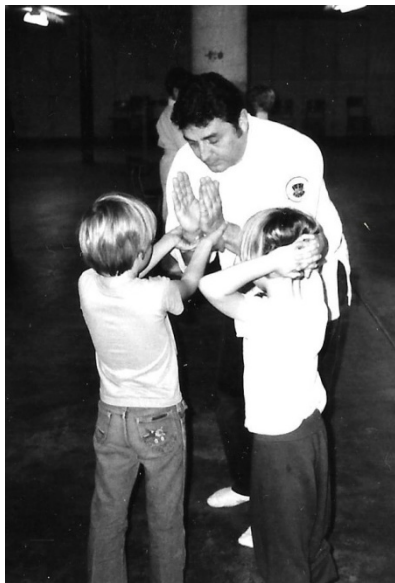
September 1, 1925 – January 27, 2018

Bill Gessner, 92, died unexpectedly yet peacefully in his sleep early Saturday morning, January 27, 2018. He was the loving and devoted husband of Barbara Gessner for over 34 years.

Bill was born on September 1, 1925 in Norristown, Pennsylvania and graduated from high school at the age of 16. Bill served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, and upon returning home began his studies at what is now East Stroudsburg University, graduating in 1950 as a teacher of "The Sciences".

Ten years later he found himself on the teaching faculty in the Department of Physics of that same institution, a position he held until his retirement 29 years later. During that time, he developed a curriculum of practical, applied physics specifically designed for non-science majors. This program was extremely well received. A few years after beginning to teach at ESU, Bill completed his Doctor of Education degree from University of Pennsylvania.

After moving to the Poconos Dr. G., as he came to be known, became involved in the Martial Art of Danzan Ryu Jujitsu at the local YMCA, eventually taking over the instruction of the classes there, starting a student club at the college, and getting the classes incorporated into the academic program in Physical Education. He also began teaching a predominantly children's programs in Stroudsburg and Portland, Pennsylvania, which had about 60 members.



Bill served for 15 years as Director of Region IV for the American Judo & Jujitsu Federation, covering all of northeastern United States, from Illinois east and Virginia north. He was honored for over 50 years of service to that organization.

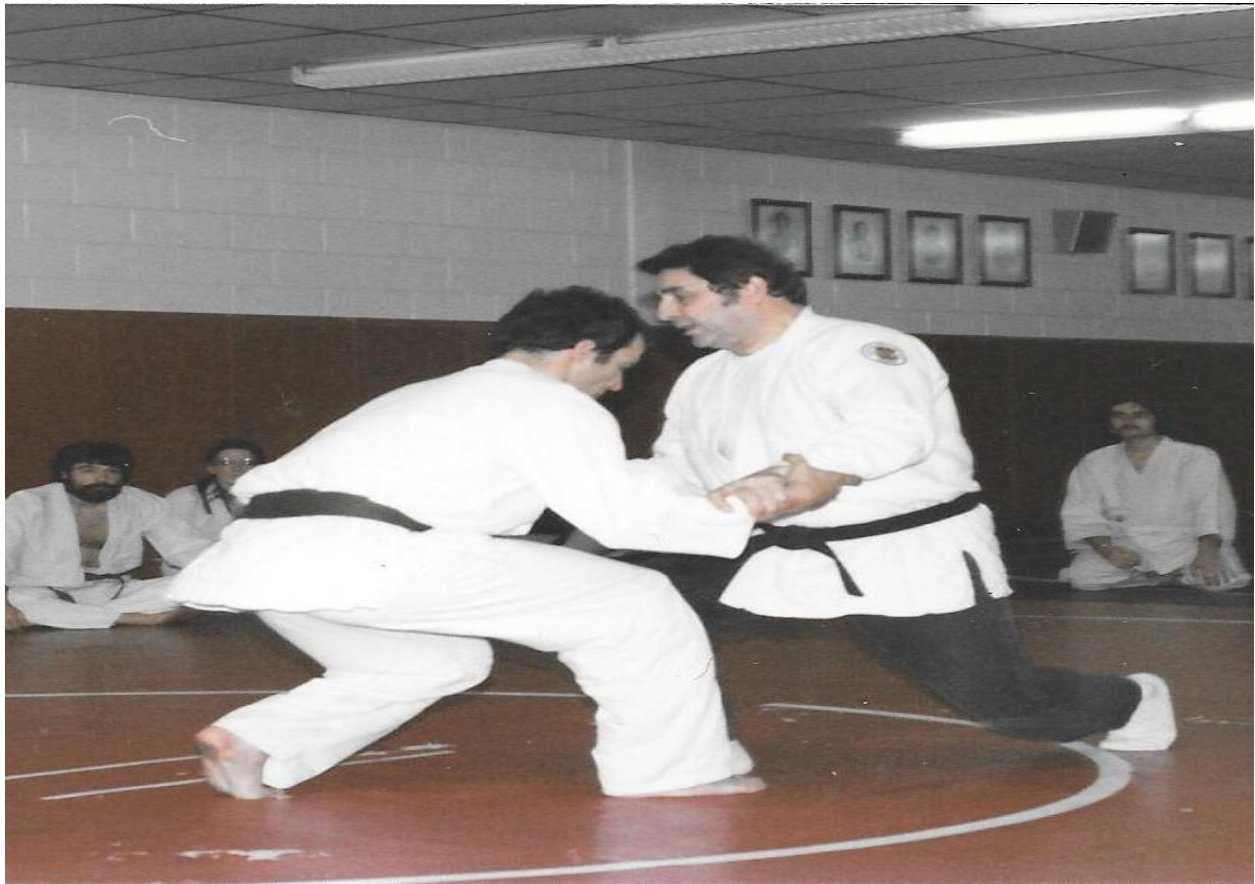
Bill continued to teach Jujitsu at East Stroudsburg University until the time of his retirement in 1989; however, he continued to teach at various camps and seminars for both the United States Judo Association and the AJJF. Even after a couple of major medical issues necessitated him using a walker, he still attended weekly classes run by his wife Barb at both Rutgers University and nearby community centers in central New Jersey, and always offered his feedback to the students. These classes are a 90-minute drive from our home in

northeastern Pennsylvania.

My encounter with Bill began as a student in one of his physics classes, and then a week or so later in Jujitsu. As a sensei, Dr. G., as his students call him, loved and valued each and every student, helping each to grow to the best of their ability, and affirming them along the way based on the inherent gifts and talents of each. When I began Jujitsu, the dojo was filled with around 35 students each night. It was Dr. G. who taught me that Jujitsu was much more than the techniques. That if the student wasn't able to "live" the principles in their life outside the dojo, they had totally missed the point of this system.

Bill's connection with the AJJF came through Ed Kent in New York City, who preceded him as Regional Director. In 1970 AJJF Professors Bud Estes and Lamar Fisher visited

Ed's dojo. Profs Estes and Fisher, along with Professor Tom Ball, continued to visit East Stroudsburg Kodokan, Bill's dojo at East Stroudsburg University, every year or so for the AJJF Regional Conventions there, till 1980 when his wife Barb began hosting them at her dojo at Rutgers University. Bill was promoted to Sandan in DZR at the 1975 AJJF National Convention in Redding, California.



We also attended Black Belt Camp in Illinois a couple of years at which Bill and I participated fully as students. He tested for and received the rank of Yodan in the AJJF in 1991 at the age of 66.

Being a humble man, Bill never blew his own horn, and consequently, did not receive the recognition he deserved. However, he was acknowledged by the local martial arts community, as illustrated by the honor given to him at a Karate demonstration we attended at East Stroudsburg University in which the hosting Sensei announced his presence in the audience, asked him to stand, and introduced him to the crowd as "The Grandfather of martial arts in Monroe County" [Pennsylvania].

Bill used to tell me that "the greatest honor a teacher can receive is for the student to surpass the teacher." Not surprisingly, he took great pride in my accomplishments in Jujitsu and Judo, and I hope he realized the enormous part he had in my achieving them. I only hope that my students will also grow beyond what I have been able to pass on to them.



Other Memorials:

After being involved in Jujitsu for a few months, I went to my first weekend clinic. It was there I met Dr. G for the first time. As a Rutgers student, the senior students in Barb's dojo told me that her husband taught a class worth taking called Dirty Rotten Tricks.

DRTs did not disappoint. The class had some vicious techniques but they were easy for me to get the basics. I have taken this class perhaps six or seven more times since. The techniques taught varied but Dr. G's enthusiasm did not. Despite the mean-spirited nature of the class title and the painful techniques, the class was fun every time. That mix of fun and dastardly techniques helped hook me for twenty-eight years now.

Now an instructor myself, I see that ability to transfer that level of fun into jujitsu without losing the attention to detail as amazing. Dr. G. had excellent skills but his ability to teach was truly great.

Learning the history of East Coast Region, I found out that Dr. G. was a lynch pin of Jujitsu's foothold. And this fact never surprised me. If he was involved, how could it not take hold? Long before the first pay per view mixed martial arts fight put Royce Gracie and jujitsu in the public's eye, Danzan Ryu had taken hold in the northeast.

Now I bring my twin girls to the kid's class. And watching them learn and practice from his wheelchair beside the mat, Dr. G. still inspired. Asking my daughters questions about their practice after class and joking around, Dr. G. made that old classroom with mats on the floor a welcoming dojo.

That great teaching and enthusiasm is something I will always aspire to and he will be sorely missed.

Scott Kennedy, Nidan
Rutgers Kodokan



I was asked to write something about my friend, Dr. Bill Gessner. How do you write about someone who not only shared his passion for jujitsu with you, but also let you know that, whatever you learned, he was there to help you understand what you're learning, how to apply what you've learned, and to make you feel like you could pay it forward, because he raised your confidence level that much higher. I really enjoyed his "cheats." But the one thing that I'll always carry with me from Dr. G. is his *Chi*, which was very warm and at the same time, imparting knowledge and wisdom in the art of jujitsu. I will surely miss your smile and warm handshake, Dr. G., but I know you are in a better place, with God. *Sensei nitaishita. Rei!*

José Aponte, Shodan
Rutgers Kodokan

~~~~~

Unfortunately, I only got to know William Gessner (or Dr. G.) towards the end of his long and well lived life. But for the time that I knew him, he remained a consummate teacher on and off the mat. The depth and breadth of his knowledge was profound, and he was dedicated to sharing it with anyone who was willing to learn. Even when he was too physically weak to train, he still observed the mat carefully and would call students over to give them advice. It delighted him to watch as students grew into a fuller understanding of themselves, because as he saw it, every student is a future teacher. As such, he recognized that it was the responsibility of the seniors to raise a new generation of teachers and he never took that fact for granted. I feel confident in saying that Dr. G. is one of the main reasons the arts grew as they did in the northeast, and his passion for learning and commitment to the arts is something that his wife, and my sensei, Prof. Barbara Gessner, maintains in our dojo today. It is a legacy I am honored to share.

Vikram Sarath, Nidan  
Rutgers Kodokan

~~~~~

I met Dr. G. late into his life when I first started jujitsu. As such, I never got to really see him in his prime. He was always an ever-present observer of the mat. Yet, despite his growing limitations with age, Dr. G. would never shy away from the opportunity to share his wisdom and encouragement with his students.

This past year, I had the opportunity to grow a little bit closer to him. Due to his declining health, he required the use of a wheelchair for mobility. Once a week, before and after our children's jujitsu class, I assisted him from the car to the building and vice versa. In those brief moments, we would talk about the class and without fail, he would always ask the same question I've come to know him for, "Do you think jujitsu is here to stay or is it a passing fad?" Regardless of my answer, which I would change up every now and then, he simply agreed. He just had that type of humor.

It's strangely poetic though, that he would ask that question, given his immense contributions to the spread of jujitsu here on the east coast. I probably would not have

taken it up if it weren't for him. So, to really answer your question Dr. G., "I think it's here to stay, and part of that is thanks to you!"

Edy de Leon, Nidan
Rutgers Kodokan

~~~~~  
"Do you think Jujitsu is here to stay? Or just a passing fad?"

Dr. Bill Gessner, or Dr. G. as he was fondly known to us, was always happy to share his knowledge and passion for Jujitsu with anyone who would listen. I remember hearing that question after practice when I was a young college student. I was just starting my journey in Danzan Ryu Jujitsu, and at the time I could never imagine this amazing martial art ever be a passing fad. I had just spent the prior several hours sweating, throwing, falling, rolling, grappling and picking myself off the ground. And I was having so much fun the entire time doing it. I could never dream of jujitsu being a "passing fad." But I think that he knew my thoughts very well, and that he was just highlighting for me the broader appeal and effect that this practice had on me, and how it would affect many aspects of my life. He was always extremely encouraging with a smile and a laugh and an occasional serious look. He has probably forgotten more about jujitsu than I will ever know, and he is missed.

Steven Chen, Shodan  
Rutgers Kodokan

~~~~~  
"Dr. G. was great because he would give me positive feedback after class and we would have a mini-conversation. After I did a fall or a roll, Dr. G. would give me an "OK" sign. He would kid around with me when I was doing very good. He always asked questions such as, "Are you 18?" "Do you have a girlfriend?" And when I said that I was 12, he would give me a terrified look and ask me, "You're 12?!?" And I would tell him, "Yes." "

Devon Kiessling, Junior Blue Belt
Rutgers Kodokan

~~~~~  
"I fondly remember on many an occasion, Dr. G. would point his finger in the air and say, "That kid (my son Devon) is gonna be something. Just you wait in a few years." He'd then chuckle. That confident prediction based on all his years of experience and wisdom is just what I needed to hear. He loved when Devon would come over to him in the beginning and end of Jujitsu class to shake his hand and to chat with him. That connection and respect across years of generations was something to see. Rest easy, Dr. G."

Marci Kiessling  
Jujitsu Mom