

F.P.G. a short autobiography.

Somewhat meandering, I hope this doesn't bore you too much?
(Not really my thing to blow my own trumpet, even if this could be called that?)

My father being the National Coach for the BJA, my earliest recollections always involved judo, surprisingly enough! Most of the family friends seemed to be involved, most conversation was on the subject, and if it wasn't judo then chances were it was Japan.

Although my father didn't marry a Japanese woman, many of his acquaintances thought he did. The house was full of Japanese paraphernalia. I have seen photos of myself kitted out, kneeling with my dad doing something or another.

It was the 1970s, coming out of the 60's and all the hippy culture when I grew up. This I think influenced both my parents. Perhaps, accelerating this, certainly in my father case, was that he spent quite a bit of time in the States, California specifically working with the US Judo Association. This was one of the countries that asked him to help them set up the machinery of elite judo development.

One of the things my dad needed was a structure of coaches, Area Coaches, to deal and handle the running of things closer to the ground, can I put it? One of the Area Coaches who really became a great family friend, more than any other was a man called Jerry Hicks.

Jerry, lived in Bristol (so in charge of the *western area*) and worked, as all but my father were volunteers, as a school teacher. To be precise an art teacher. He and his wife, I think were the biggest influence on my life after my own parents! Summer holidays spent at their house, running in and out of gardens and into the studios really left a deep mark on me. The smell of oil paint still brings back those days.

So, as I started to move towards what to do in life, my thoughts really turned towards fine art, particularly painting. Hence why you can see the degrees I have gained in the subject. Teaching was an almost inevitable add on, in order to secure an income. However, this didn't mean that judo was out of the picture, by no means! I studied at Bristol art school, with the determination of training at Jerry's club (the Bristol Judoquai, which ran from sometime in the early 60s until the mid 90s).

Much of the work I did at art school was about judo. I loved the artists, the movements who dealt with similar things; the Italian Futurists, Jackson Pollock, Newman, Yves Klein (a friend of my dad's), to name but a few.

During the first year, I went to Australia, a volunteer thing called Operation Raleigh, originally a four year expedition around the world. One part of my expedition was the recording and preserving of Aborigine rock art sites. The light, heat, colour and experience was another massive influence on me. Only three months long but stayed with me, well until now!

My art work took on another angle from this period. So between judo and the influences of the antipodean, my work really moved into colour and abstraction.

However, following from art school, I really did want to follow in my father's foot steps and at least go to Japan, even if it were on a stepping stone on a longer journey, to who knew where... Eventually, after quite a bit of messing about, well when you're young it isn't all work, career etc, is it? I sorted out a method to get to Japan and earn some kind of a living when there.

I was told, "oh yes, you'll be in Tokyo", well it wasn't until several days after arriving that I discovered to my dismay, I was about seventy miles west along the coast from Tokyo in a 'small' fishing village. Well I say small, it probably was once upon a time, I think the population stood at about 200,000. Being in Japan and doing judo, was the target, and this had become more difficult than I'd hoped! Getting to the Kodokan (where it all started, and where my dad went) took nearly two hours and I could only go once a week, my day off which was a Thursday.

Life deals funny cards and although this hadn't turned out quite like I'd hoped, I did meet some good people, one an American who also being a judo player, wrestler and art student was a welcome friend. He had discovered there was an open exhibition for foreign artists living in Japan in Uneo Tokyo. We did this several times together.

After a couple of years down in the "country" (arguably more built up than many British cities...) I managed to get myself to Tokyo. My judo became better, with increasing training schedules, I met more artists, and lived a crazy, vibrant life, so full of fun and work! With my new judo friends I went to gradings, competitions, and other dojos. Worked in many different places with some fantastic teachers, pupils and students.

Having been in Japan for nine years, now with a young family, I decided that I should return to Britain for some further education, qualifications in order to be able to make a better home for my kids.

This nearly worked, I got my Masters, I'd worked in a London secondary school teaching art, which had been an incredible experience, not all in a good way – but we never made it back to Japan. Instead, Bath, specifically the University of, offered the next more. Away from the chaos of London, to a better place for family and yours truly.

Back to judo. After six years deep in the art world judo once again took over. Life never being a smooth progression, the odd hick-up meant I started my own business teaching judo in schools all around Bath, Bristol and Sherborne. Sherborne, another strange twist of fate. A guy I did actually know, had gone to university with my sister was the new Director of Sport at the school and wanted judo – as a sport to balance the traditional sports of public schools; rugby, cricket, hockey etc.

Life was again, good. All the schools were doing well. Sherborne went to the national champs for public schools and came very near winning. My family was growing and developing. I was working hard, developing ideas, reading from books my father had written learning how to teach better judo. Polishing my skills, getting right down to what it was really all about. My father had 'taught' me judo, we had spent many hours over my life talking about almost every angle that affects judo development. Using this information, my pragmatic experiences in Japan, my teaching knowledge, now reading again and producing a "cake" from all these ingredients I really feel I have got to a very good understanding of what it's all about! No one can have all the answers, and I would suggest to think such a thing indicates a serious problem.

For the last several years I have been helping back at the University of Bath, coaching the student's club. I am very proud so say the students have really taken to the information I give them, the direction and pushing I give them and the results are, I have to say, fantastic! The 2022-23 cohort went to a competition 5 weeks after starting judo and managed to win 5 medals from the squad of 8. We went on to the national champs (BUCS) a couple of months later and do almost as well, with 4 medals from 7. Beating players that had been at it for many more months if not years! Adam, the Head coach at Bath, says with incredulity (which is very flattering) "how do you do it?" Well for all the about reasons!

I'm not really one for blowing my own trumpet, although the chances of anyone actually reading all this, certainly this far down the page, makes it almost a none statement! Well, if you'd like me to teach your children, coach at your institution or just have an odd question you'd like to ask, please feel free to do so! I'd love to hear from you. Thanks ever so much for reading this far.

I'll try and do a better one at some point but this will have to do for now, sorry.

FG '23.