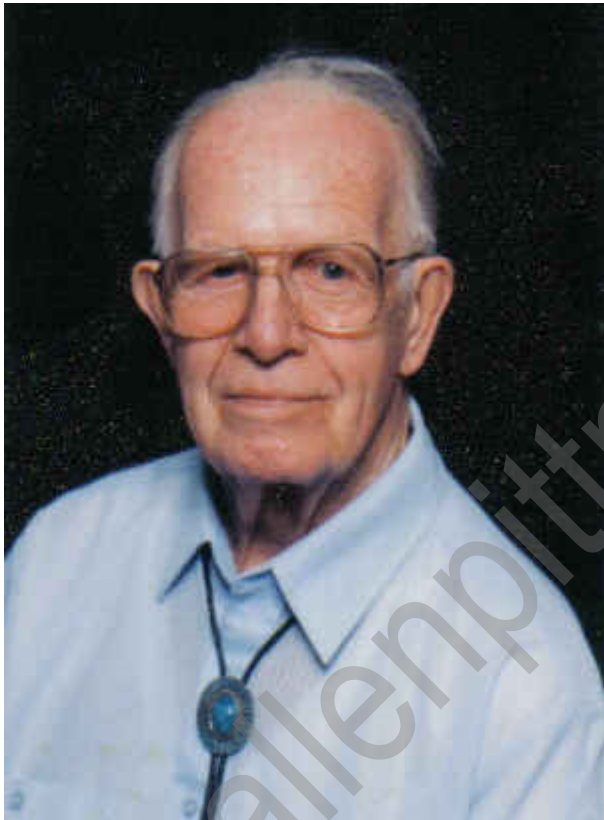


Kelly Yeaton

Kelly Yeaton

Chapter 1 Fighting, Dance and Drama

“If it’s a wave you better ride it”.



When I went to see Kelly Yeaton (1993) he had a tape recorder ready and Paul Cote and I sat down and told him how we got involved with the trail of William Fairbairn. I owe Paul for driving me to see Kelly and for connecting me to John Hepple-the archivist at Penn State University Library. Paul and I always had a great time on our road trips. His buoyant optimism and extroverted manner often kept me from lapsing into my usual philosophical moods. I have rarely laughed as much as when Paul and I -on a road trip- read Somerset Maugham’s “Razors Edge”...we had a great time. Anyhow we finished telling our stories to Kelly, K. told his wife to turn off the recorder. It seems Kelly had other visitors on the subject and had reason to be suspicious of the curious. But not us. Our tales rang true. There were quite a few visitors and correspondents who would visit him and try to pump him for info on Fairbairn and the Fairbairn- Sykes knife. And for these Kelly would sit back and let them waffle on. With us Kelly was kind enough to

pull out his brother’s old suitcase and show us the custom made Martin-Burns holster and upside down armpit knife sheath. And we got to hold one of the few original Shanghai Fighting knives before it was shipped and mysteriously lost in the hands of William Cassidy. All of it was in well oiled condition and well worn. Paul and I tried them on and I have to say it brought to life the word “well balanced”. In milliseconds Paul could pull the pistol from the Martin-Burns clamshell holster and have the nose of the pistol right on line with his solar plexus. And this was without practice. The thing was greased lighting. The knife, once hung under your armpit was touched your finger tips whence it would slide right into your hand as though “willing” itself to you. What ingenuity! I could imagine in my mind’s eye the U.S. Marines and the Shanghai Police-Chinese, Russian, Sikh and British— in their armory talking, smoking, tooling and shooting and experimenting over the months. Like a beehive at full activity. And this was the

honey! Some of the most unique and machined survival tools for a foot patrolman stuck in a dark alley with a desperate criminal who knew –by Chinese law-they would be hung or beheaded if caught. The ensemble certainly gave you the confidence of a Christian with Aces up his sleeve.

Kelly's hearing of my studies in Taiwan with Ba-gua and Fairbairn's relation to it piqued his interest and when I showed him some Chin Na with Paul's help, rolling Paul along the grass in his backyard with Han Ting-Chans "Trussed Pig" maneuver, Kelly lit up like a Christmas tree and said, "Well! We could just never figure out how the various bits Fairbairn showed could be put together! You have completed a riddle which has been with me since the War! (Since that time I have found more solid evidence of Fairbairn's Ba-gua connection-particularly in his linkages involving his "Chin-jab" and his "Failed Strangle Roll Outs" which show at the least a working knowledge of the Ba-gua Double Palm Change). After this Kelly took me down to his basement and said "I think you have earned this" and he handed me a Black Belt and Gi he had hung up downstairs—it was an antique—from the Shanghai Municipal Police. Later someone said to Paul Cote, "He should have given it to a museum." Paul's answer was, "he did!". Well he was right in a way as I've always appreciated old things. And soon I'll be old myself and hope for the same appreciation.

I had realized that during War time (WWII) Kelly had been at home –in the U.S. while his brother Sam was with Fairbairn in Shanghai. They corresponded heavily and eventually Kelly was able to give Fairbairn something via his brother, Sam. What he gave Fairbairn was the design for a lapel dagger. Small, flat and securely clipped under a suit lapel it could be quietly drawn out when the speaker was holding his lapels like a Senator- then it was lifted up- and thrown in a very decisive downward action which resulted in plenty of penetration. Kelly mimed the whole thing with one and I thought "If he let that thing go it was going to stick THROUGH something!" Kelly had got this idea from his work in stage craft as a student and director of acting. As a matter of fact, Kelly was to become one of the pioneers in the U.S. of "Theatre In The Round". As we talked I felt the room rotate as it were -and I engaged Kelly on his knowledge of acting, I mentioned my wariness of the acting profession as a sort of hot bed for insecure phonies. His response was quick and cool, "Well Allen you are acting all the time." I hesitated –he had me and he knew it and said-"you are acting like yourself! I tasted what he meant at once and thought "Oh! Our sense of self is a pose-an act- of the ego! I get it." He went on to explain other things among them the living quality of the stage (not television which he felt was more based on camera and costume rather than on any capacity to establish rapport with a living audience) and how as a director one has to sense how the ensemble of actors crystallizes into an event...a whole new light for me was shone on drama, the stage and particularly how esoteric it could be-how multi dimensional. I began to feel some exaltation and wonder about the whole world of stage acting.

Kelly mentioned Roy Mitchell the brilliant Drama Professor and had his picture on the wall. Mitchell was a big influence for him. Later I found Mitchell was not only heavily involved with the stage but was extremely well read in comparative religion and philosophy and wrote some pretty extensive essays on those subjects during his involvement with the Theosophical Society of Canada. Kelly went on to recommend to me the work of Francoise Delsarte on body movement for stage work. It seems Delsarte was the movement genius of the 1800's who was to become a foundation for the caricatures of emotion often shown in the silent film era. It was

Delsarte who taught the Pageantry designer, Steil (sp?) McKaye. McKaye was famous for his Parades and artistic “Exhibitions” and “Fanfares” in the early 1900’s. McKaye would later pass what he learned from Delsarte on to Ted Shawn. Shawn was a major proponent with Martha Graham and others of what was to become “Modern Dance”. Shawn’s text “Every Little Movement” shows some very interesting drills which are based on falling down on the ground and getting off the ground. Apparently nearly everything in the body movement scale is inside that particular process. I’ve retranslated that process in my own movement training I call “Wisdom of the Body”.

So this was where WWII and Fairbairn took me- To a retired Professor of Drama who knew- among other things- the history of Modern Dance. How strange. But yes, Dance and Martial Arts have always been connected and always will be. The relation of martial arts to movies as well as stage craft is an enduring one. It would be later through Indian Master Khilton Nongmaithem I would learn how deep-and essential- the significance of this was. Yes, it was Acting which contained some of the essence of martial skill and also martial pedagogy. Sometime later during a period of discussion on pistol craft and training Kelly wrote me the following note which is illuminating in it’s candor about the whole physical learning process-

“But really all we ever knew about shooting and control may have its premises in the wrong places...In Adam Smith’s “Powers of Mind” I think I first heard about “Zen Tennis” as taught by W. Timothy Gallwey, shortly before I was retired and then went to the conference on the West Coast, knowing that if there still were jobs available they would be at the conference safely hidden in some body’s coat pocket. (That was true, but I didn’t get it.) But an ex-student near by (L.A.) told me that his wife’s meditation teacher had been Gallwey’s as well, that Gallwey often came to the meetings with Guru Maharaj Ji and maybe might be there Sunday...so I went (but he wasn’t) but I did make a contact with one of Gallwey’s assistants who would be teaching a student on a private court in Beverly Hills, which I watched with great interest.

Gallwey’s premise is that we can’t control the body very well with the conscious mind...trying to teach a golf swing muscle by muscle and joint by joint . Set the task and ask for it...again and again and again...and suddenly “it” does it. But if you leap up and say, “ I did it!” IT will instantly abandon you, and leave the action. If you watch a lot of “high class” tennis you have seen all the strokes you will ever need , but you saw them from the outside. Can you imagine doing them? Once you have a clear image of what you want you can begin...then without further thought respond...trust the body to know how to do it without any mental effort. The mind is best kept back out of the action. Gallwey says that the perfect game of tennis is already in the body, once you release it from intellectual inhibitions. You have watched the champions and have already learned what they have displayed. The teacher I watched in Beverly Hills suggested a kind of game to his pudgy student...”Suppose we are making a film and you are going to play this tennis champion...now we are just shooting you however...so now we want to see the confidence of a champion and his polished style...don’t worry about where the balls actually go...we’ll shoot those shots without you anyway.” Amazing the smoothness and good form and simple power was all there...but actually all the balls were going exactly where they should! Take care of the form and everything else follows...and the teacher was using the familiar magic of acting...act as if,...”living by controlled hypothesis” we act as if the sun will always “rise”, although we also know that the apparent rising of the sun is just the effect of a slowly rolling earth.

And much of the inner tennis comes from what the Zen people call “beginners mind” the past should not control the present response. How many people have walked up to their first golf drive, looked at the distant flag and then just whacked the ball over to it...not knowing that it was difficult...

Gun pointing is also simple, when we use our finger, it is surprisingly accurate...The old Remington automatic was designed to point where the finger would point, as some waterpistols are. But most handguns do not, quite. And hands also vary...I once bought an old London made black- powder fowling –piece which was so well balanced that it seemed to fly to the shoulder almost without guidance.

Best book by Gallwey, I think was Inner Tennis:Playing the Game NY 1976 which deals also with over- simplification (such as I have probably done above.) and talks more about what Csikszentmihaly calls FLOW in his book of that name. which is more than merely staying above “boredom” and below “anxiety” as he had first defined it.

Enough, for today, at least...I know more useful books than I have ever fully understood!

Kelly

Chapter 2

Combat Effectiveness and the Learning Process (Pedagogy)

“Cry your trail, little brother?”

Mowgli in Kiplings Jungle Book

The trail I followed of the Fairbairn-Sykes knife itself began with my father-as I’ve written elsewhere and continued to a second hand bookshop where I found a copy of Fairbairn’s text on commando fighting called “All In Fighting”. In this small hardback are the basic techniques F. taught to G.I’s around the world. Along with this text there was also an orientation film I found at the National Archive in Washington, D.C. In this film F worked with director John Ford showing essential techniques. Some of Fairbairn’s amazing pedagogy was also demonstrated- his following a student-by his shoulder-through a “Kill House” or training house where the student would be confronted with dark rooms, lights suddenly coming on and gun shots. The student was to learn how to maintain his orientation and respond with the correct double tapping pistol shots at targets (dummies) which suddenly appeared. The whole learning process was greatly accelerated by Fairbairn standing at the students side quietly whispering encouragement and guidance. This is an ideal pedagogy—the teacher playing a kind of shadow who walks along side til the student acquires the confidence of the technique. This method of accelerated learning worked for many of Fairbairns students who survived the war to tell about them. So part of the “Trail of the Knife” led to the art of teaching. As I followed the Fairbairn research I realized what he taught was extraordinary but how he taught was equally important. In fact the “how” or the Pedagogy – may in the long run be more important. In my own experience in education with children from ages 7-18 I found how I taught was actually much of what the student learned. What I taught was strictly secondary. If I could impart the right attitude to the student, the right approach—curious, relaxed, interested, not too heavy...then the student could learn something — how to run, jump, throw a javelin etc very quickly—especially if I told them before hand, “This is easier than you think.” On the other hand if the subject taught is introduced as “difficult” or “hard to understand” at first— then guess what? It is.

On the subject of tactical techniques as taught by Fairbairn there is also profundity. I know some writers think his techniques “primitive” or that he did not grab enough—as in Judo (which he knew) or things like that.’ First off – he was teaching armed men. So he HAD to suppose they may be wearing a pack, have a knife a bayonet or a helmet. So with that as a beginning grabbing is not going to come to mind! If you put a 30-70 pound pack on your back and you try to attack someone you will not grab at them. As armored warriors of old found out—if the armor is too heavy you cannot make a long lunge! And as a rule you will be too slow to grab with your arms because of the additional weight. Therefore, you literally launch your whole body at them. And that is what F. taught. In this “launching” movement he went to the most important thing—the eyes—he emphasized getting the enemies head up by hitting—but his hitting is extremely interesting—it is from underneath their line of vision. So with this you get control of the neck first and you expose the throat for your knife or bayonet or helmet edge. That is the idea of his chin jab. The chin jab itself is of little use except it totally bends the spine of the enemy so you can hit them or pull them or stab them in any way you please. Some boxers do this with a jab but a jab takes a long time to develop. When Tim Geoghegan was teaching me about the jab he said, “the main thing is to get the head (eyes) up—that’s all you need—then use the right for the solar plexus.” Fairbairn did not have the luxury of time with his recruits that boxing trainers have with their students! Sometimes he had as little as two weeks.

Fairbairns close associate from Shanghai, Dermot O’Neill (5th Dan in Judo from Kano) emphasized the finger jab to the eyes to get enough control of the opponent’s attention to kick his legs. The significant thing about O’Neill’s method was his emphasis on being able to fluidly finger jab and kick to eight directions. Try it. Face forward and move, or step—anyway you can—try to make it smooth. Now imagine someone doing this everyday til it’s drilled into their system. It is a very good foundation for fighting and in actuality is the cornerstone of old Shaolin Temple Boxing. And you can work large numbers of men in lines to perfect the maneuver. So it saves time as well. You might ask why O’Neill did not teach the horse stance and my reply would be “because they were not riding horses!” To the jabbing and kicking foundation O’Neill added grabbing and twisting the arms in different ways while kneeing the groin and kicking the shin. In combat boots the relevance of this will become obvious. Naturally if you work on this with a partner you will find some ways of grabbing and twisting your adversary’s gun or hand or knife hand will work more to your advantage than others. You will, more often than not want to pull your opponent is such a way that you go behind them. Then you twist their head or use the knife. But the main thing is to jab to the eyes and get an arm—the rest will unfold to you. These techniques can be refined beautifully with practice with a partner and you will discover which angles work best for pistol, knife and bayonet disarms. The achievement of a comfort zone while jabbing and kicking to eight directions is a major neurological hurdle and it gives the soldier additional responses if he is attacked from the side or the back. And his hearing will pick up as it always does when you train around the body and not just to the front of the body. If you train yourself or anyone to do a finger jab to the eyes in any direction around the body you have taught them to immediately put their attacker on the defensive from any angle. There is no simpler or finer way to train someone to get the initial control of an attack with an empty handed technique than this. Why the military lost the vision to perceive the savvy of the O’Neill method I can only attribute to the fashion of ideas and the illusion of “newer is better”. (Last I heard there was high kicking and ground fighting being taught at Fort Benning. How stupid. The least important things of fighting taught first).

On the boxing side F. encouraged his soldiers to punch or chop the arms of the opponent while at the same time he would have anyone with genuine boxing skills give demonstrations and teach techniques they found efficient. He wanted his men to know what was “out there”. In fact if they were very skilled he would recruit them as a trainer and allow them to teach his basics with additions of their own. At least this is what happened according to recruits. So here I see Fairbairn was not only a good observer and a good listener. He did not let his ego get in the way of the objectives of his teaching. And he knew skill when he saw it and learned from it and employed it as quickly as he could. I recognize this was required by the exigencies of the war but I also realize Fairbairn was an incredibly open and curious person who probed things deeply and quickly to get to their essence. And I don’t think he is appreciated enough for it.

He also knew how to put students in a learning mode. I realized this when I was doing his “match box” attack which some people have thought quite silly. Well I sat down with a matchbox by a student of mine and experimented. In order to really grasp the significance of the “match box” attack you have to put yourself into the situation – like a good actor. You have been through the ticket office and the bustle and you have just got onto a train and put your things on the shelf and sat down. The train has reached it’s cruising speed and everyone is getting comfortable. In WWII the next stage would be to have a cigarette or light a pipe. It is part of the natural sequence of events. Watch a 1940’s movie and you will get a sense of the atmosphere of the time and often the atmosphere was filled with cigarette smoke! And G.I.’s and others would often offer a cigarette to a traveling companion. It was the most natural and sociable thing to do. In his text Fairbairn has his man get a matchbox out and suddenly hit the person/guard next to them in the temple with the matchbox! Must be some tough matchbox eh? Well if it’s full of matches it is pretty tough! And if you are a woman agent with small hands it can really make a difference-having something to hit them with. And give you that extra confidence you need to do something. And if the person next to you is salivating for the cigarette as soon as they see you with the matchbox in your lap guess what? They are already in a trance! They will certainly not expect you to hit them with IT! I’ll give you one more thing to think about. You can go ahead and light a match and as soon as it flairs up THEN hit them with the matchbox or your hand! The flair of the match will buy you additional response time. So I realize as I look at these things, F. knew what he was doing. And some of these things may look silly but if you are teaching a spy how to escape his captors on a train or in a car then many of his tricks really make sense. He obviously knew a lot about human nature and how to “freeze” a person’s attention.

In regard to Fairbairn’s astute appraisal of “what worked” Kelly Yeaton wrote this to me in one of his letters;

“...In something I read recently there was a quotation from a covert radio operator who was captured in France and was in a car with three Germans being taken to HQ for “interrogation”. He reports that the search had not found his automatic strapped inside his left leg so he knew he still had a chance. Although handcuffed, he managed to zip his fly open and when the car rounded a bend he pulled out his gun and fired two quick shots into the neck of the driver and as the care went out of control killed the man beside him, and also the last man while extricating himself from the wreck...two shots for each, just as he had been taught ...”just point, don’t bother to aim and fire twice quickly” Aha! I remember when Sam told me about that technique. Fairbairn took him down to the range and hung a steel bullet proof shield (covered with canvas)

on his arm, gave him a .45 empty, already cocked. “Now, I’m going to shoot one round on the shield and you snap your gun as quick as you can...OK!” Blam!!!

Sam said it was literally a number of seconds before he could snap the gun, even though he was already to do it. The muzzle blast simply wipes out the ability to respond for a moment. So...get the first shot off in the enemies general direction and it will buy you time enough to correct your aim on the next shot...or if you are just pointing close, it doubles your chances of hitting the target.”

(My script ends here but I hope to write more later...Allen P.)

allenpittman.com