

Urban Samurai

Interview with Geoff Thompson

For those of you who don't know, Geoff Thompson is one of the worlds leading experts on self defense and personal protection. In the nineties he almost single handedly revolutionized the UK martial arts scene by introducing his extremely practical and realistic ideas on street self defense and how to train for it. Since then he has become recognized the world over as being an authority on the subject thanks to the many books, magazine articles, DVDs and seminars he has produced that show people the reality of real self defense and what it takes to be able to effectively defend oneself in a violent confrontation. Martial artists all over the world have now integrated his ideas into their training, including celebrity martial artists like Chuck Norris and Benny "The Jet" Urquidez.

Despite his revolutionary ideas, Geoff is still very much a traditional martial artist and indeed holds a 6th Dan in Shotokan and has trained extensively in various other arts.

He is also a recognised author with many books under his belt. His writing career began with the publication of *Watch My Back*, an autobiographical account of his time spent working the doors in his home town of Coventry and his battles to overcome his inner most fears. This lead to him writing many more books that showed people how they could deal with their own fears and achieve whatever they wanted in their life.

And as if that wasn't enough, Geoff has also written the screenplays for five successful films, the most recent of which, *Romans 1220*, has so far picked up awards at five major film festivals.

So sit back, enjoy and be inspired by the words of the man himself!

Urban Samurai



Hi Geoff and thanks for agreeing to answer my questions. First of, do you still get to train as often as you'd like given everything you have going in your life? Do you train everyday and what would be a typical training session for you?

GT: Hi, thank you for the interview and the opportunity to talk to you and your readers. It is an honour for me.

Yes I still train every day, it is who I am, I couldn't go a day without it. No matter how busy my schedule is I always train. My sessions vary according to what my body asks for, but generally I like to do bag work, running, yoga, and weights. I still do a little teaching which involves all the physical ranges, specifically scrimmage and close range power striking. I have my training down to a fine art so I don't spend any longer on any one aspect than is necessary.

Do you still practice the more traditional aspects of the martial arts such as kata, or do you concentrate solely on the self defense stuff?

GT: My training has changed a lot over the years. It started out as very traditional, Gun Fu, Karate, Judo etc. then as you said I went heavily into the reality work, looking at pre-emption and the animal day pressure training sessions. When I exhausted that (after being involved in thousands of violent affrays believe me you really do exhaust the physical game) I started to *work in* as opposed to *work out*. This is what I called the internal Jihad, or the inner scrimmage. Rather than going around and around the fish bowl of physical self defense I started to work on defeating my inner opponents, mastering my fears with desensitization work (facing down fear in order to master it) killing my addictions and searching for self sovereignty. It is very exciting and demanding work.

You are noted as being still very much a traditional martial artist with many years of traditional training behind you. Do you think the traditional arts still have something to offer people in this day and age?

Urban Samurai

GT: Yes, actually I think that the traditional grounding is what a lot of the new martial artists are lacking. I see lots of folk on the scene now who are flirting with a lot of different styles, but they lack a real core system, so they have a very big array of techniques, but not real genesis, no heritage. The traditional systems have a lot to offer. I feel blessed that I was able to learn my basics in tradition systems with leviathans like Enoida Sensei and Kowazoe, I was privileged to have been on the scene with the likes of Terry O'Neil and Bob Poynton, Andy Sherry and Frank Brennan. I spent nearly two years under Neil Adams in judo. These guys are the most amazing martial artists. I know that it is popular to trash the trads, but man if you were ever in the room with these people you would have been awed, just like I was.

Many people are saying now that traditional martial arts are all but useless for street self defense. Do you think this is true?

GT: Look at someone like Terry O'Neil and Dave Hazard, Dennis Martin, Rick Jackson and Ian McCranor, these were all very traditional players, and yet they were all devastating on the street. I do think that much of the traditional training needs to be heavily adapted if you want it to play out in the street scenario, that is for definite, because as it is taught now it does not lend itself very well to a fight outside the chippy on a Friday night. But we also have to remember that not everyone is concerned with being able to have a fight in the street. Many of the traditionalists are simply using their very hard core training in the martial arts to find *the way*. And many of them are succeeding.

How can traditional martial artists modify their training to better prepare themselves for a real self defense situation?

GT: By being more honest with themselves. Most martial artists, traditional *and* modern, are in denial. They think that what they do will automatically translate into a real situation. But realty and the dojo are as different as football and rugby. There are so many factors in a street scenario that are not accounted for in the dojo, specifically pre-fight ritual, post fight fear and pressure tested technique and character. The range that most martial artists train for is wrong, they prepare for either very long range kicking and punching, or the new breed of martial artist tends to work heavily on the ground game. Long range fighting really does not exist, you normally have eighteen inches to work with, nothing more, and the ground game in a street fight is usually suicidal. As much as I love the grappling and as much as I have invested my time in learning grappling it is a very last resort range for the street, it is an amazing support system, but never a range I would chose in a real fight.

Another big misconception is that you can wait to be attacked and then block/trap/parry and counter. But again, this strategy would not and does not work consistently in a real fight. I wish it did, I spent the first fifteen years of my training career working on block/counter. My experiences have taught me that the only consistently effective technique in street encounters is the pre-emptive strike. Musashi believed the same thing, he broke his preemption

Urban Samurai

down into three phases, depending on the level of your game; attack before the opponent could attack, attack at the very conception of his attack before he actually initiated the physical technique just as he is thinking about a strike, or attacking pre-emptively as your opponents attack is in flight. The last is the most dangerous. 95 % of my victories came when I attacked first, the rest of the time I attack at conception or – very rarely – when the opponents attack was mid flight.

Of course on top of all this there is the overwhelming amount of fear involved in real encounters, pre-fight, in-fight and post fight. Most martial artists do not prepare for this. In my classes we always practiced *simulation training*, we would simulate a real fight in every detail in the dojo, swearing, spitting, kicking, biting, it was always knock out or submission, with no holds barred. The only way to really prepare for reality is to re-create reality in the dojo, and see how you get on, see how your technique and your spirit endures under real conditions.

Some things of course you cannot prepare for unless you actually go out there and do it. No matter how prepared you think you are, you are not unless you have done it for real. I know many people who are amazing fighters and they can really do the physical bit and I admire them for that, but they do not cope well when they get into a real fight and suddenly have to deal with the come backs, and there are always come backs; maybe the police are involved, maybe there is a court case, maybe you were fighting with someone who is connected and suddenly you are getting personal threats, the 2am threatening phone call, the windows going in, confrontations when you are out with your wife and kids. The physical bit is easy; it is dealing with the emotional trauma that most people would probably struggle with.

Do you think students and instructors are now waking up to the fact that they have to change their training if they want to be effective at self defense? Have attitudes in this regard changed for the better?

GT: I think people are still in denial. I think that people say that they want to be better prepared, but mostly they don't do the work, and I am not blaming them, it is a terrific commitment to take your training into the reality realms because usually it means changing everything that you are doing. It is not for the feint of heart. For some reason when people talk about reality training they seem to completely forget about the emotional side of the equation. I speak with lots of people who are very good martial artists (some of them not so good) and they talk about dealing with a real fight as though it is a walk in the park. Most of them would not cope, they really wouldn't. And they would not do the work needed to enable them to cope either, because the preparation is (and should be) in my opinion harder than the real thing. They completely underestimate the ferocity, the emotional trauma and the vast entanglement of a real affray.

You have written many books that deal with the mental challenges that go along with dealing with violent encounters in the pavement arena. Do you

Urban Samurai

think martial artists address the psychological aspects enough in their training or is there too much emphasis put on learning physical technique?

GT: That is a great point. And as I mentioned in the previous questions, the psychological aspect in martial arts training does not exist. Fighting hard in the dojo under controlled conditions is not the same. All people need to do is place their arts and their characters under real pressure. If they do that they will see lots of the higher grades being taken out by the lower grades who have done a bit of rugby, or spent a bit of time around a boxing gym. Without the psychological aspect you are wasting your time as far as street effectiveness goes.

You are also a big believer on training the mind as well as the body. What techniques do you think work best in this respect? I know you are a big believer in abstinence. How would this benefit people?

GT: To start with I would encourage people to draw up a list of all the things that they fear. This takes a lot of honesty and a lot of self knowledge, as I said many people are in denial about their own strengths and weaknesses. Once you have the list, start working your way through it, confronting each fear until you have mastered it. This is how you develop hardiness; this is how you become a warrior. Abstinence is just another exercise in developing a very strong will, your courage muscles really get stretched here. When you are facing an assailant in the street and you are filled with terror, it is the hardiness, the strong will, the developed courage that will carry you through. Abstinence is one of the exercises to help develop this. You can practice abstaining from your addictions, or from bad habits, or from undesirable behavior. One of the things I abstained from in my practice was alcohol. I haven't drunk for eight years. My will power doubled with just this one exercise. If you want to be very powerful, or the conduit for great power you first you have to master yourself.

What kind of future do you see the martial arts having? Do you think traditional training methods will still be with us in years to come?

GT: It's quite cyclical the martial arts. We have been here before and we will be here again no doubt. People will get tired I think of working in systems that do not have a philosophy and so I think that there will be an exodus back to many of the traditional systems. Certainly if people want to improve their game they will make their way back to good karate and good Judo (the best kept secret in the martial arts) and good Thai. We should not judge any system, some great people have come from just about everywhere, I think that it is less about the system and more about how the system is practiced.

You have achieved quite a bit of success in your life in various different fields. Do you think it is possible to gain real success in life without first mastering the self?

Urban Samurai

GT: That's another quality question; I would have to say from my own experience that every part of my journey demanded that I master a different part of myself. And the more I have wanted from life, the more mastery I have had to find over my fears. That's been the most exciting part of it for me, the search for self mastery, the search for sovereignty over the self. It is very inspiring to think that now, at the age of (nearly) fifty, I can achieve in a year what once took me ten, and I can master in a month what once would have taken me twelve, and I can create in four hours, something that as a younger man might have taken me three months. And now that I am working on the metaphysical self defense, I am able to create wonder in my life instead of violence and aggression.

You seem to place a lot of emphasis on inspiration when it comes to finding success in life and indeed you have mentioned in your books that you surround yourself with inspirational materials all the time. How important is inspiration when it comes to helping one achieve in life?

GT: Massively important. It is inspiration that gets us out of bed every day, it is inspiration that fuels our evolution, the aspiration to be better and do better and achieve. That is why I invest in myself, thousands of pounds a year, in books and audios and films and quality instruction, to keep myself fueled up. Inspiration is like a bath, we should immerse ourselves in it every day.

You have found great success in your writing career and have published numerous books and articles on martial arts and self-improvement, as well as novels and screenplays. What advice would you give someone who wanted to make a career out of writing?

GT: The first lesson of writing it to write. And where possible write every day. I speak to many people that say they want to write professionally who hardly ever write. So lesson 1) learn your craft, be piss-excellent at your craft, and write. The moment you think you have something that is saleable, get a copy of *The Writers and Artists Year Book*, find an appropriate publisher for your work and send it to them for feedback. *The Writers and Artists Year Book* tells you everything you need to know about the publishing process from writing to presentation, agents, publishers, everything - it is very comprehensive. But you must write, even if you have a talent for the written word there is still a craft to observe and there is still an apprenticeship to learn. It is the same as anything else really, don't expect to write a weekend screenplay and get Hollywood calling. If you want professional results you need to invest professional time.

Urban Samurai

You have also written five screenplays that were turned into very successful films, *Bouncer*, *Brown Paper Bag*, *Clubbed* and more recently, *Romans 12;20* which has picked up awards at five major film festivals. All your films are obviously very personal to you in terms of content and subject matter. Were they difficult to write for that reason and did you find the act of giving expression to all that darkness cathartic?

GT: They were very difficult to write precisely because they all have an autobiographical content. It was a great catharsis writing the films, especially *Romans 12;20*, which is the most autobiographical film I have written so far. With a lot of my films I would actually go as far as to say that they were atonement, and after writing one or two of them I went into a sort of mini depression, as though I had excavated a buried part of me and was mourning its passing. It was very profound. I have to say though that I have loved every minute of the film writing process, I love to see how a great producer brings the world I have created on paper to life, and it is great to watch an actor take the words from the page and make them live, and when you are working with directors like the Shammaian brothers, who directed *Romans*, it is little short of miraculous what they do. They are directing my next feature, *Last Will and Testament*, which I have adapted from my novel *Red Mist*. We have already got the amazing Paddy Considine as lead, so we are all very excited about it.

Do you ever see yourself writing for Hollywood, perhaps in a more commercial vein?

GT: I would say that Hollywood is inevitable, at some point. If you want to be a great screen writer you need to be in front of the best talent in the world. So I will go where ever that is. I am currently working in England with some world class talent, in TV and film, but the US is definitely in my sights. I am not sure when but I can feel the USA calling. I'd really love to do a Batman film or something similar, where it is commercial but still deliciously dark. I also have a dream of working for HBO, who I love. *Deadwood* was my favourite, I also loved *The Wire*, which I watched quite a few years before it came on mainstream TV here. I still have some developing to do though before that becomes a reality.

So what's next for Geoff Thompson?

GT: The main intention is to continue with my regime of self development, so I am working heavily on my internal game. Work-wise I am working with the wonderful producer Ash Attala (*The Office*, *The*

Urban Samurai

ITT Crowd) on a TV series, and I have a stage play premiering on the London fringe in October (The Finborough Theatre) and we are in talks with production companies to produce my film Last Will. There are lots of other projects in early development.

Thank you very much for your time, Geoff. You have been a real inspiration to me on many levels and I know many of my readers feel the same way. Any final words?

GT: Thank you for the opportunity, it has been an honour to talk to you all. My advice to all would be straight from the mouth of St Francis of Assisi, 'Preach the gospel, and if you really have to, use words.'

