

# Totally TaekwonDo

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The Sparrer's Toolbox -  
Part 6: Safety Equipment

## 2 Great Interviews

- **Master Jadir: From Childhood Hardship to Inspiration**
- **Master Behrend: Perseverance Pays Off**

**Plus: Creating Lifelong Friendships and Destroying Prejudices Through Martial Arts *and much more inside***



# Creating Lifelong Friendships and Destroying Prejudices Through Martial Arts

**By Casey Jones, PhD**

In early December of 1972, I carefully chose which homemade outfit I was going to wear for my interview with United Airlines. I was studying at break-neck speed, hoping to graduate college in three years. In order to pay for tuition and books, I cleaned rental properties. In addition to this grueling schedule, in my "spare" time, I was working on the family ranch in Eastern New Mexico.

While driving the four hours to Albuquerque, it seemed odd to me to be interviewing for an airline that just a few days before I never knew existed. One month later I was in Chicago at United Airline's Training Center.

My mother strongly disapproved of my career choice. She was certain that I would become a "loose and wild woman", until that fateful day when she was assigned a first-



*Casey with Flight Attendants Ruben Lee, and Teresa Hendricks  
in the galley of a DC-10 in 1984*

class seat on an international flight to Japan. In the years to follow, she and my father traveled many times internationally because of my benefits as an airline employee. Her daughter becoming a "loose" woman was no longer in her vocabulary.

In the summer of 1983, I was assigned a flight from San Francisco to Denver. I had hardly slept because the paper-thin walls of my hotel room were vibrating with drunken laughter from down the hall. If that wasn't enough irritation, the ice machine outside my door clanged throughout the night, like an old streetcar needing fresh oil.

Boarding the aircraft, I pulled my suitcase down the aisle with a grimace due to a nerve-shattering headache. I noticed another flight attendant at the rear of the plane setting up the galley of a 126-passenger Boeing 737. Teresa Hendricks glanced up at me and frowned. Her impression of the approaching sour-faced, white female was initially quite negative.

Teresa was African American and had grown up in an all-black neighborhood in Pittsburgh. By our third day of flying together, we were best friends. Over the next two years, we "buddy bid" every month and called each other "Sister Dear". We often made plans on our days off, to go to lunch or attend church.

On many flights, we transformed into the Swedish sisters, Olga and Helga Swenson. I marveled at the strange and confused expressions from passengers as they were greeted during boarding by Teresa's Swedish accent. We were partners in crime with one unified desire: to spend every flight in laughter.

In 1984, we were working on the largest aircraft in United's fleet, a DC-10. The flight was booked nearly full with over 300 passengers, many headed to the ski slopes in Colorado. After finishing their

snacks, most of the passengers mellowed in anticipation of our landing. Near one of the back lavatories, Olga and Helga were frantically stuffing the sleeves of a steward's uniform jacket with feminine products stolen from the bathroom's dispenser. My Swedish sister, Helga carefully removed the white tape from the back of each sanitary pad and proceeded to stick it firmly to the inner lining of the jacket's sleeves.

"Please hurry!!" I whispered, nervous that this delicate procedure was taking too long.

"I just finished" Helga replied, handing me the jacket.

I scurried up the aisle with the "stuffed" jacket in my arms. After carefully draping it over the jump seat I made a quick dash from the crime scene. The "No Smoking" sign flashed overhead, in each cabin.

The First Flight Attendant announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, the captain has turned on the No Smoking sign, please return to your seats and buckle up. We are in our final approach into Denver. All bags must be stowed under the seat in front of you or in the overhead bins. Flight attendants will be in the aisles to pick up any trash you may have."

Lyn, a tall male attendant, began his final walkthrough, helping passengers stow their bags. He was immaculately dressed and professional to the extreme. Before sitting down, he removed his uniform jacket from the back of his assigned jump seat and shoved one arm through the left sleeve. Unbeknownst to him, several white submarines emerged from the depths, soared through the cabin air like tiny missiles, and landed on the cabin floor. One "missile" landed in the lap of an unsuspecting passenger.

Like a springboard, Lyn's other arm shot through the other sleeve, and more sanitary napkins torpedoed into the



atmosphere. Some passengers ducked their heads. Still unaware of the events surrounding him, Lyn sat down in his jump seat. Glancing at the floor, he noticed the numerous white slender objects thrown about the cabin. Several passengers were laughing, and others were waving the disposable pads in the air. Lyn's stoicism vanished, and his face turned crimson red as he noticed one "missile" stuck halfway out of his left sleeve.

At a safe distance from the launch site, Olga and Helga Swenson peeked over the backs of their jump seats, to view the spectacle. We were filled with glee and a mischievous smile came over Helga's face.

"Olga, he looks mortified, don't you think?"

Teresa and I committed numerous "crimes" over the next few years until she moved from Denver back to Pittsburgh to care for her aging parents.

I flew to Pittsburgh several times to meet my "other" parents and visit my Sister Dear. In our adventures together, we encountered racism of all kinds from both directions, against each of us. But we greeted it with humor and kindness because we knew in our hearts that as sisters the color of our skin was unimportant. We remained unscathed by our differences because we had found refuge in our common humanity. We remained great friends until she passed away in 2004. Our camaraderie was solidified by our time together, our faith in God, and our laughter.

In 2021, I began taking Taekwondo at Force of One, in Clovis, New Mexico. In the present political climate across the USA, there is a renewed focus on racism and prejudice. Yet, New Mexico is uniquely different since it is predominantly Hispanic and Latino. As a pale face, I am considered a minority and I have



*Practicing Taekgeuk Sa Jang*





*Casey with fellow students and Master Eric Suan, after belt testing*

personally experienced numerous acts of hatred against my skin color in my beloved home state. But I have marveled at the lack of any racial negativity inside the walls of my school.

Friendships across all color barriers can be seen in dojangs and at competitions around the world via the internet. These schools give a sense of belonging to everyone who attends. Students bond with each other and many of these relationships last a lifetime. Differences of any kind are left at the door and similarities are exposed. Each school appears to be a melting pot of cultures, careers, and common interests.

As my school's Master Suan stated, "anyone who gets on the mat, deserves respect!" He believes that martial arts are a combination of the beauty displayed in competition and respect for all students who are working to improve themselves at all levels in their journey.

Prejudice against other students for their race, age, sex, or income becomes nonexistent in the Dojang. Shy, disabled, or socially awkward individuals are accepted without judgment. I have watched students move up in belts and their confidence begins to soar. Their determination to keep going is both recognized and rewarded. Respect for others is learned through bowing and shaking hands with their opponents and each other. The value of following the rules and using only legally accepted strikes is emphasized and the students connect on a very personal level. Humility, honor, and conflict resolution are instilled in the training, which can carry the student through life's uncertainty and struggles.

I especially love the fact that in learning self-defense the students are being taught how to protect themselves and the confidence to step forward if another person is in a crisis situation. While still





*Young students following instruction by Master Suan.*

flying, I worked with many flight attendants that had saved someone's life on their days off due to United's Emergency and First Aid training.

Laughter and joy are two blessings that I experience in every class! I have grown to admire even the youngest students for facing each new physical and mental challenge. Personally, I would walk on water to protect each of them.

Glancing back through my own past as a flight attendant and the racism which I experienced, I would highly recommend martial arts as a reprieve from society's woes. This incredible discipline gives all students an accepting community with many of the attributes of a loving family.

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