

Walter Evans changes lives by empowering others. This Clearwater resident is an award winning Martial Arts athlete and instructor. When I interviewed Walter, we couldn't remember exactly where or when we met. We've seen each other at a number of community activities from the Juneteenth Celebration, to North Greenwood Community CRA meetings. He is a supporter of the North Greenwood CRA and the Clearwater Urban Leadership Coalition and its goals to reduce poverty. He is particularly interested in teaching and empowering young people in our community.

Walter, thank you for taking the time to talk with me and answer a few questions. You've got quite a life story, and I admire your passion and determination to empower others through martial arts.

Tell me a little about yourself –

Well, I was born in the Bronx, NY. I used to run wild when I was a kid. I can remember being 5-years-old and playing with cap guns in New York. You know, I had a tough childhood and spent some time in Foster Care. My family traveled a lot, and I attended a lot of different schools. I wasn't really interested in sports, I guess because I never seemed to be in one place long enough to really get involved in organized sports. Once I discovered martial arts, though, I really connected with that and it's been a part of my life ever since. And here's a fun fact: I love thrift shopping! I love shopping for all sorts of things, power tools, clothing, nicknacks – you name it. I know all the best spots.

Oh my gosh, Walter, me too! I'm a life long thrift-shopper! I've got a home full of thrift store treasures. I especially like half-price days at thrift stores. We'll have to share our best spots; Clearwater's got some great ones.

What brought you here to Florida?

When I was younger I worked as a technical engineer for an audio visual company. I did a lot of work in New York, but I got to travel a lot for work. I did work at a lot of major hotels: Helmsley, Waldorf, Park Plaza. They were beautiful. I loved traveling. My brother lived in Bradenton, and my foster father had moved to Florida. When I was in my early 20's I traveled to see them and discovered the beauty of Florida. I loved being outside. I loved the beach; I loved the nature here. That's when I decided I wanted to live here and for sure, retire here. I finally moved here in 2000.

To be honest, I thought I was going to die. I was waiting for a kidney transplant after being on dialysis for over 9 years, and I was pretty depressed. I was ready to give up. I thought I'd just spend my last days in beautiful, warm, Florida. But things changed for the better. I met a woman, a dialysis technician, who taught me all about nutrition and health specific to a patient on dialysis. She ensured that I stuck to the diet plan that was best for me. After she got me on the best plan, I got stronger and started training again in martial arts. In 2009 I was ecstatic to receive a double kidney transplant! This was just a week after I had won a karate championship in Chicago. I was 52 years old. I've been a healthy Floridian ever since.

The *Tampa Bay Times* did a story on you this summer and highlighted your challenging childhood and the important work you do in our community. You can read the article [here](#):

<https://www.tampabay.com/life-culture/2022/06/15/clearwater-karate-teacher-acts-as-father-figure-to-students-like-his-mentors-once-did/>

In looking back, Walter, what were the most important lessons you learned as a kid, when you were pretty much on your own?

I really admired my Uncle Jessie. I wanted to be like him. He had an interest in Karate and that was my introduction into martial arts. I watched martial arts movies and would buy martial arts magazines from the newsstands. In learning about and studying martial arts, I learned to be respectful. I learned discipline and self control. I really latched on to that and felt like I had special powers. This was the early 60's and martial arts was pretty mystical then. But it was the best thing that ever happened to me. I wanted to make class and be a champion. I can trace all my drive and discipline to martial arts.

Are those some of the lessons you try to teach kids today?

Absolutely, to be respectful. To have self-respect. I stress always doing the best you can. Watch your attitude; maintain self control. Things are always better if you're honest and talk to others. Yes Sir, no Sir. I want kids to feel good about themselves, to feel strong and empowered. I don't let them slide. I really stress respect and doing the best you can; it's all about attitude.

What do you see are the biggest challenges facing kids today?

One of the biggest challenges for kids today is navigating the impact of social media because of the wide range of things they can access and be influenced by. But once my students learn how to flow with martial arts, and to focus, they have a chance to shine. I've seen how they begin to follow the more positive influences of martial arts on social media. Some of my students follow actor and martial arts champion, Michael Jai White, or Bailey Murphy, another martial arts champion who has a lot of positivity on social media. They also follow Beatrice Garcia, she's a great influence. Beatrice actually won my karate championship here in Clearwater.

What are you involved with right now?

I'm teaching at the Graydi Center in Largo, and I'm looking to grow my program here in Clearwater. I teach at the MLK Center, and I'd like to partner with Clearwater Parks and Recreation to increase my students and grow my program. My dream, actually, is to own a building where I can establish my own Dojo. Dojo simply means a place where people do martial arts. I'd love to be the owner/instructor of the *first* African American martial arts school in Pinellas county. I can see my students coming in, taking off their shoes, spending some time on homework, maybe get a snack and then get to work on practice or their class. I want to build champions, go to competitions, and really give kids many opportunities to display their skills. You know, martial arts is an Olympic sport. A young woman from Largo actually won a gold medal in the last Olympics.

Is martial arts good for older folks like me? Do you have to be super flexible?

Martial Arts is great for anyone! You can do martial arts at any age. You can adapt at any age, and you don't have to be flexible. Martial arts enhances your cognitive abilities. It strengthens balance and coordination, working both sides of the brain. Martial arts helps with breathing and focus, too. You just need a good instructor – like me.

If people like what you're doing – how can they best support you? Donations are appreciated and simply recommending people to my classes is a big help.

How do you keep in such great shape? I enjoy swimming in the ocean on Clearwater Beach. I swim about three times a week as long as the water temperature is over 70 degrees. I also do the entire workout, along with my students, when I teach a class. I watch my diet, especially to take care of my kidneys.

What do you like most about Clearwater?

I love that Clearwater is a thriving city. We also have a lot of potential for growth which seems to be happening now with what's going on at our waterfront. The beach and the proximity to water makes Clearwater such an appealing place to be. It makes me proud to live here. We have so many amazing parks. I think about instructing martial arts in those parks. Wouldn't that be great? I'd love to reduce my travel and make Clearwater my hub for martial arts instruction.

Favorite restaurant? Crabby's at the Marina. I also like going to Opal Sands and enjoying that gorgeous view as well as their amazing food.

Favorite sports team? I like the Bucs. And wherever LeBron James is, I'm a fan.

Are you ever going to retire? I hope not. I will go under if I ever do! I consider myself retired now; I'm just giving back to my community.

Three words that best describe you? Humble, respectful, generous.

It's been an absolute pleasure learning more about you, Walter. You've lived a rich life, and I'm so happy you're sharing your love of martial arts and your wisdom and enthusiasm for life and self improvement with so many people here in Clearwater and throughout our county. Thank you.

If you'd like to reach out to learn more about Walter's School of Survival, scheduled a workshop or contact Walter directly, here is the information:

Walter Evans – 727-641-0127

Email: shihanwalter@yahoo.com

www.shihansos.com

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Take your shoes off – sit down – get tutored – by interns from college – do your homework – then your time 0 you take the class -get your snack - Wants to build champions – compete in tournaments – visit schools – go to different events – display skills –

It is an Olympic sport –

Judo and Karate too

Male and Female –

Female who took the gold in the last Olympics was from Largo – Karate School – by Largo Park –

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Academy Prep then approached him – doing both at same time – until

He's had classes going on at MLK center – 5 years – from 4:30 – 5:30 .

Taught for Jai when he first started –

Campbell

Sanderlin Center and Jai Hinson – sponsored by JWB – main funder for Sanderlin Center – they restructured – and when he was 18 – crime in his past – Tallahassee wanted him to turn in -

Now you're here in Clearwater and looking to grow your program.

Looking to partner with Clearwater Parks and Recreation – and bring his program
Teaching in Largo at Gradi neighborhood Center – been there three years –
They contacted him –
Year round – they learn fast – equipment money – t-shirts –

The bully –
The quiet and withdrawn child –
The overly aggressive
Hyper kids –
Do really good with those types of kids – hyper – boys in his class – they were on medication and had trouble in school – and one was super hyper – and Walter
One stopped getting into trouble – police officer's kid – her child was in his class for four years – some of his top students –
He takes them to tournaments – and they would win trophies – he could call on to do an exhibition somewhere – Feel good about themselves -=

Became so disciplined – line up like
Martial arts is very helpful It all depends on the martial arts instructor and his or her style, experience – skills – their experience and skill working with children
Faster the kid learns – the more it feeds their interest -and successful
He expects results within 6-8 weeks – within any child –

5 years old is the typical starting age – but he's taken them in as young as 4 -

Foster father really encouraged him. He was a son he never had. He taught me about the auto mechanic as, how to use tools – go carts and skate boards – had a machine shop downstairs – he was mechanically inclined – he really enhanced it with the tools in the house.
Learned how to turn the phone back on.

One of the things I learned was to be respectful. I learned that from my travels, foster home, I was respectful
My martial arts training started when I was younger – Uncle Jessie – wanted to be like him. Early interest in Judo – had an interest for that- movie – James Coburn movie – magazine from the newsstand. Able to read. Save money up to buy.

Challenges with reading – and math – moving around.
7 different schools. Challenges with reading – trouble spelling – what helped me with my reading – was the interest with martial arts – read about his favorite martial arts guys.

As a pre-teen you learned that self respect – and self control – and discipline with martial arts. Really latched on to that. Felt like he had special powers. Early 60's – Martial Arts was pretty mystical then. Bruce Lee – Best thing that could have ever happened to me. Wanted to make class and be a champion.

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What brought me here to Fl – I'm a martial artist and I never really traveled a lot out of NYC until I got a job with an audio visual company. I started to make some good money and was able to travel a little. So I set my sights on Florida where my older brother had moved., to Bradenton. He married a Florida girl and moved to Florida. And a couple of years went by – and as I was working as a tech for the audio visual company – at that time I was able to go to all of the major hotels – Helmsley – Waldorf – Park Plaza – starting to understand what “a good life” was really about. So I called my brother and told him I was coming down – came to visit – really liked the area. Being a martial artist -I loved that “you can be outside all year round” weather. I loved the beautiful beaches – nature – and the weather really made me want to come live here -and retire one day. Not leave NY just yet.

To be totally honest – but about the same time I had a foster father -I was in a foster home for two years. I shared time here with my foster father and my brother.
Only one foster father – was a police officer -four daughters. Two years – 7-9 years old. Entered him into turkey shoots –
He had remarried –

He was in his mid twenties –

Moved here in 2000 – visiting back and forth – foster father passed – brother was here –
What made you move here – left NY
When he got his kidney transplant –
Typically it comes back later in life if you survive
He was acting at that time –
Worked on some locations –
When your health challenges popped up –
Moved to top of the list – healthy
9 years on dialysis
Moved here because he thought he was going to die – pretty and warm – ready to give up –
But after being here for about a year – and meeting a partner -she was a dialysis technician – she taught him what to eat – what not to eat – he had a better quality of life –
Owe a lot to her – together three years –

Started training again – for martial arts instructor –
Black guy – jujitsu with little John –
Still in Bradenton – training with him again – approximately a year –
Then moved to St. Pete – with a friend – separated – then he put an application in Clearwater –
Needed his own place to stay –
Application here in Clearwater –

47 when he came

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Are those some of the lessons you try to teach kids today? Absolutely, to be self respectful. Yes sir, no sir, etc... never let them slide. Make sure they answer. Be respectful and do the best you can. Watch your attitude. Things can be better if you're honest – and talk to others, trying and doing the best you can.

The bully –

The quiet and withdrawn child –

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Hyper kids –

Do really good with those types of kids – hyper – boys in his class – they were on medication and had trouble in school – and one was super hyper – and Walter

One stopped getting into trouble – police officer's kid – her child was in his class for four years – some of his top students –

He takes them to tournaments – and they would win trophies – he could call on to do an exhibition somewhere – Feel good about themselves -=

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What do you see are the biggest challenges facing kids today?

One of biggest challenges is social media – because of the wide range of things they could access – and be influenced by –

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What are you involved with right now?

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Looking to partner with Clearwater Parks and Recreation – and bring his program

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They contacted him –

Year round – they learn fast – equipment money – t-shirts –

What would you like people to know about you and your program?

Is martial arts good for older folks? Like me? Do you have to be super flexible?

Yes – you can do martial arts at any age. You can adapt at any age. You don't have to be flexible. It enhances your cognitive abilities. Strengthening the balance and coordination. Working both sides of the brain. You don't have to kick at all, either. He's taught Tai Chi – in nursing homes – similar, just slower. Wheelchair Tai Chi – name the movements -and breathing exercises, too. Helps make you strong. Focus – you need a good instructor.

Also taught in NJ

He encourages it too -

If people like what you're doing – how can they best support you? Donation or recommending people to his classes. Donations keep him going. He has to carry insurance – communications – websites – computer -

How do you keep in such great shape? Swim in the ocean on Clearwater Beach. Three times a week. When the water gets to about 70 degrees. Stays in shape by doing the class with his kids. Great diet – takes care of his kidneys. Both kidneys from the baby. Three year old boy. Tissue type is so close.

What do you see as Clearwater's greatest strengths and

greatest challenges? Community of Scientology – not much to say about that –

North greenwood area – been teaching there – think the challenge is having a place for youth to go – and be themselves – be safe – recreation center – have programs that you age out of –

Interest in martial arts – (Teen Center) – CETA – Teach them trades –

Talking points from the CRA –

Returning Citizens a Change

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Female who took the gold in the last Olympics was from Largo – Karate School – by Largo Park –

Favorite restaurant? Crabby's at the Marina – also likes going to Opal Sands -

Favorite sports team? Bucs – for football – wherever Lebron James -

Are you ever going to retire? I hope not. I will go under if I ever do. I consider my retired now -

Three words that best describe you? Humble, respectful, generous

OR

Favorite quote you live by? Not really – You get out of it what you put into it –

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