

THE MARTIALIST VOL. TWO NO. SEVEN

My Father, the Martialist

By Phil Elmore

We all get started on the path of preparedness, of survivalism, of martialism, for different reasons. Some of the less flattering theories about why the martialists among us think and act as they do involve traumatic childhoods, personal insecurities, or other emotional difficulties. Martialists tend to take a hard line on the topic, sneering at the unrealistic fantasy worlds in which their critics live.

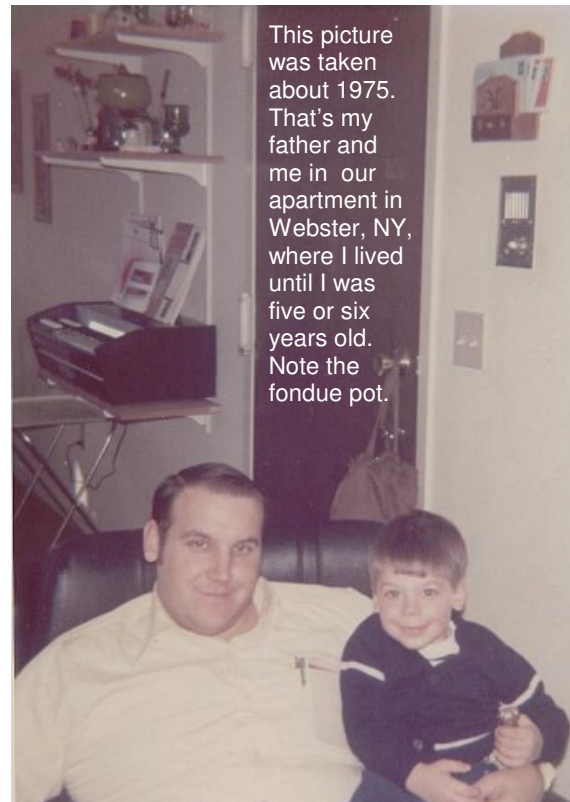
The truth, however, is that the martialist mindset is *taught* as much as it is acquired through experience. It would be long after my own formative years that I realized this. There came a day, however, when I opened the blade of my Swiss Army Knife to remove a splinter from my hand, that I realized to whom I owe – most fundamentally – the creation of this publication and the philosophy on which it is built.

That person is my father.

My father taught me many lessons about survival and preparedness. Most of these he did not teach me deliberately. Rather, I absorbed the majority of these lessons by example – by watching him as he went about his daily life. I don't think even he knew he was imparting such information to me, most of the time. He reads *The Martialist* and I sometimes wonder if he sees shadows of his own life in what we attempt to teach and to share now.

I have known of the Swiss Army Knife since my earliest childhood. My father always carried the largest version available – what Victorinox does or did call the SwissChamp, complete with

pliers and magnifying glass. Every Christmas, when I needed the tape on a package opened, my father and his knife were there. Whenever I got a splinter, Dad and his knife were on the case – first with the tweezers, and then with the smallest blade if the splinter was too deep. Dad was never without his knife and the tools it incorporated. Years later, when I discovered the Leatherman tool, I would remember the concept my father first imparted to me without trying: A pocket-sized implement that bears multiple tools is useful in countless situations you cannot predict.



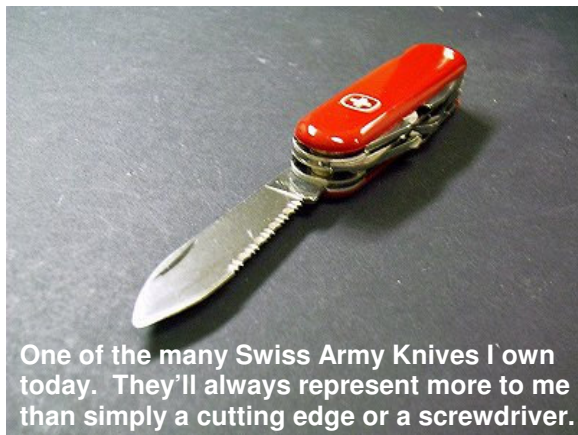
This picture was taken about 1975. That's my father and me in our apartment in Webster, NY, where I lived until I was five or six years old. Note the fondue pot.

Photo by Sally Briggs

Long before the movie *Revenge of the Nerds* made the Pocket Protector a universally ridiculed concept, my father carried one. He never wore a shirt that did not have a breast pocket into which he could place his Pocket Protector. In

THE MARTIALIST VOL. TWO NO. SEVEN

it he carried pens, a penlight (which will always be to me the first “tactical light,” because he always had it when he needed it), and a small organized notebook in which he kept what you’d keep in a PDA today – phone numbers, “to do” lists, working notes, etc. From my father I learned the basics of carrying personal accessories you’ll need on a regular basis to stay organized, informed, and ready for whatever task is at hand.



One of the many Swiss Army Knives I own today. They’ll always represent more to me than simply a cutting edge or a screwdriver.

Photo by Phil Elmore

My father carried the contents of what was probably an entire machine shop in the back of his vehicles. He owned a series of full-sized Chevy Blazers in which he installed a homemade false-bottom cargo floor in the rear compartment. When he opened the tailgate he could pull out sliding drawers containing all manner of tools, from screwdrivers to hammers to power drills. These days, he drives a Suburban and the slide-out drawers are part of a commercially manufactured truckbed toolbox, but the concept remains the same.

Those of you old enough to remember televisions with dials on them also remember the Citizen’s Band Radio craze of the 1970s. My father installed

CB radios in all his vehicles and was as connected as it was possible to be three decades ago. Just before car phones became common he did go without the CBs for a little while. “I just got tired of listening to truckers swear at each other,” he told me once.

I learned the basics of car repair from my dad. I have never been terribly handy when it comes to automobiles, but Dad taught me that I didn’t have to collapse in abject horror when something went wrong with the car. Some things were easy to fix; everything else could be handled by a mechanic. Nothing was worth getting upset about.

When I came home from college one day and realized, to my horror, that my Chevrolet Caprice was spewing steam, I started to freak out over it. Dad calmly told me it was no big deal, popped the hood, and showed me the hose that had developed a hole. He drove me to the auto parts store and I watched as he purchased a replacement hose. Then we went back home and he clamped the new hose in place. “This is the tricky part,” he said, holding up a bottle of antifreeze. “It’s a very precise mixture.” Chuckling, he poured into the radiator a healthy dose of antifreeze and chased it with tap water from a glass he’d brought from the kitchen, eyeballing the mixture at roughly 50:50. “See?” he asked, smiling.

It was also my father who taught me what a Torx driver was – and how to use it to replace a burned out headlight on that same old Chevy. I learned most of what I know today about tools and home repair and improvement from my father, who was always engaged in some

THE MARTIALIST VOL. TWO NO. SEVEN

project or another. Over the years I helped him do everything from refinish, drywall, and wire the attic of our house to building furniture, gardening with a rototiller, installing insulation, and rehabilitating metal patio furniture and fencing. These are chores at the time – tasks few kids would enjoy – and I did not like doing them. It is only years later that I realized just how much I learned because of them. When a faucet leaks or a breaker trips or the car turns over but won't start, I'm not left feeling helpless or upset; I know what I must do to solve the problem and I know when to call in outside help after I exhaust my personal options. Without my father I am not sure how I would have learned any of these lessons.

My father, never really one for fistfights, nonetheless taught me some valuable lessons about fighting. "When you have to hit someone," he told me, "Hit them right in the face. The other boy's not going to expect that." More importantly, though, Dad taught me that if I had to defend myself, it was okay to do so. He wasn't going to punish me for fighting if I had to hit someone in self-defense. That was the end of the issue as far as he was concerned – and the beginning of a lifelong interest in self-defense for me.

It was my father who gave me my first knife – an inexpensive shell-bolster jackknife. I have no idea whatever became of that knife, but it chopped up many a small stick and bar of soap in its day. Dad gave me the knife after years of begging for one. He handed it to me with a book on whittling and the instructions, "Cut away from yourself."

It was Dad who taught me to shoot, too.

The first pistol I ever fired was his Colt Mustang in .380 ACP. I don't think I managed to put any of the shots into the target that first day. I learned a valuable lesson about the difference between action movies and real life. Dad taught me the basics of firearms safety, the importance of secure storage, and the basics of breaking down and cleaning handguns and rifles. He also taught me how to be aware of your fellow shooters at the range – when I bounced a half dozen hot shells off his head while standing to his left and firing my semiautomatic pistol.

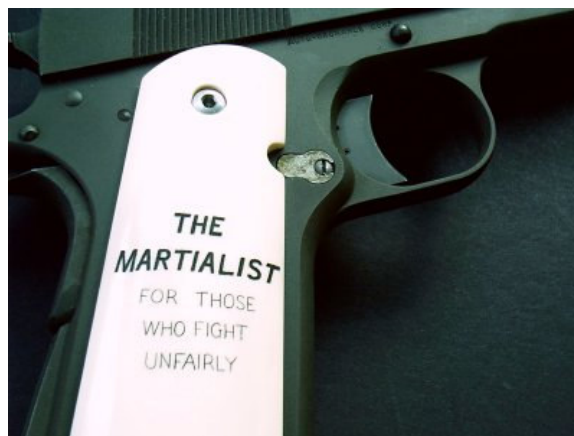


Photo by Phil Elmore

I don't know if any parent ever stops to think, "I'm doing a good job," or, "I'm teaching my children things they'll need to know for the rest of their lives." Whether he knew it or not, though, my father instilled in me the mindset that lies behind *The Martialist* and helps me to be a capable, competent, assertive person in life. He taught me to be prepared, to carry the tools of preparedness, to stand up for myself, and to stay calm in a crisis in order to efficiently solve the problems it presented.

That's my father, the martialist. ♠