



The Massage from Hell

John Gill never thought he'd be held hostage at a Chinese medicine clinic in Shanghai. The 6th Dan hapkido and taekwondo Black-belt and current 12-time world self-defence champion was attacked following a massage and held by a group of Chinese thugs — but with 35 years of martial arts experience, Gill turned to what he knew best. In this new segment on real self-defence scenarios, Gill tells *Blitz* how he handled it.

INTERVIEW BY STEVEN TALEVSKI

Last October, I was in Shanghai, China, for a work conference. One Sunday I was walking down the street near my hotel when I was stopped by a man who asked if I wanted a foot massage. I thought it was a good idea, as my feet were sore from walking around a lot. It looked professional as we walked into the clinic; I would've had second thoughts if she'd taken me down a back alley.

I went in and they took me upstairs where there was a seat. He brought in all the stuff for the massage as I took my thongs off. I also decided to have a back massage and after it had finished, he walked out, and I started putting my shirt back on. I thought I was safe until I heard a whack on the door.

Seconds later I got a whack on my neck and this guy got me in a choke hold. I automatically reacted to that because of my hapkido training: I elbowed him and threw him off me, but as I turned, the other four guys just absolutely clamped me. With no space to move around and evade them, I had no chance. All five men were on me, one grabbing me around my neck and the others around my arms. Every time I tried to move forward, one guy would punch me in the ribs and another in the back of the biceps, so I had bruises all over.

I needed to get up and get loose. I thought I was in trouble because nobody knew I was there — my daughter is my travel agent, so she knew



Gill demonstrating hapkido self-defence concepts at the International Martial Arts Council USA World Championships

where the hotel was, but that was it.

They kept saying things like, "This is China, not Australia," and that they were bigger than the Triads. Initially I was quite panicked, thinking they could just kill me and dump my body. I knew it was a robbery and when I was being choked I pointed my hand towards my wallet in my pants. I kept saying, "You can have my money!"

As they continued to threaten me, they got all my money out of my wallet and dumped it on the table. They saw my cards and I had mixed up the pin number I gave them because I had more than one bank card. They said, "You better

say the right one or we will kill you." I then said, "You can have whatever is on there, but I don't think there is anything on that card and I have about 2000 Yuan (\$447) in cash." He went to their ATM at a restaurant and came back, saying I was telling the truth and that he couldn't get any money. They told me I was lucky.

Then they saw one of my martial art business cards, which had 'instructor' marked on it. He goes, "You're a master..." and I replied, "It isn't doing me any good now!" I started laughing and smiling a lot, as I thought I would change it around and try talking to befriend them.

Suddenly the conversation started to change; it was like they started respecting me a little bit more, like I was a kung fu master. They started letting go of me — the guy who had me in a choke hold loosened up and the other guy took his arms off mine, and suddenly I was loose.

The conversation turned to Jackie Chan, and they reacted in appraisal — so Jackie Chan's got to find out because he actually helped me! I said I was John and shook all their hands, smiling at them. I was thinking, this is ridiculous — they could have done this in three minutes! The longer they hold you, I thought, they are

REALITY CHECK WITH JOHN GILL

scaring you so you won't go to the police — but that actually made me angrier.

I faked that I needed to go to the toilet and they laughed, saying, "Don't do it here." One guy opened the door and the other guy nudged me up the stairs. I was smiling and saying thanks. The next thing you know, I smashed this guy with a left backfist and side-kicked another guy on the right. Then I moved into a front kick back to the other guy as he moved in. As the others started coming in, I started to throw what felt like a million punches and ran at the same time. I ran out screaming and punching guys. I was so angry, there could've been 30 of them and I feel like I would've got through. As I got out, I ran down the street yelling "Police!" This lady came up and said she was the police. I looked at her and thought, you're not dressed as one. So I kept going until I saw a police van. About five minutes later, the lady came

running towards me with my wallet in her hand and cash and other things in her other hand. I couldn't believe it! She told me I must go now.

I rang my driver, Lee, to get here and passed the phone to a Chinese guy to explain exactly where I was. Lee rolled up and I asked him to call the police, and they came. We met with more police at the front of the massage parlour. A man ran out claiming to be the manager and apologising. He pulled out the 2000 yuan (\$447), which had been missing and gave it to me.

I got to my conference later on and I told people what had happened. I met up with a couple from the Gold Coast with a guy who had 20 years of martial arts training. They went for a massage next to their hotel and they were just bailed up for extra money as they left, so they managed just to escape with a bit of push-and-shove. I found out another guy from Melbourne

"As the others started coming in, I started to throw what felt like a million punches and ran at the same time..."



Gill with his 2015 world self-defence trophies

got held up by three guys, but they didn't hold him down. He got nailed for about 12 990 Yuan (\$2905). I went to the embassy with Cameron. We saw the consulate, they wrote all the reports and they were happy with me getting the money. Fifteen minutes later, a guy turns up — probably the manager — with the money and asks him how much money he wants. He says, "All of it, 12 990 Yuan," so the guy puts the money on the table and the police put it through a counter. We asked if they were going to charge him and they said no, "because you got your money back". In Australia they would've been locked up — but apparently they said



The massage clinic at 510 Nanjing Rd East where Gill's ordeal took place

Anthony Mitchell's Story

Anthony Mitchell was in Shanghai with his wife at the same conference as John Gill. A Black-belt in taekwondo, Green-belt in jujitsu and trainer at Rings MMA Club in Toowoomba, Queensland, Mitchell was a victim of a similar scam on the same trip.

Having arrived in Shanghai a few days before the conference, Mitchell and his wife decided to go get a massage at a 'fancy' parlour across the road from their hotel. The couple were well aware of scams after reading one of the Lonely Planet's books on China.

After agreeing to a price for the massage with a worker, Mitchell and his wife crossed the road to their room for a shower before they returned for their massage. On return they were met by the lady

with a calculator, explaining that the price had risen. After a back-and-forth conversation, the couple finally got their massage.

Once they went downstairs in the parlour, the massage ladies demanded more money. With unknown men sitting in the lounge, Mitchell began to worry. As it got heated, with Mitchell's partner involved, the two men got up and began an aggressive exchange with them. Mitchell knew they were in a dangerous situation, so after more commotion, he put his palms up in a forward defence and threw the original amount of money at the others. With his back to the exit, Mitchell stepped in front of his wife and gradually moved to the door, then they got out as quickly as they could.

to Cameron, "We own the police." It was ridiculous, the whole thing was like a movie.

Basically, my emotions went from shock to anger, and I'm still angry. But martial arts helped me in two ways: firstly, they found out I was a master and they showed me more respect; secondly, they loosened me up and I used my hapkido techniques to fight my way out.

The lesson is that we can't really trust anybody, especially when travelling. You should always contact *smartraveller.gov.au* before you go overseas.

You can find out more information about Chinese scams on John Gill's new website www.scamsafe.com.au and also at the government travel site smartraveller.gov.au ■



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Master John Gill is an 12 times world Self Defence champion, a 6th Dan Blackbelt and a Master instructor in Taekwondo and Hapkido. Master Gill offers regular classes, workshops, weekend Motivational and Empowerment retreats and an online learning system in Self Defence, Taekwondo and Hapkido.



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