

**STORIES FROM CAMP**



# The Body Remembers

Carlos Guzman, Orlando, Florida

My Systema camp experience was phenomenal; beyond anything I had expected. With the participation of up to 150 practitioners from 46 countries, all sharing the same passion for this wonderful art, it was without any doubt a full immersion into Systema training under different environment and circumstances.

Averaging 9 hours per day, starting with the early morning breathing and warm up drills, my body was recording every move between every breath taken. They kept us going with a variety of breathing, stretching and warm up exercises. It was never repetitive nor was it dull. Always exciting, leaving you wanting more and more. A quick jump in the lake right after the morning drills, for those brave enough to face the cold waters, was even more exhilarating. The jolt of diving into cold water was rejuvenating and surely wakes you up. You are ready to take on the new day.

Training in different scenarios and under weather circumstances as it was in this case with the cold and the rain, enhanced the Systema experience. No one seemed to care. In fact, it made it all more interesting. At full range!

Knife training, stick training, multiple attackers, fight in the water, training in the woods, training at night and much more, it all made the theme of the camp alive... FULL IMMERSION into Systema.

I took a lot of notes and pictures that will reinforce what was taught but it was the hands on experience what sealed the essence of the drills and training. The lessons have been locked into my body.

My Systema was enhanced not only physically, but mentally and spiritually as well.



I enjoyed my conversation with Father Vladimir from the Russian Orthodox Church of Toronto. I came to him without any idea of what to talk about. It didn't matter, for he knew what to say. I just wanted to listen to him. What I received was much more. I remember everything we talked about.

I enjoyed sharing experiences with other practitioners. Everyone has a distinctive way of absorbing what was learned and each of us helped each other out. No egos were ever involved. There was an air of a big brotherhood with a special art in common. The camaraderie was evident, the laughter and enthusiasm even more so. The camp was alive and the vodka was good too.

I thank Vladimir for a great experience. Also thanks to the twins Adam and Brandon for their input and energy. Big thanks to Valerie, Melissa, Julia, Robert and the entire staff for putting everything together and running a smooth camp. This will be one to remember for years. My body still remembers. Until the next one...



# Systema as Indivisible Whole

Thomas Ridolfo, Essonne, France

After a few days off, I take a look back to this unique experience that was Systema Camp 2014.

It was a heavy week with nearly 9 hours of training per day. Even though I used to put on paper the exercises and learning situations, it is mostly the internal sensations developed throughout the Camp that represents for me the true interest.

Upon waking, breathing exercises and « pushing » exercises have made me re-discover the huge task of self-knowledge through the feeling of my tensions, my strength, my pride, my desire to do well, my fear to fail, my judgments... all these obstacles that prevent us from exploiting our true natural potential by locking us into an artificial framework of techniques and demonstrations.

The simplest situations sometimes hide the depth of Systema.

The second important point during the Camp was the work in awareness. Through situations more “complex” and stressful (night work, multiple opponents, shaky ground, work in the water), we understand the importance of the psyche, and its impact on our ability to perceive our environment and act simply.

This is by slowing down the work to study our state in the present moment (perception, immobilization, impaired vision) that you realize how important it is to seek calmness and work consciously, without judgment, in order to not try to fill our helplessness by automated actions like a robot. This becomes even more understandable facing a knife in the night.

This seminar was a great opportunity to understand the Systema as an indivisible whole, and as Sergey Makarenko said: “Systema is like a good meal that we share; you cannot just grab a piece, you should to sit and eat at the table with those who prepared it.”

I want to thank all my training partners, all with whom I shared the path of Systema; it was a very rich human experience. I also thank Sergey for his generosity, Adam and Brendon for their advice and of course Vladimir for his instruction of highest quality and his humility.



## Learn and Make Friends

Dan Furlong, Dubai, UAE

I am safely back in the Desert and missing the greenery already.

After Camp, I had a couple of days in Toronto where I put my Systema breathing and fear control to the test at the top of the CN Tower (piece of cake after the week of training).

Aside from my company, I also run events and I know how much hard work you all put in to make camp the success it was.

I would like to thank you all for the truly amazing experience and pray to God that you do another one soon.

Not only did I learn so much from the camp but I gained many friends from all over the globe.

I also feel in love with Toronto and hope to visit again and train at HQ. God bless you all!



## Fear and Faith

John DeArmond, Oregon, USA

The greatest lesson that I learned at camp came from an unexpected source. In the last days of the camp, Valerie Vasiliev gave a brief lesson to all of the new instructors on the various aspects of handling the business side of teaching. Many great topics were covered such as class costs, advertising options, and insurance. During her talk, the subject of authenticity and instructors who claim to be certified, but are not, came up in conversation. Without missing a beat, Valerie shared a quote from Mikhail Ryabko, “do not worry about Systema, it will take care of itself”. She said that we should simply focus on making ourselves and our work better. At first, I took this too simply as a classy way of handling an unfortunate but inevitable issue, but now I think that the combination of Mikhail’s and Valerie’s words hold a much deeper truth for everyone who practices Systema.

Towards the end of camp, all of the instructors and instructors-in-training were brought together for the unique training-testing session. The exercise was simple yet challenging. This made me concerned that my poor representations could turn future students away from Systema, or hinder them from seeing its true and beautiful nature.

It was while I sat in my bunk, pondering these thoughts that Valerie’s words came back to me, and I realized that not only were these thoughts were founded in self-pity, but also that they were feeding the ego. After all, what could any of us possibly do to harm Systema? After 10 centuries, Systema surely can “take care of itself”. The admonition to focus instead on ourselves and our own work became even more poignant, as a reminder that the purpose of Systema is not to spread far and wide, though I think this has been happening and we all wish for that, but rather to be a method through which its practitioners may attain freedom from fear and the ego. It also serves to remind us all that Systema is a practice that is founded in faith. So whether you are an instructor or a student, remember to not lose heart when you have trouble with your work; simply have faith and keep working at it honestly, and **Systema will take care of itself.**



# Illuminating

Matt Hill, England

Just a short note to say thank you so much for a week that was beneficial in so many unexpected ways.

Not only was I treated to mastery (and I don't use that word lightly) of combat skill and more importantly, mastery of self, but I was also treated to other wholly unexpected benefits.

I don't think that I have ever attended another martial arts seminar where the level of the participants was so high in terms of all round combat and physical capability and openness to help others develop. The result was a **very powerful learning environment without the distraction of competition.**

Observing how the Vasiliev family worked together alongside Konstantin, Valentin and the Headquarters students was a master-class in how to run a seminar in a way that engenders, fun, loyalty, productive self-development and self awareness.

I was also amazed at the insights, openness and generosity that Valerie shared with regard to how to develop our own clubs.

On the last day I have to confess to a greater feeling of physical well being than I can ever remember. Morning warm ups and regular cold water immersion coupled with the whole concept of noticing and releasing tension and relaxing being reinforced throughout the day left me feeling more relaxed and at ease than ever.

The whole course made for a very comprehensive 'gap analysis' of where your levels of competency are across the broadest range of physical, mental and character realms. This was then supported by very logical steps and exercises to improve.



The explanation and understanding of the psyche by all three instructors and especially Konstantin was illuminating. It reminded me of Muhammad Ali's comment when he said that, 'you gotta have the skill and you gotta have the will, but the most important is the will'.

Finally, the camaraderie. I have not felt camaraderie amongst a group of people like this since my time in 2PARA. A group of likeminded people sharing a common goal in **great humor and honest endeavor.** It was **nourishment for the soul** and from the bottom of my heart I would like to thank Vladimir, Valerie, and the Systema HQ team and all of the participants.

So much has been left unsaid here, and so many treasures to work on, but I will end with a simple thank you to you all.

## I Can Tick One Off the Bucket List

Steven Nguyen, Australia

I just wanted to express my gratitude and how much of an honor it was to train with such great people.

I would like to again thank Vladimir and all his instructors for their knowledge and patience in their classes as well as at Systema camp. Thank you to all partners I have trained with and learnt from both in class and at the camp.

There is so much to say that I end up without much, except thank you. I have learnt so much through which I have found more direction in my life.

It was **a dream to come here and train with the best** and I can honestly say **I can tick one off the bucket list**.

## The Honesty in Training

Daniel Case, Kentucky, USA

I wanted to express again my gratitude at being blessed to train at Camp 2012 and Headquarters. The level of training was incredible and the experience was one I will never forget. I came away with many bruises and a better understanding of Systema principles, but mostly **I have a better understanding of myself**.

I look forward to sharing the principles with my training partners here in Kentucky and continuing the discovery of my own abilities. I especially appreciate **the honesty in the training that the masters demonstrated**. Thanks again for the great experience and I am looking forward to my next opportunity to visit Toronto.





## A “User Guide” for the Body

Martin Jay Knott, Virginia, USA

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the absolutely amazing experience at the Systema at Full Range Camp this year. **It was the first that I have attended, and it blew me away.** I have been studying Systema since 1999 through Vladimir’s tapes and DVD’s. I have studied and competed in several different styles of martial arts for 20 years prior to Systema, but the quality and clarity of Vladimir’s instruction on the tapes and DVD’s allowed me to surpass 20 years of previous experience in just a few years. I currently study only Systema. This camp was the first real hands on instruction that I have received in Systema. It was eye opening to say the least.

The individual attention that was given was astounding. It didn’t just come from the Masters, there were several senior students that had been studying with Vladimir for several years in Toronto that were very helpful and shared their knowledge and experience freely. I was also blessed to have the opportunity to work with several very experienced instructors from around the world. They too were a wealth of knowledge and information and very forthcoming.

I was exposed to Systema Health Practices for the first time at camp. Every morning we started our day with a stretching and warm up routine. All of it was tied to Systema Breathing. In my opinion it was **the most effective routine that I have ever done.** It made my body feel fantastic. It has been a huge success with my training partners and students. Systema really is a holistic approach to the human body. It’s almost **like a user guide for my body that I didn’t have for the first 33 years.** If the trend continues, the second half of my life will be much healthier and happier than the first.



The instruction that I received allowed me to achieve an Instructor-In-Training status. That was the highlight to my trip. Now it is possible for me to stop teaching Systema “principles”, and start actually teaching Systema. This is the beginning of my journey. I look forward to many more years of expert instruction, self-awareness and enlightenment.

I really can’t thank you enough for all that you have done for me. It is my sincere wish that I can pass on the knowledge that you have passed to me, and help others enrich their lives as you have enriched mine. May God Bless you and remain with you.

# Awake

Robert Vyn, Washington, USA

Feel the sun upon your face, the light that's sinking deeper  
If you'll let it, through the skin, through muscles, tendons, bones  
Towards the beating heart and nervous system, reaching down  
To touch the tenderness of grace  
Inhale, breathe in the wind from the lake that whispers  
Promises of rain, still washing distant skies  
Soon to come and swift to pass away, they leave us  
Cleaner, more prepared for inspiration calling us to life

Freedom's price is sweat and time, the flesh and mind  
Resist the pressing change, new discovered flaws exhaled  
From deep within as strange new feelings rise  
Remember them and listen, hear soft wisdom's signs that guide  
Exploratory motions, strip off burdens wrought from fear  
Primeval roots adhered before we knew the unconscious cost  
Of listening incautiously to precedent devised  
By twisted thoughts and bodies, resultant as the psyche recognizes  
Promises of pain

The first untainted hurts that purely taught us calm alertness lost  
In history of sowing sorrow forth from suffering, begun at birth  
Then carried on through social bonds and separating laws  
With too much holding on too long and hard to what we know  
Until each foreign form holds threat foremost  
And every person, isolated, shrinks from touch  
Although the other side of struggle grants us peace, it calls  
For faith enough to persevere and then let go



Outside we seem to have so little time, the world  
Goes rushing by, its pace unsatisfied even as accomplishments  
Push standards high, demanding sacrifice in constant striving for success  
But here we have some space to rest, a chance  
To find a slower rhythm, pause and feel the steady dance of trees  
The insects singing, grass beneath our feet until together  
Breathing synchronized with pulse and action  
Brings clarity of cause

Now give us stressful pressure meant to test our guiding hands  
Rising tensions breaking us apart until we cannot stand, we stumble  
Off too many ways at once then faced with failure gather up  
The shattered pieces, finding humble courage leads to strength  
Move just one speed and direction, held composed  
Towards salvation, stir up the warrior who lies dormant  
Abandoning his post of guarding honestly his heart  
From starting what it will not finish

Arise and find camaraderie, straightened postures ease the panic  
Deafening our senses, open the imagination and perceive beyond  
What meets the eyes at first and enters in, acceptance shows  
Hope unforeseen with confidence and growing seeds of spirit  
In alignment see we need not dread the gifts of men  
So strange and sometimes bitter to receive

Indeed they hold adventurous vitality, a quest to find reality  
That special place a state inside where cogitation disappears  
Derive beliefs from tangible experience instead of preconception  
Draw near to truth with roots in endless chaos  
Held to the stillness of eternity





## A Whole New World

Christie Falk, British Columbia, Canada

I just wanted to thank you again for the amazing camp. I learned so much and met so many amazing genuine people. This is definitely the highlight of my summer.

The concept of Systema is so different from anything I have done before and it's so refreshing. I realize Systema is not just a martial art but a way of living and it addresses all areas of life. Physical, mental and spiritual. It really resonated with me and how I want to live my life. I know for myself this has opened up a whole new world to me that I am excited to explore. I also really appreciated the respect that I received from the instructors and the other students at the camp. I hope to train more with Systema in the future.

## Life from a Relaxed Point

Gavin Westermann, Toronto, Canada

Camp was amazing, very challenging on a few fronts but I'm so glad I went. It was wonderful to spend that time with you!!

I've taken many things away from my time at the camp that I will use in my life. As always, Systema continues to provide me with experiences and tools that help **negotiate the tougher spots in life from a relaxed point of view.**



# Mind and Body

Mark Zamarin, Utah, USA

Vladimir gave to us what I call The Christmas Present article of 2010 titled **“Are you really training”**. As usual and in his very succinct way, he speaks volumes, summing up a life time of study and work in just a few sentences. In that article he states “The focus of Systema is different, you need to understand yourself. Watch constantly what it is that interferes with your calm objective and continuous movement.” The primary topic of camp was the preparation of our body, from the inside out, I would say the camp was right in line with Vladimir’s article. **Quite simply, this was the best Systema camp I have been to thus far.**

I would like to share some of the highlights taken from my camp notes that helped me gain further insight on this wonderful art of Systema. To observe Vladimir move is to observe that which internally animates him, one quickly discovers it isn’t all the external techniques that magically appear, as there’s something much deeper going on. The inner mastery is the foundation of Systema. If one merely dedicates their study to the external tactics and techniques, the training is hollow and superficial at best. When one takes the time to work on the inner states, one realizes that there are really two points of perception; one being our physical or *external attention* and the other our nonphysical or *internal awareness*. So attention and awareness are two very distinct perceptions that most are unaware of.

When Vladimir speaks about the response of tension in the body, what he is referring to is the response of tension as a subconscious reaction and reflex to some sort of external action the body perceives as a threat. The first step is to notice the body tension with the scope of your awareness.

Most of us do not answer the door when the “at-tension” tension knocks. We walk around holding our breath and our tension in our body without even being consciously aware of this process.

To sum up with an example, when our body jumps in the “brisk waters” of the lake, our body instantly responds with tension and “OMG is this water ever cold.” Now if we allow our awareness to become consumed by this we become one freezing entity of I AM the freezing body and everything locks up, mind, body, and breath. We can practice our conscious awareness and direct our body’s attention back to the movement of the breath to calm and restore the psyche of the body.

This now leads to the next area of study at camp, “*the breath.*” At camp we were given many drills and exercises that helped us explore the realm of the Breath, and how to use the breath to restore calm and balance to the body after a fight/flight response event. Actually the Breath is but one of nine body bridges where we actually have some conscious control over our subconscious body functions. Some other regularly used bridges are blinking of the eyes, swallowing, and hand movement just to name a few. These bridges or interfaces allow us a dual autonomic and somatic control over certain body subsystems. It is estimated that only .0001% of the body’s functions are actually conscious while the remaining 99.9999% is under subconscious control. This is quite amazing when one actually believes we can operate our strikes and other physical tactics by the .0001% intellect or conscious mind. If you believe that little fairytale, try this experiment; try to swallow 5 times as fast as possible and you will soon discover that you or what you believe is you has no real direct control over your body functions, not to mention our physical martial tactics.





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So is it any wonder that our intellectual tactical bag of tricks cannot swing a punch as quickly as Vladimir can, you see he has mastered the subconscious. When our body responds to what it perceives as a threat, a stoppage of the breath is one of the body's first reactions to stress, and we feel it as tension. Throttling back our response psyche requires our conscious involvement and effort to calm the breath and psyche down. When the body responds with tension, we can use the cycle of breath work, square breath or burst breathing for example, to restore a balance to the heightened state of alert, the effects of which can actually last up to 6 hours after the stressful event if left unchecked.

During all drills at camp the Russian word "Ochuchenie" or "O-shu-she-nye" was repeated many many times and the meaning of this word is feeling or internal working state of being. Restoring and cleansing the body psyche of old response habits and patterns is the internal work we must practice, as only then can the body respond and move calmly, continuously, and free.

Now lastly, we turn to the external body work and mechanics of movement. Again all movement must progress from a center or beginning. That beginning state of movement is either from a working state of tension or freedom. Our external attention is always about that which the body perceives, while our internal awareness is that which perceives what the body is attending to. Vladimir spoke regularly on the feeling of tension in the body, Konstantin spoke to us about "ochuchenie" or feeling and internal working state of being, while Valentin addressed our need to cleanse our body of old response patterns and habits. He saw many students return to their old intellectual arsenal of techniques when fear and tension entered and stopped the breath. We were given many drills and exercises by these great masters that addressed **the true operation of our mind and body as a complete unit.**



Konstantin also explained further and deepened my level of understanding about our human psyche. He told us our body perceives all that surrounds us and is constantly responding to subtle energy shifts of both the seen and unseen stimuli. In my own study of the subconscious, this is the biggest reason why slow work practice is so important, as this allows the subconscious to become imprinted with a relaxed working state in its actions as the intellect is lulled to sleep and its tension kept out of the way. All these exercises at camp were designed to teach our body the process of **restoration to a balance** of our internal and external working state, and as Vladimir said in his article, "watch constantly what it is that interferes with your calm objective and continuous movement" as this, I believe, was the gift to us from the Masters, at the best summer camp ever.

In conclusion, if you have never attended a Systema Summer Camp, you need to attend the next one; two of my students were able to attend camp this year and told me it was a great experience and in **those 6 days of camp that you receive the equivalent of 4 months training.** I would also like to thank once again all the Masters for their training and personal support, also to Valerie, Dimitri, Robert and all our Systema family who attended for a great camp this year. We all now have much work and practice ahead, so be well and happy training to all. Also, congratulations on the 20 year anniversary of Systema Headquarters, Toronto.

## Strong and Complete

Spiro Spanos, British Columbia, Canada

What a blast! Systema camp 2012 opened me to understand a much fuller range of Systema and myself. It is my 8th year since I began to practice Systema, and my 3rd year as an instructor-in-training. I arrived with strong confidence in my skill set, eager to learn. But by the end of the week my expectations were shattered and replaced with truth and wisdom.

The intelligent and refreshing training from our senior instructors added great depth in all my work. New training elements and challenging situations reinforced my good techniques and made my weaknesses clear as day.

The whole camp setting with its **lake and wilderness serenity, deep heavy punches, tough training partners and good food**, all serve to facilitate healthy and inspired training. My body feels more confident and controlled, supple and complete. My mind feels more creative and positive, relaxed and aware. I broke away from pent up aggressive emotions with solid water training, long breath holds, and faith in the unbreakable Creator. The guidance of the masters was direct and effective. They speak with few words and can reflect a kind of mirror into my soul with simple looks and body gestures. They are inspiring role models to look up to and work with. And as I am a role model to the youngsters around me, it is important I be critiqued and kept on the right path within community.

Systema is a serious road to walk, and truly allows me to see the full extent of my limitations while learning the values and endurance required to be my own, a natural warrior. I recommend Systema to people who search for the inner truths about self and life. Its methods and flexibilities are **far reaching, strong and complete enough for me to rest my life on.**

## Inhale Faith and Exhale Doubt

Stephen Cornelius, Colorado, USA

When I was studying Korean Martial arts and sparring back at the age of 14 to 18, then when overseas in Southeast Asia from 1967 - 1971 in the U.S. Marine Corp., I was occasionally asked if I was angry or mad as seen by the look on my face during sparring or fighting or in combat. It always surprised me when some said that... Even when doing Aikido and Systema work: I was never mad or angry back then or now. It's seemingly just the way I look when I am very focused in the moment.

The first camp picture is all steady work but with a compassionate mind for the guy I'm holding under water cognizant of his movement and tension. I was merely ready/prepared for new business, if any was required.

On the other hand, I may have just been seriously pondering if we were going to have chicken for camp dinner that night and then some ice cream for dessert. Maybe it's just the 63 years of interesting, hard living a good life... Maybe, it's just that old people always look mad at something, even if they are not?

But have a look at me on the camp group picture – ALL BIG SMILE sitting behind the instructors. That's the real inside me...

I am the product of all my mentors and committed teachers... Systema is a place of discovery and for enlightening perception. What one does with it in anything they do, be it military combat or gently mentoring a young child or the lost soul of an adult toward a sense of care and confidence is it's legacy: This is the worth and measure of value in Systema as I have found its essence taught by those practitioners I have met.

To **Inhale Faith and Exhale Doubt** with every breath of every kind.



# Systema, it's a Natural Thing

Garry Hodgins, Dublin, Ireland

It is an ironic truth that, even as we are well established in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, science and engineering still create technologies which attempt to replicate the patterns which propel the rhythms of the natural world. As Urban dwellers, we often take the way things are verbatim and are often in a reactionary mode of being.

Training and spending time in a natural environment can really help to focus the mind and the body, to listen to the way things are, rather than the way we make things out to be. This reality was very much brought home for me at the recent Systema Summer Camp in Canada.

At first glance, the camp might seem intimidating, 6 days of training, 4 times each day across various terrains during daylight and night time hours. The Camp is a biennial event, and was run by Systema Masters.

To list the range of activities undertaken during the course of the event would be futile, so I have decided, instead to focus on two or three insights which I took away with me from the event.

Do I have to see you to know you are there?

If training in the darkness taught me anything it made me realise just how much we rely on our sense of sight in our everyday lives and how much we ignore the information offered to us from our other senses. **I was amazed at how effective my movements were when I was attacked in the darkness** and appreciated how much we have disrupted the natural power of our instincts by conditioning our minds and bodies to rely too much on the sense of sight.

Leaders emerge from the group when ignorance is king.

During some of the group exercises, when people were challenged to think and act creatively, the leader was forced to take charge of the group and direct proceedings. Confidence in your choices, when there is something at stake, is essential for success.



**Matching an attacker's movements is essential for entering their space.**

It's not often that I get to train with creatures that are bigger and stronger than me but I had the pleasure of training with the inimitable Sergey Makarenko again at the camp. In order to have any chance against such a behemoth (if you're reading this, apologies Sergey!) it is essential that you learn to match your movement to theirs, something that Martin Wheeler calls "moving inside the opponent's movement". This breaks the opponent's perception of your movements and allows you to slip under their natural radar. A skill which is well worth refining.

Near the culmination of my week's training, myself and one of my cabin mates, Aikido and Systema instructor in UK, Matt Hill, were enthusing about the significance of all that we had just experienced and **how energised, content and happy we each felt**. Matt likened the experience, and the strong camaraderie which had, naturally, developed amongst all the participants. The power of the experience could be measured in the genuine regard which we each felt for our fellow participants as we had strived together to overcome our fears and immerse ourselves in the splendid complexity of the Russian Martial Art, Systema. It was a wonderful experience and is testament to the brilliance and professionalism of the organisers, Vladimir and Valerie Vasiliev.

## Perceptions at Full Range

### Colin Shubitz, Texas, USA

“Most of your perception of reality comes through your eyes.”

It doesn't matter that it's a star-studded, crystal-clear night with a billion points of light because you're deep in Canadian forest. It was August 2012 Systema Camp in Ontario and over 120 students hone their skills in a clearing as the light slowly dims. “Most of your perception of reality comes through your eyes,” master instructor, Konstantin Komarov had said that morning. Now my reality was rapidly dwindling. The pre-night training instructions were, ‘dress appropriately for the forest but no weapons and **no flashlights.**’

In the clearing, the master instructors demonstrate each exercise in the fading light of the evening. Finding a partner to practice exercise started with both of you putting together what you had heard and what you thought you'd seen. I was beginning to wonder how my sight compared with the people around me because all I could see were vague, animated blobs of light.

The last exercise was one partner guiding the other with an arm around the shoulder. The guided partner tried to escape as the guider changed arms, circled and purposefully kept the journey in a constant direction. Then Konstantin's whistle blows.

His instructions are in Russian with the translator Dmitri following in English: “This clearing has two true exits and a few that look like exits but aren't. You each have to find the two exits. One is to the trail back to camp. The other is an exit to something else. Find both and walk a hundred feet along them then return to this clearing. When all students are back I will blow my whistle and we'll all return to camp.”

I quietly congratulate myself on remembering the sequence of trees that mark the exit from the clearing to the trail back to the camp. So my thinking is that I'll poke around a little looking busy and wait for the whistle to start back to camp.



I follow fellow campers around the perimeter of the clearing and take a few stabs at finding the second exit but we all seem to be hitting dead ends. At this point it's so dark that even white t-shirts are barely visible. Then the second whistle blows. “Okay back to camp.” I look up and I find the tall tree that I've set as the ‘pointer’ to the camp trail and I see a group of dark figures already heading in that general direction.

So I leave the clearing with about twenty fellow campers. No one talks. After about twenty seconds I'm surprised that some have turned back and walk past me in the opposite direction, which makes me think this might not be the right way. But I refuse to accept it. About a dozen of us move ahead.

In the night forest with trees all around you, the only light source is the sky. When you look ahead it's black. When you raise your eyes at some point you see light breaking through the silhouettes of the top of the trees. The illusion is one of being in a gully surrounded by cliffs. I'm starting to sweat and I make a silent promise to myself that however lost we get I will stick with the group. My lack of perception has changed my goal from ‘find and follow the trail back to camp’ to ‘don't be alone and lost in the forest.’

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So I follow my small band but it soon becomes obvious that they haven't found the trail home. Some turn back, others turn left and right in confusion. Everywhere I turn people fade into the gloom. Voices call out in the darkness and for a few seconds somewhere in the distance someone breaks the rule and turns on a flashlight. Cheat!

Then I think I see a lighter area on the floor of pitch darkness. In my reality-deprived mind I believe I've found the trail! I turn and carefully head towards it. I take three or four steps and stand on a series of dry branches which snap with loud cracks. I manage to keep my balance stepping over an unexpected rock and crash into a young tree. I look around and realize that I am now completely alone. I try to find shapes of people in the blackness of the forest but see nothing. I'm in a dark gulley surrounded by cliffs. I hear no voices and see no humans. And panic surges.

I'm exactly where I promised myself I wouldn't be—lost and alone in the forest.



Fear rises in me with two ugly heads. One: I'm lost in the forest and won't find my way back to camp. Two is an even bigger fear: Everyone else finds their way back without a problem and a search party is organized just to find me—the idiot who panicked got lost and had to be rescued.

I walk forward crashing hopelessly into everything, breaking branches, tripping over rocks and walking into tree trunks. I restore myself with breathing, then hear a voice and stop. "Dude....?"

"Hullo. Yes?" replies the voice.

"Do you know the way back? I'm lost..."

"Head towards my voice" says a calm German accent.

I stumble towards the sound.

"No this way" says the voice.

Even when I'm standing a foot away the two fellow campers are barely visible.

"I think the trail's over to our right" I offer.

"We don't need the trail. We follow those stars. Forget about your eyes, feel with your feet."

Forty-five minutes later, after carefully avoiding overhead branches, tree trunks, roots and rocks, we cross the road to camp, only to find out that five other campers are still missing.

Later, I realized how perfectly the exercise demonstrated the concept that we create most of our reality through our eyes, and what happens to that reality when our visual perception is reduced. I also realized that **there are very few places in the world where one could have an experience like the one I just had and how valuable it is to find your fear and have the tools to control it.**

## A Better World, One Systema Practitioner at a Time

David Bergland, age 77, Washington, USA

I was fortunate to be able to attend the Systema Camp 2012 with lead instructors. This was not my first Systema Seminar; and I plan to attend many more in the years remaining to me. The experience was challenging (really challenging), enlightening, exhilarating and rejuvenating – as always.

What effect has my several years of Systema practice had on me as an individual person? What effect might Systema have on any person who takes it up seriously? Proper breathing and relaxation reduce stress and allow one to assess and respond effectively when under attack or in dangerous situations. One learns to accept one's situation, including the number of opponents, the physical environment, and one's own limitations, then to deal with that world as it is with the tools at hand -- without panic or anger. In my younger years I worked as a beach lifeguard, a firefighter and an attorney. Systema training would have helped me greatly in all three. Fortunately, it is never too late to learn valuable lessons, regardless of your age or line of work.

Although, in Systema, we train primarily in confrontation and combat situations, the basic lesson of “breathe, relax, stay cool, and deal with it appropriately” applies in all areas of life. Whether on the street, in business, at work, within the family, the church or other groups to which you might belong, you will occasionally confront antagonism, or even physical threats. The approach you learn in Systema will help you deal with any of them. Indeed, **the person you become due to your Systema work will reduce the likelihood of unpleasant confrontation.**



I have spoken to many Systema practitioners about this. Typically they report that people close to them comment that they have become “nicer.” They are **more relaxed, easy going and not so quick to anger, criticize or complain.** And they attribute these positive changes to what Systema training has given them. That is certainly the case with me.

Each person who improves as a result of Systema training makes the world around himself or herself a better, safer, more comfortable place. They become role models for their children, friends, associates, and co-workers, even though they may not realize it. Each Systema practitioner is like a stone thrown into a pond, sending out ripples of positive effect that help others see and understand how personal interaction can be peaceful and productive, rather than stressful or dangerous.

So, many thanks again to Vladimir, to all the Systema instructors, and to my fellow Systema students for making the world a better place for me, my wife, my children and my grandchildren.

David Bergland, age 77, resides in Kennewick, WA. He is a retired attorney and a director of a mutual fund. David attends several Systema seminars per year. He can be reached at [dpbergland@yahoo.com](mailto:dpbergland@yahoo.com).



# Breathe At Full Range

Junaid Khan, Toronto, Canada

There is literally no better way to describe the experience at the camp. It was every range, every environment, every body condition and every weather condition one could possibly imagine. But through all of those variations and changes, one thing remained true and tested: breathing. Breathing to strike, breathing to take a strike, breathing to move, breathing to stop and always breathing to relax.

Such a simple concept, with such deep and profound applications. Watching the Masters put it to use so deftly and delicately with drastic effects on their opponents was always enlightening. No matter how many opponents, no matter what weapons, no matter what environment, the concept was always the same: **Breathe and relax fully and you will know what to do.** From my own experience of wanting to train with as many instructors and experienced Systema practitioners as I could, I definitely understood the gaps in my own understanding of breathing and relaxation. A few particular instances stand out for me unlike any others. Particularly those which required us to train in the dark and train in the water.

There was no excuse when it came to fighting in the dark, you could not say “my opponent caught me off guard” or “he had an advantage” we were all in the same boat. The only thing that kept you from getting hurt as compared to your opponent was how relaxed you were, with that relaxation came confidence in your body and your abilities and with that came out an innate sense of movement. **A sense of moving however it is your body sees fit,** and more often than not, it would have surprising results: you would deflect a knife attack with the smallest of movements, or dodge a punch that you didn't even physically see coming. It's flabbergasting how much simple breathing calms the mind and rids you of fear of your opponent or his weapon. Somehow everything becomes possible, and movements just naturally become more logical.

In another instant of partnering with a partner slightly bigger than myself (A Systema instructor simply known as Big Sergey) when we were doing sparring and wrestling in the water. Every time I would try to mount an offense against my partner, he would simply pick me up over his head and slam me into the water. And all he would say is “breathe, don't be afraid” this process repeated itself for about 7-8 minutes until I finally started to understand to a greater extent the concept of emotions such as fear causing tension in the body and making it harder for you to think or move. The more I breathed, the less afraid I became of the inevitable smash into the water, and after a couple more throws I started to enjoy the process in an odd way; every time I would hit the water, I would have less fear of it and therefore less fear of the fight.

There are in infinite amount of stories I could connect to the simple act of breathing and relaxation and it still would not be enough to fully explain the profoundness of the activity without trying it yourself. If there is one thing I have taken away from Systema At Full Range 2012 it is the concept of everything being related to breathe. No matter how simple or complicated, every mental and physical activity can be made more conscious, beneficial and enjoyable if we simply breathe and relax into it.

I would like to thank all of the instructors and participants at the camp and school who gave me the opportunity to train, be tested and helped me to see **how to enrich my life in such a deep and simple way.** Thank you. May your breath be forever strong and conscious.



## Life Changing Experience

Anthony Kotula, Minnesota, USA

The camp was a life changing experience! I am talking to everyone about it. I showed and tried some of the work from camp at my karate class. I did not want to put my gi on and go back to regular karate techniques.

## Enough Material to Practice Until Next Camp!

Dmitry Guz, Texas, USA

Хочу сказать огромное спасибо за лагерь, за отличную программу, организацию всего. Было очень много интересного материала, для практики которого хватит до следующего лагеря. В общем было здорово!

## Camp Days Contained More Hours

Andrew Issaev, Toronto, Canada

Большущее Вам спасибо за прекрасно организованный лагерь, интереснейшую программу, лучших тренеров- мастеров Системы, и солнечную погоду с теплой озерной водой! Вы проделали такую огромную работу и при этом сумели выглядеть такими свежими, заботливыми обо всех нас и веселыми!

Обычно время летит, к сожалению, очень быстро, но у меня всегда было ощущение, **что в тех сутках было гораздо больше часов, чем в обычных – так много всего Вы в нас старались вложить и дать нам**, даже когда уже было ничего и не видно, и мы как могли ведь старались все это взять, хотя бы лишь и по звуку. Все было так легко и весело! И особенно понравилась шутка привезти с собой 2-3 фонарика с кучей батареек и прожить и обойтись без них. Мы теперь и в темном лесу не испугаемся никакого медведя.

Большое спасибо и Вашим подрастающим помощникам и всем тем, благодаря кому все это стало возможным!

Всего хорошего!

Исаев Андрей.





# FIT <sup>TO</sup> FIGHT

## SYSTEMA CAMP 2023

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