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World Oyama Karate

Honbu Newsletter

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Lifelong Rival

By Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

MESSAGE FROM FOUNDER SAIKO SHIHAN Y. OYAMA

Osu! We're almost finished with 2010, which has been another glorious year. We've had many great events in the World Oyama Karate Organization, including the American Cup Knockdown Tournament here in May, the Fighter's Cup in San Francisco in June, The Challenge Cup in Japan, which was a new tournament organized by Sensei Naoi. Summer Camp went well despite the BP oil spill. We weren't able to train in the water, but I think everyone had a great time learning fundamental *sai* techniques. The November Japan Cup went smoothly, as did the Ultimate Challenge Tournament here in Birmingham later that month.

Most likely, students aren't so dedicated to training during the holiday season. But this is the best time of year to look back at what's happened and set your goals and targets for the coming year. For me, 2011 is going to be very exciting. I'm going to be working hard and will count on all the Branch Chiefs and senior Black Belts to make the upcoming events a success. On April 30th, we will have the 35th Annual American Cup
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2010 Annual Black Belt Conference at Honbu Dojo

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When I was growing up and training in Mas Oyama's dojo, I fought many people from different styles such as the ones I mentioned in the previous newsletter. There is another of these fights that is clearly embedded in my mind. I was 18 or 19. The man I fought was about 26 or 27. Somehow this guy had been able to train as a Pro Wrestler. During this time, the popularity Pro Wrestling was booming in Japan. (When I first came to the United States years later, one of my students showed me a picture of this same guy, "T.K.", in a martial arts magazine and said he was the most famous Karate master in America. All I could think of was the time I'd beaten him up in the dojo. I didn't mention it to my student; he probably wouldn't have believed me anyway.)

When T.K. came to our dojo, Mas Oyama told Haruyama and me that whenever we fought him, we didn't need to use any control. T.K. changed clothes in the tiny dressing area. He came out only wearing his dogi pants. It was winter, but he just held his dogi top and Black Belt in his hand and swaggered around the dojo, showing off his body. Our eyes popped out as we watched him. I'd never seen someone with a body like that. His muscles rippled and looked like they'd been chiseled by a sculptor. He reminded me of Hercules or some other Greek god. He put his dogi top and belt on the floor and started waving his arms around and slapping his chest as he warmed up. To us, he seemed like some sort of crazy robot. As he moved, he'd watch us with eyes that seemed to say, "Look at me! Look at this body!"

He was just slightly taller than me, but was about three or four times bigger. I was 115 lbs. and looked like a skeleton, but he was over 200 lbs. and looked like a bronze statue. I looked at him and wondered what it was he ate to get a body like that. My mother and I were poor, so I was always hungry. We only had meat on very special occasions, and even then it wasn't much. I didn't think about T.K. doing weight training and body building, but was convinced that he had that body because he was able to eat steak and sushi and whatever

else he wanted all the time. It made me so jealous.

After awhile, he put on the rest of his dogi and started doing some type of Kata while we lined up against the back wall. His body looked so big and dynamic, but his kicks and punches were slow and stiff. His dogi would make a sharp popping sound as he moved, but I had seen lots of other guys in our dojo with more speed and sharpness in their techniques. I wasn't impressed with his movements, even though his body was so massive. After he'd finished, he looked around at us and shouted, "OK, let's start!"

Mas Oyama pointed at me and said, "You, c'mon! Take a good lesson from him." He then looked at T.K. and asked, "Please teach my student well."

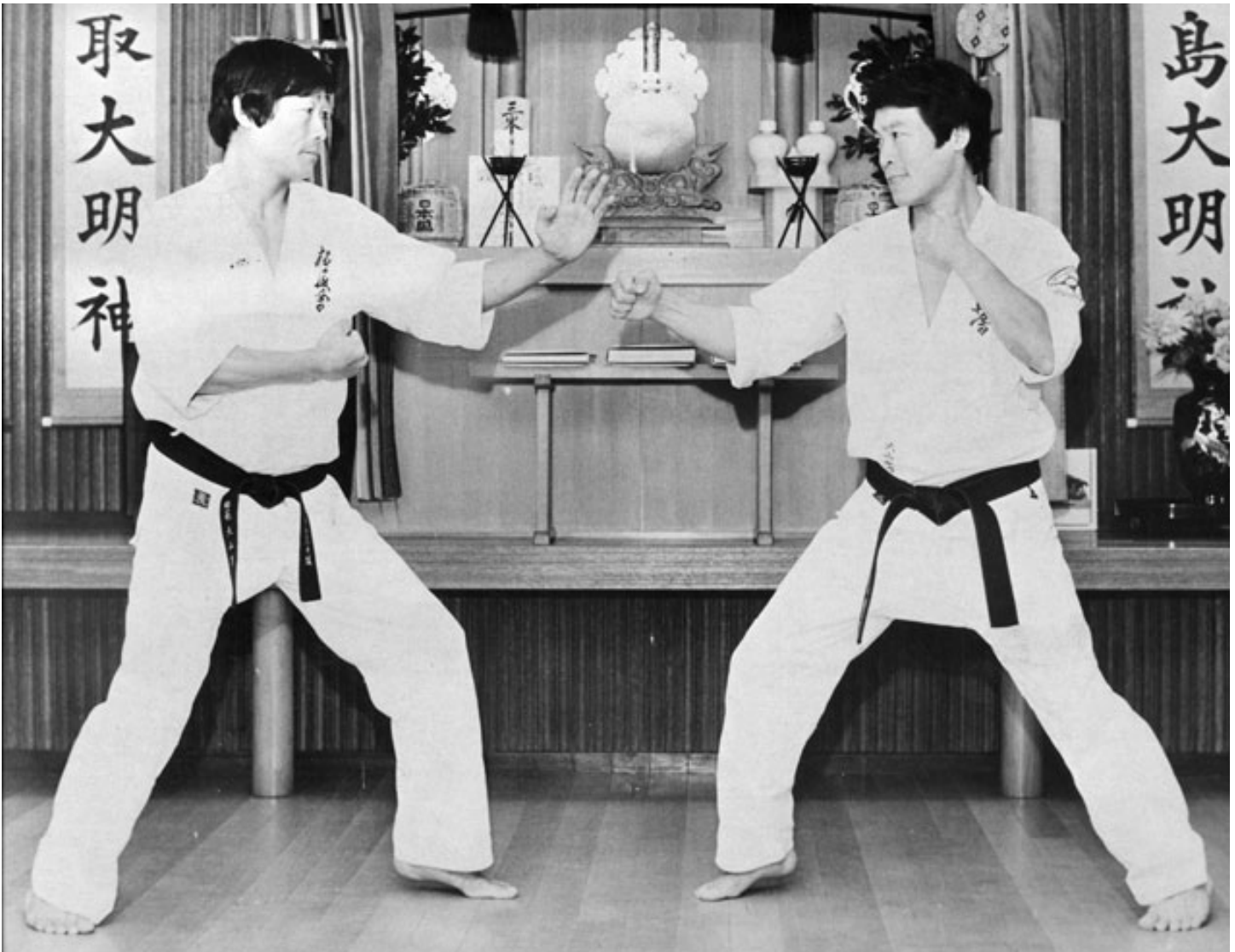
T.K. bowed and said OK. He told me to get into *kamae* (fighting stance). I did. He told me to go ahead and do whatever I wanted. I started moving around. T.K. moved slowly with his body open in a wide stance. There were so many targets. Did he really want me to do whatever I wanted? I could hear the other Black Belts telling me to go ahead. Haruyama gave a deep kiai, like a growling tiger. So I slid forward and punched T.K. in the jaw with my front left hand, then slid back. T.K.'s eyes suddenly popped open. He tried to hit me with a reverse kick, but I easily moved to the side, kicked him low, then in the face, which sent him stumbling backwards.

"You should use control," T.K. shouted.

"What?" I just looked at him. "This is a contact style," I answered.

"Yes, but you should use control." He was mad now, his face was getting red. He tried to punch and kick me, but I could read him easily, and would just move out of the way and counter attack. I started pulling back the power on my punches and kicks, but the Black Belts told me to go ahead. So I kicked T.K. hard in the ribs with my right foot, which sent him backwards onto the ground. He stood up and growled. He tried to grab me, but I just

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Soshu and Saiko Shihan

moved around and hit him over and over.

The fight was supposed to be two minutes, but after three minutes, we were still going. We continued on after seven minutes. T.K. was dripping sweat and blood. His dogi was wide open and flapping around. All of the Black Belts were cheering me. Finally, T.K. stopped and said, "Today's not a good day. This lesson is finished."

I thanked him very much for the good lesson.

Years later when my student showed me the magazine, I imagined asking T.K. if he remembered me. He'd probably say, "No I don't remember you."

"You sure? I bet you remember my right foot cracking your ribs."

"No, I don't know what you're talking about."

I have a lot of fond memories from training during this time. It was the time when I was in the zone with my fighting, and could really feel myself making improvements. One of the beautiful (as well as difficult) parts of Karate training is that you often can't feel yourself improving or getting stronger. It's hard to see your progress. If you lift weights, you can instantly feel your muscles working when you do the bench press or curls or leg press. You can see your results in the mirror. But

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in Karate training, you can go for a long time without really feeling yourself improving. Then one day, something will happen and you'll be able to see just how far you have come.

If you fight against stronger students in the dojo day after day, it's easy to get an inferiority complex after they beat you again and again. You may think, "I just can't win. He's so strong. I don't know what to do." I sometimes had these thoughts, but I also believed that when it came down to it, my opponent and I were on the same plane. We were both human, with two arms and two legs, so I just needed to figure out how to best use mine to beat him.

I got to the point where I didn't consciously think of what to do while I was fighting. My techniques and combinations came naturally depending on my opponent's movement, fighting style, *kamae*, size, or speed. When I kicked Haruyama in the fight I mentioned last newsletter, I hadn't knocked him out, but I could feel that I was moving in the right direction. During this time, I trained every day and night. Fighting was at the center of my thoughts and actions at any given time or place, deep in my subconscious.

I believe that everyone has some type of special talent or natural ability. However, most people never have the chance to really discover theirs, so it remains latent and hidden. That's why education is so important. At school, you have a chance to really search yourself and find what you are capable of achieving. You can choose your area of study and invest yourself 100%. If you hang in there and keep working hard, then eventually you will find fulfillment one day and open yourself to a whole new world.

■ Death Match

After I kicked Haruyama, fought the university students and T.K., I had a tremendous sense of myself getting stronger and transforming. I was now a man, a gladiator (even though I was still 115 lbs.). My older brother,

Soshu, was bigger than me, with longer arms and legs. I can't count the number of times he knocked me out in the dojo. His fighting style was left-foot-front. He'd stretch out his front left hand and put it in my face, then pull it back and put the right hand out, then the left one again, and so on, making a circular movement and obstructing my vision. He'd put one hand in front of my face, and then slap me in the side of the head with the other one. I knew he was going to do it every time we fought, but he still got me. He'd do it on both sides. He'd hit me with his open hand, not really using his full *shotei* (palm heel), which would have knocked me out cold, but rather his palm and finger tips. His hands were still big enough and he'd still hit hard enough to cut the inside of my cheeks as they made contact with my teeth. Riding the train home, my ears would ring and my head throb with a dull ache. Usually for breakfast, I ate hot miso soup, rice and a little *ume boshi* (pickled plum). But with the inside of my mouth cut open, I couldn't eat anything hot because of the intense pain. I'd feel the pain as I ate and vow to get revenge.

During class one night, my chance finally came. The dojo was packed. Mas Oyama had Soshu and another Black Belt stand at the front for us to fight. I was able to handle the other Black Belt pretty easily. When Soshu and I fought, he started the same way I mentioned before, moving his hands in front of my face. I pretended to fall for it. When he tried to hit me with his left hand, I moved in close and blocked it. I countered by swinging my left hand and hitting him across his right cheek, which made a loud cracking sound. Everyone stopped. He stumbled back. I gave a loud kiai and stood ready for more. At first, Soshu just looked at me with stunned eyes. Then he became furious. He gave a loud kiai and the fight continued.

Our battle was like something out of the Old Testament; an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. At one point, we punched each other with a right reverse punch in the face at the same time. I bloodied Soshu's nose, but his



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arm was longer than mine, so his punch landed squarely in the front of my mouth and knocked me to the floor. My lip was busted open and the inside of my mouth filled with blood. I stood up, but was seeing stars and was wobbly on my feet.

Mas Oyama stopped the fight. "You guys are crazy," he said. "This is a dojo, but your fight is like an *OYA NO KATA KI* fight (someone who watches their parents' murder and devotes his life to avenging their deaths)." He banned Soshu and me from ever fighting again. It was the last time we ever did. When I started writing this essay, I looked in the mirror and could still see the scar on my lip from where Soshu hit me. It made me mad all over again. I felt I needed to get revenge again. But he's too old now...so am I.

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During this time, I couldn't wait for Kumite training. Ki-hon and Kata were boring. I looked forward to the end of class when we would fight. Sometimes, some of the senior Black Belts would pull me aside before class. "Osu, my ribs are still a little bruised today," they might tell me. Or, "My leg is still kind of damaged." They'd warn me before class, asking me to go easy on them. It made me feel so good. I could feel myself getting closer to catching Haruyama.

As I mentioned before, when I was training every day, Haruyama started coming to the dojo less and less. Sometimes it was once a week, then maybe twice a month. When Haruyama wasn't there, the dojo seemed empty, like something was missing. Eventually it started affecting me. My target, my rival, wasn't there, so my motivation started waning.

One winter night, Haruyama showed up at the dojo. I was so happy to see him and have the chance to sweat and train together. But he looked tired. The gladiator aura he'd always had seemed faded. But as we started class he seemed to slowly get back to his old self as we practiced basic techniques and did partner training. I

could feel his spirit picking up and becoming stronger.

But when it came time for Kumite, for some reason I didn't want to ask him to fight. I'm not sure what it was. Maybe because he'd been gone for so long. Something just didn't seem right. I was content to just watch him fight the other Black Belts. I think Haruyama could read my thoughts, though. Towards the end of class, he said, "OK, let's fight." We faced each other and said, "Osu!"

In the past, whenever we faced off, I always felt that he was a monster and I was just an ant. But this time, I didn't feel that. I don't know if it was because I had improved or he was different. Before we started, he looked at me with an expression of "Ooh..." like he was hesitant, doubtful. I didn't like seeing that look from him. It was the Haruyama I knew.

I was relaxed in my movements as the fight started. We exchanged techniques back and forth, but I kept pressing forward. At one point, he tried to punch my face with his right hand, but I stepped to the side and blocked it and countered with a hard kick to his body. He stopped and tried to recover and catch his breath. "You're getting stronger now!" he said. His congratulations was sincere, which made me emotional. We continued fighting. Near the end, he punched my left cheek with his right hand, but it wasn't as hard as in the past.

That was my last fight with Haruyama. After that, I never saw him again. Eventually, my passion for training started fading because he wasn't there. A couple years later, in late December, Mas Oyama told us during class that Haruyama had died in a car accident. At that time in Japan, very few people owned sport car convertibles. But somehow, Haruyama had been driving one. He crashed into the support column of a highway overpass.

■ Coincidence and Destiny

Haruyama's death shocked me greatly. I couldn't believe he was gone. Since I'd started training Karate, I thought about catching up to Haruyama every waking

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moment and even in my dreams. I imagined him to be my lifelong rival, but he was also a great friend. He was my senior, my Senpai, but he always treated me well and talked nice to me—even after beating me up. Whenever Haruyama entered the dojo, the atmosphere would transform. As I mentioned before, he had a great big body and a real hard face. He was tall, so he'd always be looking down at other people. He was cocky and extremely confident. He always talked straight and to the point. At the bottom of his heart, though, he was tender and sentimental and cared about other people. That's why a lot of wise guys followed him and did whatever he said.

When I began writing about my memories of Haruyama last year, I experienced a strange coincidence. I was in Tokyo last November for the All-Japan Tournament. Shihan Goda said a woman he didn't know had called and asked if she could speak with him about her older brother. She was Haruyama's younger sister. We'd never heard about Haruyama having a sister or any other family. Why was it she was suddenly appearing from nowhere? I felt like the invisible strings of destiny were pulling us together.

The day after the tournament, Shihan Goda, Haruyama's sister and her son met me in my hotel room. She was the complete opposite of Haruyama; so elegant and refined. Her son had graduated college and was working as an international attorney. We sat down, and Shihan Goda and I started telling Haruyama's sister all our memories of him beating us up in the dojo. We talked as if we were school kids telling on a fellow student. She and her son just smiled and laughed as they listened. These are a couple of the memories I also shared with her of me and Haruyama outside of the dojo.

One night after training, Haruyama bought me dinner at a fancy restaurant. We were still in high school, but Haruyama always had money because he worked as a bodyguard. As I've mentioned before, he didn't look or act anything like a high school kid. It was easy to mis-

take him for someone who was 25 or 26 years old. After we ate, he invited me to his apartment. As I've mentioned before, back then the dojo and surrounding buildings were pretty run down and flimsy. But, Haruyama lived in a really nice building just a few blocks away.

When he opened the apartment door, four guys were inside. They all stood up, bowed and shouted "Osu!" when they saw Haruyama. Haruyama looked at them and asked where some other guy was. "In the back," they answered.

I followed Haruyama into the apartment. He walked over to a closet door and pulled it open. Inside was a girl on top of a guy (they were still clothed). I just stood there, looking at the ground, trying not to make eye contact. "What's the matter with you?" Haruyama asked me with a laugh. I realized at that moment just how different Haruyama's and my life were. I went to school and studied every day, then to the dojo. That was my life. But Haruyama's life was a complete mystery to me.

On a different night, Haruyama bought me dinner again after training. As we were walking down the street, two guys suddenly appeared and stood in front of Haruyama. They were older than him (we were still high school kids). I could tell these weren't regular guys. They looked like Yakuza. They started cussing out Haruyama. Haruyama called my name. He threw me his dogi and told me to go home. By that time, a couple other guys had appeared. He was surrounded by five of them. My heart was pounding. What was I supposed to do? I was just a high school kid. Should I help him? Haruyama was shouting back and forth with them now. I started to scoot off to the side, still unsure of what I should do. Suddenly, Haruyama knocked out the guy in front of him, then turned and did the same to the other guys. He took off running in one direction, and I ran in the other, towards the train station.

The next day, Mas Oyama found out about this in the news. It gave him a big headache. The news story had said that five guys had been put in the hospital from a

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street fight, and police were looking for the assailant. Mas Oyama knew it was Haruyama. It wasn't the first time this had happened. Haruyama had done the same thing a couple times before.

About a year after Haruyama and I had our last fight, I ran into him out on the street. I was in college then. I went with four of my friends to go ice skating at Tokyo Dome. Tokyo Dome is a big complex with a baseball stadium, ice skating rink, roller skating rink, and amusement park. As we were walking through a big open area, we saw a huge guy with a mean face coming towards us. He wore a bright suit, not like a normal business man. Four guys with similar mean faces were following behind him. Everyone moved out of their way as they approached. We did the same. As the front guy got close, I realized it was Haruyama. I called out his name. He looked at me, startled. Then he smiled when he recognized who I was. He pulled me aside and told me not to call him Haruyama anymore. His new name was Kuma Jiro. The guys behind him were his *kobun* (group of followers that do whatever the leader asks). Haruyama said that the Tokyo Dome complex was his territory. "Anything you want to do, just let me know and I'll fix it for you," he said.

"We're OK. But thank you anyway," I answered. "You going to come back to the dojo?"

"Nah, I'm done with Karate. I'm a business man now."

"Business man? Really?"

"Yeah," he said with a smile. "Come down again sometime, and we'll have dinner."

"OK, thanks," I said as Haruyama and his followers walked off. My friends just stared at me with their eyes wide open.

The summer after that, I ran into Haruyama one more time. My oldest brother, Hiroshi, and I took his truck down to the beach. As I mentioned in Newsletter #21, Hiroshi was Mas Oyama's first Black Belt. He was big,

but not as big as Haruyama. The beach front was crowded with all sorts of small resort places, all competing for customers. While Hiroshi and I were trying to decide where to stay, we saw four guys in Hawaiian shirts walking towards us. They had mean faces, and everyone moved out of their way as they approached. As Hiroshi and I stepped to the side, I recognized Haruyama. This time I called him out by his new name, Mr. Kuma Jiro. The guys stopped. Haruyama recognized me and came over. They guys behind him were looking at us with hard eyes, but Haruyama told them to cool it. I introduced him to my brother and asked what he was doing there.

"This is my territory," he told me. "It's good business, but only for the summer. You looking for somewhere to stay?" he asked Hiroshi and I. We said yes. Haruyama took us to one of the small beach front properties. "I want you to take good care of these guys," he told the owner.

"Yes sir, yes sir!" the owner answered, bowing to Haruyama. My brother Hiroshi was impressed. That was Haruyama.

I shared these stories with Shihan Goda, Haruyama's sister and her son. We talked and talked, sometimes laughing, sometimes with tears. It was so funny to meet his sister, whom I'd never known anything about.

The image of Haruyama that I carry in my mind is of a great big guy standing in front of me and telling me to "C'mon!" I try to beat him, but he pushes me back down and tells me to get up and try again. So I try again, and he pushes me down again, and I get back up again. If it hadn't been for Haruyama, maybe I wouldn't have continued Karate. Of course my brother Soshu would have forced me to keep training, but Haruyama was my source of motivation. He was both my rival and best friend. If he could see me now, the director of the World Oyama Karate Organization, he'd probably smile and say, "That's good. You need to keep working harder. **Build it up!**"

Road To Back Belt - Lora's Story

Sensei Tetsu always says the way to get your black belt is to keep training, don't quit. So, I guess I began with a slight advantage because I simply wanted to *train* martial arts. I did not set my goal at black belt. First, I tried a free lesson at a Tae Kwon Do school. I was paired up with the least intimidating and most awkward woman there, probably so I wouldn't be frightened away. Apparently I had done well because after class, the instructor complimented my abilities and joked that maybe I was really an undercover black belt. Perhaps this comment was meant to flatter and woo me. However, I walked away feeling that that school had little to offer me.

I entered the Homewood Oyama Karate dojo in spring 1998. I had the rare fortune of having Saiko Shihan Oyama himself conduct my free private lesson. After spending what seemed like 10 or 15 minutes on just

seiken-- how to make a fist, which knuckles to impact with, how to turn my shoulders, etc., I felt certain that this man had a lot to teach me.

■ Singing and Dancing

The biggest obstacle for me was learning kiai. To the non-martial artist, a kiai is simply a loud shout, which is often very dramatic and sometimes quite comical. Incidentally, "dramatic" and "comical" are two words that I desperately try to avoid being associated with. It didn't take me long to realize that there is a lot more to kiai than just shouting, and that kiai is intimately connected to technique, if done correctly. However, as a beginner, I could not kiai correctly nor did I have good technique. So, I opted to keep my mouth shut.

It seemed Saiko Shihan never let a training day pass without harassing me about kiai. When I was in class,



everyone knew I was there and everyone knew that Lora wasn't saying, "Yaaah". One day, when I was somewhere around orange belt level, Saiko Shihan must have been tired of telling me to kiai, and he also must have been in a very good mood. After class, he walked up to me and took both of my wrists in his hands. He made a strong heiko dachi stance, put his face very close to mine, looked me right in the eye, and shouted "Yaaaaaaah!" at me. Then, he indicated that it was my turn. My

Sensei Tetsu and Senpai Lora

Lora's Story....Continues

thought was to run away from this crazy man, but he was holding my wrists firmly. So, I managed an awkward “yah!” in a voice that wasn’t my own. His “Yaaaaaaah!” came right back at me. This time his eyes were holding me captive too. With no other choice, I returned the call with a little more force. This primitive game continued on back and forth for about a minute. He concluded with a few words of advice, which I don’t remember now. Although I did not come to understand kiai that day, that experience catapulted me ahead in the right direction.

But, apparently not quickly enough. That formal lesson in kiai was later followed by Kiai Lesson Number Two, given on a day when Saiko Shihan was not in such a good mood. At the end of class, during which I had not kiai’ed to his satisfaction (again), he unceremoniously took my green belt away from me. So, for about one week, I had to wear my old orange belt, line up with the orange belts and train orange belt level skills. It was just long enough for everyone to notice that I had been demoted and ask why. Then one day, without warning, Saiko Shihan told me to put on my green belt. That was the end of that.

Early on, I contemplated quitting karate. I had been enjoying training tremendously until one day we were told to “shadow (box)”. Blood drained from my extremities. There I was, expected to move around *freely* and make up my own *creative* combinations of punches and kicks directed at an imaginary opponent *in public!* (And I

was supposed to shout “Yah!” while doing it too.) This, I thought, was more self-expression than I can handle. So, perhaps karate was not for me...

How I managed to learn to shadowbox, I don’t remember. When the “Shadow!” command was given, I would first adjust my belt, then my ponytail, then my belt again. Then I would make a fighting stance and check the placement of my arms and feet so that they were just right, and then finally throw a punch or two. After looking around the room, I’d stand straight up, walk a couple steps to the side, and begin again with my belt. Usually the round lasted one (long) minute. Now, I know that this behavior surely did not escape Saiko Shihan’s notice. The only reason I can think of as to why he didn’t whack me with his bamboo stick is that Saiko Shihan has a very good eye for reading people. Perhaps he knew that this was one area where his pressure would surely break me. Although “Shadow!” continued to fill me with



Watch Out ! Sensei Tetsu !

Lora's Story...Continues

dread for several more months, I eventually figured out what I needed to do and relaxed.

■ Bruises

I was a yellow belt when I fought in my first tournament. Also there to fight was another girl from Homewood dojo and a lean girl from New York, both yellow belts. The NY girl and the Homewood girl fought first. About 10 seconds into the fight, NY girl kicked Homewood girl in the head and knocked her out cold. I was next to fight NY and advised by many well-wishers to keep my hands up. About 30 seconds into my fight, NY did a back spin kick and landed it on my head. Four whistles blew, four flags when up. I was still on my feet, but Saiko Shihan (the referee) stopped the fight. He held up his hand and asked me, "How many fingers?" Adrenaline was surging through me, and I was furious! "Five!", I shouted impatiently. I was correct, but Saiko Shihan decided that NY got me pretty good and awarded her one full point and the win. Weeks of nervousness and excitement had anticlimaxed into a 30 second fight and second place award. I went home feeling empty.

I didn't need an opponent from across the country in order to get a kick in the head, though. Right here in Birmingham was a very experienced 2nd degree black belt, who was the same age, height, weight, build and gender as me, and she appeared out of nowhere for class one day. We were paired up immediately. I had heard stories about this girl who broken another black belt's nose. Indeed, she was very intense, and I was determined to be an opponent like she'd never had before. Well, her foot did contact my head, right around my temple, and caught the outside corner of my eye. Being kicked in the head is never a good thing, but being kicked in the head by a girl who was, by all other measures, my equal meant there were no excuses; she beat me with skill alone. This really fired me up, and the fact that I wasn't able to return a good shot just fueled the fire. For the remainder of the class, I wiped tears from my right eye.

Some guys are very tentative when it comes to hitting a girl in class. Once they realize that I'm going to hit them as hard as I can, they begin to take me more seriously. Senpai A. was a very talented black belt who had sort of 'moved on' from training karate. He showed up for class one day, and we were paired up, knowing nothing about each other. I assumed he would "not hurt the girl" and toy with me for a while until he figured out how much I could take. So, I threw the first kick, hard and fast. In a flash, he swept my standing leg. First, I went up. Then, I went down, ending up flat on my back on the floor. I looked up to see him standing over me ready to make the kill, not a hint of remorse in his face. Needless to say, I fought him much more cautiously after that. I had a lot of respect for this guy who dropped me to the floor upon meeting.

There was one petite, middle-aged black belt woman who, to me, did not seem to be the karate type. She was my partner one day for punch training. We each wore a thin chest protector and were supposed to "punch fight" each other. Since she was a higher rank than me, I felt no reason to hold back with her. However, every time I punched her, she punched me at the same time, and that skinny lady knocked me off balance. So, I focused more and tried harder to punch her. For some reason, my punches were totally ineffective. She continued to knock me around for the full two minute round, all the while looking like she was thinking about what to cook for dinner. I was perplexed, not to mention frustrated. Could it be that this unintimidating woman knew more about how to punch than I did? Was that why she was wearing a black belt and I was not?

During class, Saiko Shihan yells at us frequently and with great sincerity. Often, it is because we are moving too slowly, making the same mistakes repeatedly or just not training with enough passion and kiai. I generally dismissed his comments as not being directed at me; I was already moving as fast as I could, I was not making nearly as many mistakes as other people, and I loved

Lora's Story...Continues

training karate. One bad day, near the end of class, Saiko Shihan got up on his soapbox and lashed out at the whole class. I remember him saying that karate has a long history and many traditions. People have been training karate this way for hundreds and hundreds of years. He went on and on about the meaning and purpose of karate while we all stood absolutely still. Then, he went on to chastise us for not respecting these ancient ways and, in so many words, for being spoiled, selfish, arrogant modern day people who think we understand karate. As he lectured, I began to feel as if he was speaking every word directly to me. I hardly breathed. By the end, I found myself struggling to hold back tears. On that day, I learned that whenever Saiko Shihan speaks, he *is* speaking to me. I also discovered that it was possible for me to move even more quickly, to make fewer mistakes and to train with more kiai.

■ Oyama Science?

Shortly after I started karate, I saw a cartoon in the newspaper of an alien spaceship landing on Earth. The aliens exiting the ship were built out of bricks and boards. A group of humans wearing dogis and training karate saw the aliens and said, "At last, we can put our skills to use!"

By the time I neared Black Belt, I had learned to kiai when I was supposed to, and I did it because I had to. It took me a few more years to learn to kiai naturally and willingly. Chelsea dojo had recently opened. The building itself lacked spirit (as Saiko Shihan had said it would for some time). There were only a few students, and they were new and timid and lacked spirit too. Admittedly, this was a boring time for me, and I too was guilty of lackluster training. I first began to kiai during class simply because the dojo was so quiet. And because it seemed I could offer Sensei Tetsu, my husband, some support that way. Then, I noticed that I could use my voice to make a rhythm during class; I could cue the beginner students with my kiai, helping them keep pace with Sensei Tetsu's counting. Later, I discovered that

sometimes I could get other students to kiai with me, just by putting more excitement and spirit into my own kiai. By putting feeling into the simple word "Yah!", I could make something happen.

When I look back at the most difficult times of my life, I think that perhaps I was missing kiai. During the time I was training for my black belt, I was also in graduate school training to be a biomedical researcher. Not surprisingly, I was not taught to kiai in the lab. I just went through all the motions like I was told, much like a new karate student. There was a disconnect between my intentions, my actions and my raw self that persisted. After a couple years, I felt little enthusiasm and a lot of uncertainty, and I began to question if I really wanted to be a scientist. What I was doing was not unlike the karate student who comes to class each day and trains roundhouse kick—left kick, right kick, left kick, right kick, ten times, twenty times, fifty times, today, tomorrow, next day, all the while wondering if she will ever get a Black Belt. There was no kiai.

I ended up receiving a Ph.D. and an Oyama Black Belt, in that order. For a long time, I valued the Black Belt more. Now, I think that if I can put these two things together—there is the true prize. I am sincerely grateful for my many lessons in Oyama Karate over the years. It is very rare that an adult is pushed physically and mentally, bruised and bled, scolded and shamed, educated and genuinely guided to grow as a person. Saiko Shihan says, "Put karate into ordinary life." It has taken me a long time to figure out what that might mean and how to begin to do it. Of course, it has little to do with karate-chopping a bad guy on the street. I think it means to take on life's obstacles with kiai. For me, that means to face science with all the kiai I can muster. That is how to make things happen.

"Eeshaaaaaaah!"

Lora Yanagisawa, Ph.D.
Shodan, April 2003



Some Of The Major Events in 2011

April 30th — American Cup Knockdown Tournament (Birmingham, AL)

June 5th — Fighters Cup Knockdown Tournament (San Francisco, CA)

July 21st – 24th — Summer Camp (Orange Beach, AL)

October 30th — Japan Cup Knockdown Tournament

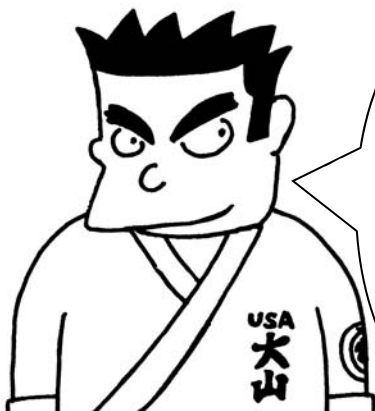
Complete Listing of 2011 Events — COMING SOON

(Message from Saiko Shihan continues...)

Knockdown Tournament in Birmingham. October 30th will mark the 20th anniversary of the Japan Cup Knockdown Tournament. I'd like to take a group to Japan. Also, I want for all the Black Belts to do a demonstration with the Black Belts from Japan and other countries. And of course for everyone to compete.

One of my biggest projects over the past couple years has been turning my novel, *Uchi Deshi in America* into a motion picture (currently titled *Take a Chance*). I've learned that the movie business is much different than Karate business. A couple of times we've come close to getting all of the financing and everything else in order, only to have things fall through at the last moment. It's been a real roller coaster. But I am ready, and have the commitment of some other people, to finance this project and make an independent film. This is one of my biggest goals for 2011.

In order to accomplish what I want to do, I need to keep healthy and build up my condition. I think it's the same for all of you. We are lucky to live in the United States. We have countless opportunities. Even now when the economy is down, we still have a chance if we commit ourselves. I've travelled to many countries around the world, and I always feel renewed appreciation for the U.S. when I return home. So, the coming year is going to be exciting. Don't just sit there; if you can run, you better run. If you can punch, you better punch. If you can kick, then you better kick. If you can sweat, then you better sweat. We have a limited time in this life; it doesn't last forever. We need to appreciate each moment and take care of ourselves. Everything is possible if you have health. **JUST SWEAT!**



Wish
Everyone
Happy
New Year
and a
Great
2011 !

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