

CLOSING COMMENTS ON MY THREE YEARS AT THE HONBU DOJO

7.20.99

It seems that every time I reach a turning point in my life there is a corresponding turning point in my Karate career. For example when I left home for university my old Karate club was at a low point. The Chief Instructor had left about a year earlier and membership was waning badly. I needed new energy in my Karate as I felt I wasn't learning much. I was a 2nd Dan in my old style at the time and everyone remaining from my old club was at a similar level. We helped each other of course but there is only so much you can do without instruction from a higher authority.

The answer to that problem came in the form of Chikara Shotokan Karate Association and two senseis called Roger Timmins and Gary Truman. This was my new club at university and they were my new instructors. Not only was I beginning a new style of Karate (i.e. Shotokan) but the depth of teaching and experience of Roger and Gary gave me exactly what I was looking for. That was the first major turning point.

The second one came when I graduated from university and left for Japan. Unfortunately I had to leave the university dojo at Aston University of Roger and Gary but I was going on to greater things, namely the Honbu Dojo of one of the most famous and greatest Karate masters alive today – Hirokazu Kanazawa, 9th Dan!

This point has to be undoubtedly the biggest and most important turning point in both my Karate career and my life. What I have learned and achieved in the past three years in Japan has had and will continue to have a very big influence on the rest of my life.

As far as Karate is concerned, after 1 ½ years of hard training at the Honbu-dojō I was allowed to take my 2nd Dan in Shotokan Karate and passed. I added that to my slightly dubious 3rd Dan in my previous style which I passed at the age of 19. A year and three months later after receiving my 2nd Dan from Kanazawa-sensei, I was again allowed to grade and came away with my 3rd Dan, again from the master. So at 25 years old I hold an official SKIF "sandan" which will allow me to open my own dojo.

As far as my life is concerned, well I learned innumerable things in Japan, not least about myself, and I think I matured a great deal as a person. I hope that those experiences will stand me in good stead for my future. The other major thing I came back with from Japan was my wonderful wife Erin, so it certainly was an eventful and worthwhile three years.

I can not thank enough the senseis (Kanazawa, Ichihara, Murakami, Suzuki, Tanaka and Nobuaki), and the members (Togo, Takahashi (1), Takahashi (2), Baba, Awaya family, Takeuchi family, Kagawa family, Kaburagi, Daizo, Fumitoshi, Declan, Eva, Richard, Tamakoshi, the list goes on...) All of these people made my experience at the Honbu-dojō so special. I will never forget the excellent lessons, superb teaching, immeasurable kindness, openness and acceptance, sense of humour, fun parties and family feeling at the Honbu-dojō. What I gained there goes far beyond improved Karate technique or deeper understanding of a kata.

I am of course very sad that my time at the Honbu-dojō has come to an end but to be honest it isn't the end at all, it is just the next step, a new start and another turning point. I know I will see most of the friends I made at the Honbu-dojō again, I will be able to train with them again and we will always be in contact.

So as I face this next turning point in my life and my Karate career, it is not with despondency but with hope and confidence for an even brighter life. I'm in yet another new country with many new challenges but I step forwards with the strength taken from my experiences in Japan and the support from my new wife Erin. I'm going to open my own dojo and through teaching what I learned in Japan, I myself will come to understand the true value of my experiences in Japan and how Karate continually helps and challenges me. To the next step along my path (michi/do).

Oss, arigato gozaimashita!

Paul