

Let me tell you a little about my Sensei.

Funamoto Sensei took me as a student in September of 1983 at the Shidokan Academy in Montreal, Canada. He was about 67 years-old at the time, but was still actively participating in the practices. My first class was a private lesson with him. I found out later that he did this with all of the beginners. I do add that he had many Yudansha assistants to run the class so he did have the luxury to do this. He brought out a real Katana and showed me how the Shinai was representative of a Katana. He then proceeded to show me basic footwork and how to swing Men. From that day onward, he became my Sensei and I his student.

For the next 14 years, I was a devoted student of his. He retired from actively participating in class in 1993, but he kept coming to teach us until he became ill in 1997.

He didn't let me wear Bogu for one year. He didn't let me take Shodan until my 4th year of training. He told me that one day I'd see why. He stressed fundamentals and basics to the end. He always told me to be patient and to let things happen naturally. I never was patient. I always wanted to fight, to win and to move up rank. He always convinced me to do things his way though. I still feel sorry for having talked back to him all the time. He told me that I'd understand someday when my own students would talk back to me. I guess that's why I'm sorry now.

The irony of his love with fundamentals was the fact that he was famous for being a shiai champion and not having good solid Kendo. He told me that his Kote strike was so good that he went years at a time without ever scoring Men.

He never raised his voice at me and I'll never forget his Polident denture smile. We always spoke in Japanese. His pre-war dialect and bluntness with people was priceless. No demographic was safe from his salty criticism. I'm glad that he isn't around to put up with political correctness. His favorite restaurant was KFC of all places.

Funamoto Sensei passed away in February of 2001 during the weekend of the Detroit Kendo tournament. I didn't know until I had gotten home. An E-mail from a fellow student of his informed me. I cried. I hadn't cried in years. I didn't know what to do. He had always been there. The first time I tested for Godan, I looked into the crowd and searched for him since he had traveled with me to all of my tests up to that point. I had never felt so alone in my Kendo life until that moment.

I still go to KFC every February to have lunch with him. I still don't get why he liked that place so much...



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