

志道館

Homecoming

Ten years have gone by since the passing of my mentor. Funamoto Sensei passed away in February of 2001. This was a sad time for me. I cannot believe that it has been so long. Interestingly, I have had one of the most successful years that I have ever had in my Kendo career. I have captured 6 medals including two at the US Nationals and led my club teams to two finals including one championship. One of my long time students, Travis Hill, has actually been named to the United States National Kendo Team. At this stage of my Kendo career, I really cannot complain about the year that I have had and I think too that Sensei would have been pretty happy about it.

Amidst all this, I must admit that there were two other events that I not only consider to be important, but would call the highlights of my year. In August right after I returned from the All US Championships in Atlanta, I received a visit from Michael Kim, Adam Ashton and Gabriel Schor. I had only met Michael briefly in the past so I did not really know them very well. The only link we had was that they studied Kendo under Santoso Hanitijo Sensei. Santoso was a student of Funamoto Sensei alongside me at Shidokan many years ago. They were a part of the new generation at Shidokan. They had never studied under or even met Funamoto Sensei, but I felt a bond with them. I felt as though I needed to pass on to them what Sensei had left with me. We practiced very hard and for a very long time together that day. Upwards of four hours along with Travis Hill. They stayed in my home and we shared meals together as I told them stories about the past. I truly hoped that their time with me would motivate their Kendo and that they would bring a piece of me back with them to Shidokan. They left me Tenugui and a team jacket which were items that I would treasure more than they could imagine.

The visit in August set the stage for a homecoming. It was time for me to actually attend a Shidokan practice. I called my fellow Shidokan alumni, Lawrence Tsuji, and told him that this was something that we had discussed for a long time and that we simply needed to make it happen.

The stage was set. The visit was scheduled for 10/15/2011 at Shidokan. I called my mother and told her that I was coming home in more ways than one. I realized then that it had been a very long time since I had been this excited and nervous about attending a Kendo practice. I'll even admit that I trained hard for this visit during the weeks leading up to it. I wanted the new Shidokan generation to see "Matsuura Sensei" at his very best and not some old, lazy and sluggish version.

Walking into the gym area with Lawrence on the day brought a flood of emotions. Of course, I was wearing the Shidokan jacket which had been presented to me and it was great to see many others there wearing the same jacket. The first person to greet me was Hanitijo Sensei. We embraced and mentioned that we had not seen each other for many years. He had not changed much at all. He mentioned too that I looked fit. I didn't tell him that I had actually trained for this day in order to not let everyone down. Hey, I seem to carry this strange aura in Shidokan lore. That's a lot to live up to. Of course I showed up fit and in shape.

Meeting all of the members was great. I had seen pictures of many of them on the website and on the Facebook page. Of course it was good to see Michael, Adam and Gabriel again. I really thought to myself that these moments made continuing on in Kendo so worthwhile. This was something much deeper and meaningful than the medals and other things I talked about earlier. It was a day like this that would have made Funamoto Sensei happy. Seeing many generations of Shidokan Kenshi together and practicing. I had brought my Tsuru Hakama and brand new custom double layered Keikogi. Every detail was important for me on this day and this was how special. Hanitijo Sensei asked me to sit up front at the end of the Dojo. I was reluctant because that was where Funamoto Sensei belonged and it was a place where Hanitijo Sensei had carried on.

However, Santoso insisted that is what Funamoto Sensei would have wanted. I looked at all the eager Kenshi in front of me thinking that I had sat in every position in that line-up at some point in time.

Lawrence and I split the teaching duties. We were both impressed with the overall skill level and most of all the overall spirit. We chose not to introduce any advanced elements, but to stick with the Kendo basics that we had spent so much time learning under Funamoto Sensei. The only real addition I made to this was to add a different level of intensity. I could tell that everyone was tired, but I had a feeling that everyone had come prepared and expecting this to happen. I made a very honest attempt to do Ji-Geiko with everyone. Not an easy task with as many people in attendance. I must admit that having gone through everyone, I was exhausted.

The only thing that kept me going was the spirit that everyone brought to me and my desire to share a piece of what Funamoto Sensei left with me. My Gi was soaked and for the first time in almost ten years, I had a blister underneath my foot. I did not want to leave Shidokan with anything less than having put forth my best Kendo. Even during my final session with Lawrence, I wanted to show everyone Shidokan Kendo. I truly hope that it gave everyone a little bit of motivation to do well and to become stronger. I must mention too that Michael, Adam and Gabriel came at me with very strong spirit and a lot of power. Maybe our encounter in August did leave an impression.

Needless to say, dinner afterwards at a nice Korean place was a great time talking to and getting to know the Shidokan family. My biggest thought at this time was to plan on a return trip.

I would like to thank everyone at Shidokan. Hanitijo Sensei welcomed me with open arms and gave me an open door invitation. So be ready everyone. This is an invitation I plan on accepting. I have been inspired to continue doing Kendo at the highest level possible so that you all have someone out there to look up to and train with. I hope that you all do the same for me.

Yutaro Matsuura



*Kendo Seminar with Shidokan Legends: Matsuura Sensei and Tsuji Sensei
Oct 15th 2011*