

Shidokan Stories 3

Funamoto Sensei passed away in February of 2001. I've come to the realization that it is soon going to be 10 years.

When Lawrence Tsuji and my parents informed me of Sensei's passing, this still remains the most devastated I was during my Kendo life. I was even sadder that I could not be there to say good-bye as I was already living in the United States at that time and could not travel to Canada since I was in the midst of applying for my Green Card. I was very sad, but a wave of relief came across me as I had made a special effort the past Christmas to write him a nice letter how I felt about him and how much he meant to me. I told him that no matter what, I would continue Kendo the way he taught me as long as I possibly could. I probably would still be living with regret had I not sat down to write that letter when I did.

As I wrote in my previous stories, I still go to KFC every February to enjoy one of his favorite vices. As I have said, I still don't get why he liked that place. I also admit that I sit down and enjoy a couple of cigarettes (I don't smoke, but I can smoke) since that too was one of his favorite things to do. I sometimes take students with me and sometimes I go alone. I always buy a two piece plate and place it beside me when I go alone. I can't remember what sides he likes so I assume that it was mashed potatoes and green beans.

There's a lot of things I've accomplished since 2001. I've passed my Godan and Rokudan examinations. I've captured quite a few medals and even won two team championships. I was never able to win a team title as a member of Shidokan. I was even a coach at the US Nationals and led two teams to place at the national level. I often wish that I could tell him about all I did and listen to his criticisms as he was never 100% satisfied even when I did well.

You know what I miss the most though? I still miss his guidance dearly. I'd still gladly sit at the other side of the Dojo if he could visit. I'd give up those two precious team championships for just one more practice with him in charge. I want him to look at my Kamae and note that I still hold my right arm too far out. Sorry I haven't corrected that yet Sensei. I want him to also note that my left foot is now held straight for the most part. At least I fixed that Sensei. I hit a pretty decent Men now too without leading with my upper body. Thanks for that tip Sensei. I want to sit and watch the video of my most recent examination so that he can question what on earth those crazy judges were thinking by passing me. I still don't feel comfortable when students call me Sensei because in my mind Funamoto Sensei is still Sensei and will always be Sensei.

I have a student. A student who has been brilliantly dominant in tournaments having won almost 20 championships in the span of 5 years. He has won a silver medal at US Nationals. He came to learn Kendo from me 8 years ago when he was only 13 years old and is now a 21 year old Sandan. Travis Hill is very close to being on Team USA for 2012 Worlds'. Even when my parents observed him recently, they told me that they had never seen anything like it in the Shidokan Family. I still sit at home and wonder. I wonder what Sensei would tell him. I wonder what Sensei would think if he saw Travis. I wish I could hear what he thought so that I could guide him better as he heads into his Team USA challenges.

I'll be strong though Sensei. You have trained me well and I'll guide Travis. I'll be patient with him like you were with me. Forgiving with him as you were always. Give him all the tools he needs. Travis is very tall and strikes a Men that would have made you proud, but you know what Sensei? For the past year, we've worked on Kote and what a Kote he strikes. He has to be able to strike Kote to be our student Sensei.

When I take him to Worlds' as a member of Team USA someday, I'll make sure we take a moment to thank you. I still obey your wish to not call my Dojo by your name (it's simply called Grand Rapids Kendo Kai) and I don't display a picture of you in it. I want you to be remembered by the Kendo that is practiced there. It's been almost 10 years, but rarely a day goes by without me thinking about you and what you taught me. Last, but not least, I'll bring in the right arm when I Kamae. I'm still working on it.

YM
12/30/2010



Yutaro Matsuura