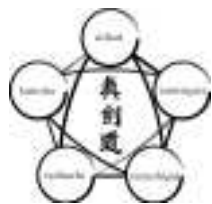


# News from Honbu

## Nisei Festival Edition



ISF/AB/KTRR



Issue 0015

September 2003

### Sensei's Corner

*Enbu* (demonstration)

On August 10 and 16, we demonstrated Shinkendo in the Japanese Village Plaza in Little Tokyo for Nisei week. I brought a total amount of 90 tatami targets and 20 bamboo targets from my yard, some which I personally cut, the rest cut by other students at the demonstration. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, a few Honbu students demonstrated at a summer camp for 120 kids. That night, a news reporter took a few pictures in class for the Rafu Shimpo newspaper.

After the dojo moved to Little Tokyo last year, I believed that it was important for the Honbu to participate in more local demonstrations. In order to make Shinkendo more known, it is necessary to take part in as many demonstrations as possible, even in small events.

Besides the demonstrations performed by the Honbu dojo, many Shinkendo branches are active in demonstrations. I wish that branches which might be demonstrating in the same location or area do not conflict. The newer branch should mind the senior branch, and make efforts to cooperate in order to conduct a safe demonstration.

Many groups outside of our Federation have been reported getting injured from making careless mistakes. Safety is an important issue in our Federation, and the location, weather, stage size, etc. are to be carefully put into consideration for each demonstration. Among the students, proper dignity should be kept. Twenty-three years ago, no one practiced *Tameshigiri*. Little by little more groups are now test-cutting, and it is necessary that the *Tameshigiri* in Shinkendo become a standard in the test-cutting community.

I observed an *laido* demonstration with my wife and daughter recently. Some of the students performed on the hot concrete floor. Their *hasuji* was off, and their speed was very slow. There was no *Tachiuchi* or *Tameshigiri*, the students only performed about eight similar *katas*. After watching the demonstration, I honestly believed that it was necessary for Shinkendo students to help students realize what true swordsmanship is.

In the August issue of a Japanese knife magazine, there is a 10 page article on Mr. Phil Hartsfield's knives. My one page interview is included in this article. I was hoping that a Shinkendo branch would open up in Japan this year. Although this did not happen, I hope that people in Japan read this article or my other past articles, and this curiosity will spark an interest in Shinkendo for the future.

- Instructors, please send pictures and information regarding how the demonstrations (not only seminars) went. We will include the news in the next article. It is important that the Honbu is kept up to date regarding demonstrations, before and after.



*Sensei Performing Kiriage Tameshigiri (Photo by Mike Krukowski)*

### Inside this Issue

- 1 Sensei's Corner
- 2 Nisei Demonstration Photo Special
- 10 Sayonara
- 12 Traveling Through the Universe

# Nisei Demonstration Photo Special

Photos Courtesy of Mike Krukowski  
Written and Edited by Michael Shu

Nisei week is perhaps the biggest yearly event in Little Tokyo next to the New Year's celebration. The Honbu Dojo participates through an hour long demonstration in each event which gives us ample time to show a great number of techniques practiced at the Honbu. This year at the Nisei week festival our dojo was on a 'demo-streak' of sorts with one hour performances on both the 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of August.

During each demonstration, the Honbu usually begins with Aikido, moving on to basic Shinkendo techniques and finishing it off with the all-time crowd-pleasing Tameshigiri demonstration. This year Sensei decided to mix it up a bit and started the 10<sup>th</sup>'s demonstration off by personally demonstrating his Tameshigiri skills! Including the cutting of bamboo this started the demonstration with a bang, and it was ended in the same fashion with some of our advanced students performing Tameshigiri at the very end.

The following pictures are from the demonstration on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August taken by the professional photography skills of Mike Krukowski, a hard-working new member of the Honbu family. Thanks for the photo's, Mike!

Here they are presented in the order performed in the demonstration...sort of...

## Sensei's Tameshigiri



Sensei Performs yokogiri (left) and kiriage (above) at the beginning of the demonstration

## Shinkendo Basics



Group Kamae pose (above) Matthew Lynch Sensei performing Chuden Sei (Left) Nathan Scott Sensei performing Chuden Do (Below)





*(Clockwise from Above) James Huang blocking fiercely; Me thrusting; Me being conceited; Brian Drake striking; Matthew stopping his sword; Jon King ready to strike; Jon going to Kamae; Jon doing his wacry as Brian looks on*



## Tachi-uchi



(Above) Obata Sensei and daughter Yoko show their bo staff sparring techniques

(Below) Sensei and Yoko show sparring techniques again, this time with sword versus bo staff





(Above) James VS. Nathan  
(Left) James – how swift thy sword  
(Right) Matthew blocking my attack  
(Below) A still from 'Samurai Showdown in Little Tokyo'



# Aikido



(Above) Nathan throws Jon with Jo (Right) Nathan shows James true pain  
(Below) Nathan throws Yoko (Lower right) Jon throws poor James



(Above) Nathan throws Yoko yet again (Right) Yoko gets her revenge

# Tameshigiri



(Left) Yoko makes a cut as Sensei proudly observes  
(Right) James takes perfect aim



(Left) Nathan powers through two tatami mats (Right) The stupid mat doesn't realize what happened to it



(Above) Nathan shows Yokogiri  
(Above Right) Sensei readies to cut bamboo as Yoko holds steady



(Left) Sensei does Yokogiri through a large stalk of bamboo as Yoko continues to hold steady  
(Above) Sensei shows Yokogiri

## Sayonara: A Translator's Notes

By Victoria Van Fleet

During the first hours of the “Shock and Awe” campaign in Iraq, I received a phone call: my mother was in the hospital; she was having strokes, one followed by another. I was living in downtown Los Angeles, just a few blocks from Honbu, as a wannabe uchi-deshi. It was a simple life; I was happy--I loved Little Tokyo. The homeless people who camped in tents and boxes on Third Street called me “Lady Blade”. That night, between the hospital call and the televised air raids, I realized that I would have to leave Honbu for the cold far-away of Flint, Michigan. I felt nauseated. My mother had lost part of her brain; I was losing my foothold at Honbu....and I was ashamed to discover which inspired in me the most angst.

I was not willing to give up my place at Honbu; I could not accept the possibility that I had run out of time to study with Kaiso. I lied to myself--perhaps just so I could breathe. I told myself that I would only be gone a few months, that this was a temporary situation.. When I told that lie to Kaiso, he was not so easily deceived. My last night at Honbu, I tried to slip away casually, unnoticed, without the goodbyes. Goodbye was something I never, ever, wanted to have to say to these people. Goodbye was too real; too final...*goodbye meant I may never see any of them again*. Kaiso collared me. He insisted that I join him and Mrs. Obata for a drink, on this, my last night in Los Angeles.

Mrs. Obata looked particularly elegant, but when she removed her shawl, I noticed that her arm was in a sling. She had a surgery the day before on her shoulder, but learning that this would be my last night of training at Honbu, she came out, regardless. “I had to see you,” she said, “It’s very important. I wanted very much to say goodbye to you.” Indeed. I felt chintzy. I had actually indulged in a shifty avoidance maneuver to avoid the truth: *this was it...this was goodbye*. A samurai knows that his life is but a fleeting, transitory experience that can never be repeated. It is his resolute acceptance of this that gives him awe for living. When a samurai expresses this in his acts, he is awesome...*she is awesome*.

I slunk in my chair; my thoughts were way too heavy. I knew that there was no dojo where I was going and I *knew* that I might be stuck there for years. There was no guarantee that I would ever see my teachers or my comrades again. *This was it*. I had a flashing stab of regret for every night I ever blew-off training, every time I half-assed it. I crumpled the little paper wrapper off my chop sticks; so deep in myself, I hadn’t even noticed that Kaiso was talking. Quietly, he explained how he was neither an optimist, nor a pessimist. From that neutral position, all options are visible and one is not unbalanced by small failures or drunk on little successes. “You feel sad about leaving tomorrow, but right now, you are here with us; don’t be sad when you are with us, please.”

A memory came to me...some night at Honbu; I was struggling to memorize something or another. Kaiso said, “Victoria, Shinkendo is not *that* difficult. If you just tune your radio to pick up my wave, the kata will make sense to you; you will understand *why* I made it. When you understand why I made it, you will have no more problems with memory; you will *know* what to do.” The wave. Kaiso described “wave” as an ephemeral force that emanates from all living beings. It is not literally electricity or radio waves, but an intangible *something* like that, by which the intent of an individual could be perceived if one honed in on it, thus, his metaphor of “radio wave” and “tuning-in”. I realized that by not utilizing this facility, I was reducing Shinkendo to an empty system of cuts and katas memorized by route. *Tuning-*

*in* to the intent of Shinkendo is a different thing; it is not learning or memorization, it is comprehension. And comprehending the intent of Shinkendo is the threshold to embodiment of its principals and precepts. What Kaiso has given me cannot be described in eight cuts: decisiveness. Our training forges the fortitude to act on our decisions, whatever they may be, with the precision and fluidity to parry life's blows without injury, exploiting every situation to our own advantage...*this* is Shinkendo. The man on the street might sneer, "Yeah, but when will you ever need to know how to fight with a sword in the *real* world?!!", but that is exactly what Shinkendoka do everyday, in every conceivable situation.

"Maybe you should consider forming a Shinkendo study group in Michigan." Kaiso's voice pulled me back to the here-and-now of our table. Like all his students, I take his suggestions as directions, and "should consider" as a bona fide assignment. This is due, I think, to our confidence in his insights, rather than a desire to oblige or please. Because there is no space between what he says and what he does, his words and actions are resonate with our own bushi damashii; thereby, he inspires our trust. My first impression of Obata Toshishiro was: "I have never met anyone who so naturally inhabited an archetype like samurai warlord." It remains as my lasting impression. In another time, another place...he is a General, a natural leader of men. His life is my proof. Now, he was asking me to consider something that I had never hoped to consider: teaching Shinkendo. It was not my ambition. I figured that it would never be required of me. I planned to "hang" at Honbu until Kaiso kicked me out on a far-away someday, when my skills approached that of my sempai. I figured that meant *never*. I had figured wrong. Honestly, I knew that if I did not take on this challenge, the budo that had given my life an elegant underpinning would wilt so far from its source. Even as I had no idea how to go about it, no confidence that I was capable or that anyone would be interested, I was nodding in agreement. "Yes, Sensei, I will."

"I was just thinking that so many of my students have left Honbu for new places. David went to Chicago; Sammy moved up into the mountains..." Counting now, on his fingers, Japanese-style, "Nathan, Sammy, Saito, Peter and Matthew all have their own dojos." He sat his glass down. Mischievously, he looked up, "When you return, you might find Michiyo and me all alone at Honbu!" We laughed, bitter-sweet. Even as the Federation is enhanced by new dojos, the daily contributions of these people at Honbu have been missed. It is as if each of those people has a lingering presence at Honbu; the abstract space that they occupy in our minds, in our swordsmanship, cannot be filled up with others. The true portrait of Honbu is rendered not only by the students who flesh-out the mat on any given evening, but the abstract presence of all the students who have studied there.

I remember sitting with Nathan Scott Sensei folding hakamas. He told me that when he was a teen he was a bit of a slob, tossing his clothes around carelessly. Through his martial study, he came to appreciate the underlying intent of samurai etiquette, to recognize that even the meticulous folding of the hakama is demonstrative of the samurai warrior's spirit. Due to the dangerousness of his profession, a samurai made a practice of keeping all of his affairs in order; his house was neat and his bills paid before he left for work. He did this because he knew that it was possible that he might never return and he did not want to leave a mess of his personal affairs for his family to contend with. He accepted his mortality and respected those he might leave behind. With the idea of death so prominent in daily life, every morning included "Sayonara"; thereby, a samurai's actions acquired the elegance and sincerity which were indicative of his class.

In the back of our minds, we all know that our time for training in the martial arts is temporal. We know that a blown knee or shoulder can mean an early retirement. Realistically, training can be compromised or interrupted by a multitude of factors, at any time. Yeah, you'll deal with it when it comes...but I'm wondering if intentionally honing an awareness of our own mortality and the transitory nature of life's situations can impart a sharpness to training that its' very regularity, dulls? Consider that this plain-old Monday might be your last night of training---a real possibility. How might that knowledge affect your swordsmanship? Would your attention be more acute? Your gratitude more sincere? All of the things that you habitually put-off until tomorrow, would have to be done right now, if there were to be done at all.

Kaiso paid the bill. The something I never wanted to have to say was said. The three of us parted honestly, knowing that this might be the last time we would ever see each other. I had wanted to bookmark this page of my life, to come back to it, to pick up right where I left off by forgoing goodbye---not possible. Life is not going to take an intermission while I am in Flint. Even if I find my way back in Los Angeles, the passing of time will make for a different Honbu, a different me.

The next morning, I was on the road. As the hundreds of miles turned into thousands, I lingered over a hard image of Kaiso and Mrs. Obata disappearing into the streets of Little Tokyo and pondered the preposterous task ahead: I was going to have to teach, to start from scratch, in the middle of nowhere, from nothing. Impossible.

At a truck stop in Utah, I saw a key chain: "ALWAYS DO THE THING YOU THINK YOU CAN'T DO." Wistfully, I bought it.

To be continued...

## Traveling Through the Universe

By Jonathan King, Honbu Jiho

Here I expect to explain the beginning. In my view the Universe began as a superposition of action and thought whereby the universe and god were created together. My next task will be to relate GO and the universe. Until then here are the answers to our questions asked previously. I calculated these to a significant number of decimal places, but have rounded the answers here for the sake of brevity.

**If the Sun were as large as a golf ball, how big would the earth be in relative size?**

A grain of silt: smaller than a grain of sand.

**What is the angle between the Sun, Earth and Venus, when Venus is at it highest point in the sky?**

36 degrees, a good angle for test cutting.

**How many Earths would fit in the Sun stacked side by side? (assuming they didn't burn up!)**

109

### New questions

**How far apart would the grain of silt and golf ball have to be in order to represent the distance between the Earth and Sun?**

**How fast are we traveling as the earth is rotating? As the earth revolves around the sun? As the sun revolves around the galaxy?**

Good Luck! Jinsei Shinkendo.

### NEWSLETTER STAFF

#### PUBLISHER

OBATA TOSHISHIRO KAISO

#### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

MICHAEL C. SHU

#### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

VICTORIA VAN FLEET  
JONATHAN KING

#### CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER

MIKE KRUKOWSKI