



# MŌ ICHI DO

*IOGKF-USA NEWSLETTER*

November 2008

## IOGKF-USA

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## From the Editor's Desk

We traditional martial artists are often looked at as a curiosity, at best, by those practicing more contemporary fighting arts – especially those engaged in so-called mixed martial arts. Our practices, methods, and traditions seem antiquated to many, a waste of time to others.

Why kata? Why uniforms? Why punch like that? While it is not my intention to answer these important questions here, there is one I would like briefly to address: Why all the Japanese customs?

Some will argue that bowing, counting in Japanese, sitting in *seiza*, or using Japanese titles has little relevance or importance for studying a martial art like karate. One can become an equally proficient martial artist without copying all of the Japanese etiquette and externals. I completely agree.

At the same time, the longer I teach karate, the more Japanese culture I bring in to my class and impress upon my students. Why? The answer is that I have the opportunity to teach a bit of another culture and provide a language to students who are often rather provincial in their view of the world. And I benefit from the same practice.

When I was in college, just beginning my karate training, I never imagined I would someday have the chance to study karate in Okinawa, Tokyo, or the Philippines. While my language skills are quite weak, I could communicate with others through the “karate Japanese” I have learned. You can go anywhere in the world and train in karate, as the basic vocabulary is always the same. It is a practical skill.

These skills, however, go beyond the dojo. When I recently received my appointment at Senshu University, in an official ceremony with the president, the bowing was natural to me. *Arigato gozaimashita* rolled off my lips. My karate training allowed me a connection in another culture that most foreigners would have awkwardly stumbled through.

Many of our students will never visit Japan, but they will meet Japanese guests to the United States. The familiarity with just a little Japanese language, culture, and etiquette is a wonderful means to make friendships and demonstrate respect to others. In our increasingly inter-connected world, this aspect of traditional karate training is a wonderful thing we have to offer. I hope we maintain its use and never give in to a narrow view of the art, focused on fighting efficiency alone.

## Those who came before us!

Three times per week I walk into our dojo for training and to complete any administrative duties I've let slide, (which is usually a lot). I always look around with ideas of what could make the space more appealing as a traditional dojo. I look for the tidiness of all the training apparatuses, location of the wave masters and cleanliness of the floors. Then I usually focus on the Shinzen. I make sure you can read the names on the photographs of those who started it all, starting with Higaonna Kanyro, Miyagi Chojun, Miyagi An'ichi, and Higaonna Morio. Now, keeping in mind that Higaonna Morio Sensei was the IOGKF-USA Chief Instructor when I joined the IOGKF in 1989, ideally that would be all of the photographs that would normally be displayed on the Shinzen. For all they have done, we are all surely grateful.

There is nothing more exciting than attending a gasshuku where Higaonna Sensei is the guest instructor. Usually, when we can't get enough, and we have the time and resources, we make every attempt to attend other gasshuku with other leading IOGKF black belt instructors. The thrill is unmatched by any other event, concert or office party. For weeks, or even months or years, we reflect on the best gasshuku we ever attended and who the instructor was and how long the spirit training was on that Friday night. At most every gasshuku I've attended, people always tell stories about the gasshuku they were at in Okinawa,

Mexico, Canada, one of the States or any other location around the world. "Sensei (place name here) was great! We did this and that and everything in between."

The next time you attend a gasshuku, pay particular attention to who is there. I don't mean simply names and faces; I mean what ranks are there. Every gasshuku I have attended has been filled with roughly 80% black belts, 15% brown belts, and the remaining 5% being lower kyu. That 5% is 99% kyu grade students from the hosting instructor's dojo. I ponder the question as to how many of the black belts got started in karate simply because of the person instructing the gasshuku. Whether it is Higaonna, Terauchi, Bakkies, Andrews or Nakamura. Were these great instructors responsible for these black belts' initial step onto the dojo floor and their evolution through the kyu ranks? The 5% kyu grades attending the gasshuku are privileged to receive such level of expert instruction, but why are they there?

The first thing that comes to mind is that it is in their hometown. A black belt perspective is that if it is within driving distance, there's no excuse not to go. But kyu grades, on the other hand, have really no idea what they would be missing if it weren't for their dojo instructor. That is the person that got them there. It is that instructor's hands in which parents put their child's martial arts education. The person that, as the kyu grade students grow in their training, instills respect, humility, confidence and technical ability. This is

the person that sets the standard of karate in the kyu grade's eyes. This is the person who wells up with pride at the progression of his or her student, and encourages them to better themselves. This is the person who is saddened when someone gives up or moves out of the area. Yet, how many of us give *credit, respect* or *loyalty* to that person that got us to where we are?

I started karate training in 1987 in a small dojo in Toledo, Ohio. A dance instructor subletted the space for karate classes twice a week. The karate instructor there, then Sensei Wiesje Amrhein, was an ik-kyu permitted to teach karate by her instructor. He would come and check on her on occasion but it was her dojo. I advanced to 6th kyu under her instruction in just over one and one half years.

I moved to Houston and aggressively looked for Goju-Ryu karate because that was the style I had been learning. I could have gone with any number of different martial arts, because in a city the size of Houston the phone book had about six pages of martial arts schools. I found Goju-Ryu at a small YMCA dojo about an hour and a half away. The instructor there was in his mid thirties but somehow was from the old school of karate. If you left training with any energy you obviously didn't train hard enough. If you didn't have battle bruises or break a toe or finger somewhere along the way, you just weren't training hard enough. I remember training for over one and one half years before he even graded me. Unlike the gradings I've experienced

since then, his were pass, fail or regress. If you did well you passed. If you simply did the essentials you failed and stayed where you were. If he thought you had nothing into it, you could go back to the previous belt. I truly believe that I survived the Houston dojo because of what I got out of the lessons Sensei Wiesje put into me in Toledo. Here this skinny little blonde in a small dojo invested her time, energy, encouragement, trust and belief in me that set a standard in my mind as to what karate was all about.

Of course I didn't realize any of this at the time but eventually the revelation hit me as such, and I thank her for that. She is still my Sensei and always will be. That's what is on the business cards, the website and the first thing off my lips when someone considers joining our dojo.

So the next time you start sharing your experience at the last great gasshuku, let someone know who it was that got you started. Show pride, respect and even *reverence* to your sensei. Even if you moved away and found someplace else to train or opened your own dojo, there was someone that shouldn't be forgotten who is responsible for where you are right at this moment. Remember, even if you think so, you didn't get to where you are now by yourself.

Thank You Sensei Wiesje!

O. Eugene Collins, sandan  
Administrator / Asst. Instructor  
Ichiban Martial Arts, Toledo, Ohio  
<http://members.toast.net/shodaneuy>

## Supplemental Strength Training

This section of the newsletter will be devoted to presenting supplemental strength training exercises that can be practiced easily, in many places, and with minimal investment. Whether at home or in the dojo, we can often find a little more time to tend to these often neglected areas of our bodies.

### Hand Strengthening



I suspect that many of you may roll your eyes when you see this issue's training suggestion and its accompanying picture. I would probably do the same in your shoes. After all, this is not something we have not all seen before.

If you're like me, you have purchased a few of these, or other similar contraptions, over the years. And you may have said to yourself, "I'm going to use this regularly until my forearms look like Popeye's." And again, if you're like me, you used it regularly for about a week. We all understand the practical usefulness of strong hands, but we have trouble sticking to any new training routine.

So, please allow me to make two suggestions and encourage you to start again.

First, there is more than one way to squeeze. Just as in jumbi undo, we tighten our fists three different ways (pinky first, index finger first, and all fingers simultaneously), we can do the same with this hand exerciser. However, I am guessing that insight was not sufficient to motivate you to leave your warm house and head off into the holiday shopping mania to go to Sports Authority and get a new one.

What most of us would like is the habit of using one regularly, but new habits are hard to establish. I think the mistake most people make is that they start with the best of intentions, but then their old routine takes over. They tell themselves they will squeeze the darn thing 100 times per day with each hand. Great! But that is a significant new habit to create, and is unlikely to stick. If, however, you say, "I will squeeze it 10 times per day with each hand," that is an easy habit to start. And once the habit is established, you can increase to 20. A few months later, it may be 30. What is important is to start a new habit modestly so that it easily becomes part of your routine.

Personally, I started by using this exerciser in my car on the way to work. (I drive a car with automatic transmission, by the way.) I picked an easy goal: I squeeze with my left hand from this street corner to that. And then I switch, using the other hand to another landmark. The point was not to fatigue the muscles, but start a habit. However, over the years, this modest routine on my way to work has paid significant dividends.



Notes from the North America  
Chief Instructor

– Sensei Nakamura

Christmas is just around the corner. It is almost the end of the year. I hope everybody accomplished the goals that you set at the beginning of this year. Next year, IOGKF will be celebrating its 30th anniversary. It was 30 years ago when Higaonna Sensei established the IOGKF to protect and preserve Okinawan Goju-Ryu. Due to his strong commitment and tireless efforts, IOGKF has now spread to over 50 countries and is known as the strongest traditional Okinawan karate organization in the world. Next year in May, we will celebrate his 70th birthday and IOGKF's 30 year anniversary at the Miyagi Chojun Festival in Burlington, Ontario, Canada. Please check for more info at [www.iogkf-usa.com](http://www.iogkf-usa.com). Please mark your calendar, and do not miss

this special event!!

**Poland Gasshuku:**

During October 24-26, I was invited to Poland to assist Higaonna Sensei at the Poland gasshuku. They expected 150 members from the local area. However, it turned out that over 400 IOGKF members from 15 European countries attended. We divided the class into 5 groups and they were taught by Higaonna Sensei, George Andrews Sensei (OTGKA-England), Ernie Molyneux Sensei (EGKA-England), Henrik Larsen Sensei (Denmark) and myself. I saw a lot of familiar faces and made new friends. The Polish national TV, newspaper, and radio station came to interview Higaonna Sensei. Next year's European Gasshuku will be in Sweden.

**Los Angeles Seminar:**

I was at the Los Angeles Seminar (November 7-9), that was organized by the Hokubei Shihankai (Japanese Karate Masters Association of North America). They held seminars focusing on a comparison of Goju-Ryu and Shotokan techniques.

Higaonna Sensei was invited to teach Goju-Ryu. Takayuki Mikami Sensei taught Shotokan. It was very interesting to see the differences and similarities in the two styles. Eric Higaonna and I were invited as assistant instructors for Higaonna Sensei. Sensei Gene Villa from Spokane, Sensei Steve Duz from San Diego and his members, students from Georgia and San Francisco also attended this unique event.

There were about 12 Japanese karate masters that came to this event, and each of them is the chief of their own organizations.

I personally had a great time meeting all of the Japanese masters and hearing many stories about teaching karate in the 60's and 70's. These masters are the pioneers of spreading traditional karate in North America. The purpose of this organization is the same as the IOGKF; they try to preserve traditional karate for future generations. For more information about the Shihankai, please visit <http://hokubeishihankai.org/>.

Upcoming Events

December 1–4      **IOGKF INT’L Black Belt Gasshuku**  
By Sensei Morio Higaonna  
Okinawa, Japan

Apr. 30-May 3,      **Miyagi Chojun Festival**  
By Sensei Morio Higaonna  
Burlington, ON, Canada