

SEIZAN®

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Circumstances that trigger our initial interest in traditional martial arts vary from the mythical as proper planet alignment, to personal as in, "My girl/boy-friend made me do it". A select few would commit to this endeavor as a lifelong pursuit, perhaps for even more profound reasons.

Having culled the viewpoints of senior members, *Seizan* now explores unifying traditional martial arts values that appeal to younger members. The ever evolving traditional Karate that we practice today has withstood the test of time, and transcended cultures before being formally introduced to the United States by Nishiyama Sensei some 60 years ago.

We will attempt to glimpse at the roots of traditional karate from perspectives of members who came from another culture. Anjali Krishnan addresses this issue's Q&A. Anjali hails from India and came to pursue a PhD education in Dallas, TX in 2005. She felt completely at ease to resume her training

at the local university karate club (University of Texas at Dallas), and has competed at the national level for the past 4 years. From Vassil Petechev, our readers will get an appreciation of the competitiveness and camaraderie of the AAKF US Team. Vassil served as US Team Coach at the 16th ITKF World Championship held in October 2012. He emigrated from Bulgaria and has lived in Madison, WI since 1991. He currently serves as Regional Director of the AAKF Great Lakes Region. In exploring the "trans-generational gap", Sensei Larry Swift, Mid-Atlantic Region, relates traditional martial arts ideas that he holds dear as a decades-long practitioner and competitor. These tenets form the bedrock values that he is proud to pass along to his son Nick, a young *shodan* now training alongside dad. As well, Ellen Riley of the Manhattan Beach Karate Club, CA, recounts her experience as a first time international competitor at the 16th ITKF Youth World Championship.

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Member's Perspective: Lessons Immemorial

By Larry Swift, Mid-Atlantic Region



I was a college student that needed to choose a health credit... karate or basketball??? That fateful decision was made over thirty years ago. The instructor for that George Washington University class was Sensei Tabassi Sr., older brother of Sensei Mahmoud Tabassi. I instantly loved the training. It wasn't long before I was training five days a week between Sensei Tabassi Sr.'s dojo (about an hour away from campus) and Sensei Mahmoud's student club on campus that met in the evenings.

Sensei Mahmoud's training was intense. Thousand punch or kick nights were common, as were training techniques like walking in deep stances with a classmate on your shoulders. Spirit was always emphasized. Dig deeper; never give up;

push your limits... these were the consistent themes, regardless of the topic being taught.

Over the years of training, there were many insights that I have learned and a few accomplishments I have achieved. I'd like to share two stories that stand out as moments when the true spirit of *budo* and my life converged. The first happened during my first regional tournament. I competed in the adult brown belt division, and remembered being nervous. I wanted to make my instructors proud; I didn't want to get hurt; and I wanted to win. Those nerves were there with each successive match. Ultimately, I found myself in the *kumite* finals against the same opponent whom I had finished second behind in the *kata* finals. The match started, and those nerves were still there.

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Seizan Interviews its Productions Editor, Anjali Krishnan, Ph.D.

S: Dr. Krishnan, could you tell our members about your training background, and what brought you to the United States?

A: I started my karate training in the small coastal town of Manipal, India, in May of 1990. I was six and a half years old. Although our dojo's style was called "Budokan" (<http://www.institutekarate.org/>), we essentially trained on the same elements of *kihon*, *kata* and *kumite* as with traditional Shotokan. My family moved twice, first in 1995 and in 1997. I was fortunate to find an affiliated karate dojo each time. The new dojos practiced versions of Goju-Ryu, Shito-Ryu and Ryobu-Kai along with Shotokan, and eventually I received my *Shodan* in 1998 and *Nidan* in 2002. I moved to the United States in 2005 to pursue a graduate degree in Cognition and Neuroscience at The University of Texas at Dallas, and very soon started training under Sensei Alex Tong, Sensei John Bell and on occasion Sensei Brad Webb. I graduated with my Ph.D. in August 2011 and moved to the University of Colorado, Boulder on a post-doctoral fellowship. There is no AAKF affiliate dojo in Boulder and I currently train in Sensei Khalili's dojo.

differences of training methods in India and here in the United States?

A: My parents introduced me to karate when I was very young, presumably for self-defense, but I quickly realized karate was more than just physical fitness. We also learned about conduct, concentration, control and single-mindedness of purpose - the very essence of Shotokan. These qualities helped me to always seek out a dojo wherever I lived. I have maintained my karate training for the past 22 years and counting. Having been in various dojos in two very unique countries, I have experienced quite a few differences in training methods. For instance, in India, we have a saying in Sanskrit "*Acharya Devo Bhava*", which means, "regard your teacher as God". A *karetaka's* most important duty is to the Sensei, and so we were trained to be disciplined, not defiant. When I moved to the United States and began training under Sensei Tong, I had the opportunity to politely question the meaning behind different aspects of karate. I concluded that both approaches are two sides of the same coin. In today's world when everything is about instant gratification, karate has taught me to take life a little slowly, learn through introspection while also being respectful of seniority and experience.

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Anjali Krishnan, as a white belt, and as a Nidan twenty years later, and still counting!



Perspectives: From Madison, WI to Łódź, Poland for the 2012 ITKF World Championships

By Coach Vassil Peytchev

Poland. While at last year's Pan American championship, I watched Sensei Brad Webb manage the US team as Coach, and he made it look so easy. As I started planning to attend the World Championships in Łódź, Poland and to support the US team, I wanted to learn more about the coaching process in order to be more effective and be able to help when there was a need. I took and passed the class D judging exam and the ITKF coaching certification, yet my intention was primarily to be a tourist.

Then came the bad news – Sensei Brad Webb couldn't make the trip, and I was thrust into an official coaching position. During competition, the role of the coach is to keep track of the different events, and to make sure the athletes are ready at the correct competition area, and to be vigilant of any procedural errors during the competition. Certified coaches are allowed to lodge a protest with the *Kansa* in *kumite* or the *Shu-shin* in *kata* events if any procedures are not

followed properly. On the day before the tournament, we received a mailing list to make sure that everyone was properly informed of the correct locations and timelines. I also received very valuable help from Sensei Shimoji and Sensei Webb on things to look out for during the tournament. To be better prepared, I also attended the two-day judges' refresher course in the Polish national training center Dojo Stara Wies, which was two hours away from Łódź. This involved a few roundtrips for me and the judges to meet the team, and make sure everyone had all the necessary information, paperwork, and equipment for the competition.

The events draw was in the evening before the competition. Some countries were still registering competitors at the very last minute, which delayed the draw until much later than scheduled.

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US Coach Vassil Peytchev rallies Junior Team members, 2012 ITKF World Championship



Member's Perspective: Lessons Immemorial Continued

We fought aggressively... until I missed one technique; my nose was now floating somewhere under my left eye. I remembered sitting at the edge of the *tatami* as Sensei Mahmoud reset my nose and asked if I wanted to continue. It seemed an odd question at the time. In all those hours of intense training, giving up was never an option. That idea never even crossed my mind. I asked Sensei to plug my nostrils. I recalled the taste of blood in the back of my throat as I turned to restart the match, but more so, the complete lack of emotion. I wasn't angry with my opponent; I felt no need to defend my ego; had no fear of further compounding my injury; no anxiety about being champion... nothing. All I remembered was feeling empty. Later, I read Sensei Funakoshi's book, *Karate-Do*

Kyohan, The Master's Text, where he wrote:

"Just as it is the clear mirror that reflects without distortion, or the quiet valley that echoes a sound, so must one who would studies Karate-do purge himself of selfish and evil thoughts, for only with a clear mind and conscience can he understand that which he receives... in a fundamental way, the form of the universe is emptiness (*kara*), and, thus, emptiness is form itself."

In thinking back to that match, I believed I gleaned an insight into those powerful words, and the importance of these words among the emphasized aspects in today's karate teaching.

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*Larry and Nick Swift,
circa 2008*



Karate Worlds: The 2012 ITKF World Championships

By Ellen Riley, Western Region

I have just returned from the most incredible experience of my life. Before I left for the World Traditional Karate Championships in Poland, I was passionate about karate and I knew that 32 countries would be represented and that people all over the world did karate. Nevertheless, I had not anticipated the magnitude of the bond that I would develop with the US team members and others around the world.

The event itself was a huge celebration for me as soon as I arrived in Łódź. I saw a massive billboard advertising the Championships. Excitement at the arena was palpable. At the opening ceremony, there was a constant din of noisemakers, with the

audience singing, cheering, and chanting. There were photographers, television cameras, real time display on a large screen, and little kids seeking autographs with unbridled enthusiasm. It was surreal to be among 400 black belt competitors from diverse backgrounds, performing the same *katas* that I have learned. The traditional karate *budo* values: commitment to self-perfection and respect for the training process and for others, were very much alive and resounded in the competitors I met. I felt proud and inspired to exemplify these values and to pass on what I have learned.

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Ellen Riley standing next to Sensei Nick Salcedo (first on right, mid row) after her first kyu examination by Sensei Nishiyama, February, 2006



Editorial: Playing for Keeps Continued

Just last month, AAKF technical committee members learned of Sensei Penny Ringwood's abrupt passing while they were conducting the National Seminar in Dallas, TX. Ms Ringwood made traditional karate her lifelong passion. With over 35 years experience in the traditional style of Japanese Shotokan Karate-do, Sensei Ringwood operated and instructed at the Seaside Shotokan dojo she founded until her passing. Many of us, at

one time or another, have had the pleasure to train with or under Ms Ringwood, or witnessed first-hand her unmatched technical precision and her intense competitive spirit. All of us at AAKF share the profound sense of loss of this incredible talent, an inspiration to us all. We extend our deepest condolences to Sensei Ringwood's loved ones.

Alex Tong
General Editor



US Team at the 1995 ITKF Pan American Championship (Buenos Aires, Argentina). From left: Tati Eugenio, Sensei H. Nishiyama, Penny Ringwood; kneeling: Randall Hackworth, Brad Webb, Avi Rokah. Penny was the fourth place finalist in Women's Kata.



Allison Prost, Color Bearer, US Team, 2012 World Championship



From Madison, WI to Łódź, Poland Continued

At around 2 am, I finally had the draw and events in my hands, and our team was one of the very few who had the information first thing in the morning.

The day of the tournament came, and the team selected the youngest member, Allison Prost to be the flag bearer. The tournament venue had six competition areas (*tatamis*), with the middle two on a raised platform. The arena was very large, with close to five thousand karate fans in the stands. Four large screens, hanging over the raised platform, displayed various ongoing events of the competition. Some of the events received 'play-by-play' commentary, which together with the crowd and the announcing system would often make the noise level unbearable.

US Team. Our team was on about equal footing with the best of the world. While the dominance of the Polish and other European athletes was undeniable, our representatives

can stand toe-to-toe with any of them. Given the difference in training between our team, and the teams receiving government support, this by itself is quite an accomplishment. In almost every event, a medal winner had to get past a US athlete to get to the awards podium.

Our team was also regarded with a lot of respect. One example was Taichiro Kaijima's *kata* performance to break a tie for entry in the top eight. Both he and the Brazilian athlete did Unsu, and after their performance several Brazilian team members and coaches came to Taichiro to congratulate him on an obviously better *kata*, before the judges' decision was even announced. When Barry Power's second round win was broadcasted on the main monitor, the announcer was impressed with his "*bardzo szybko*" (very quick) dispatching of his opponent.

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Q & A with Anjali Krishnan Continued

S: You represented the Southwestern Region in the AAKF National Championship in 2009, 2011 and 2012. Were those a positive experience for you?

A: While most of my early competitions were at the *kyu*-level, my first experience with an exclusively *dan*-level tournament was the AAKF National Championship held in Dallas in 2007. I did not compete then, but helped with the organization. I had a first-row view of excellent karate and quality judging. It took a couple more years of hard training to develop my skill and confidence to compete at that level. As an athlete representative of Southwestern Region at the 2009 AAKF Nationals in Minneapolis, I realized I was still no more than a mere rookie compared to seasoned competitors. However, the overall experience was very positive, and I thoroughly enjoyed the tournament spirit. I have never considered karate to be a competitive sport, and I consider tournaments as a learning opportunity. I competed in two more AAKF Nationals (Atlanta, 2011; Los Angeles, 2012)—and have personally improved every year. I have also been intrigued by the nuances of tournament judging and hope to qualify as a competent judge in the future.

S: *Seizan* feels that it's always a treat to gain a different perspective on training

philosophy from someone who has diverse experiences. Drawing from your Eastern and Western cultural backdrops, what would you consider to be the strength and lasting values of traditional karate training that should be passed down to our aspiring members?

A: In my opinion, traditional Shotokan karate in today's world is an amalgamation of art and science. I hail from an ancient land credited for the origin of martial arts; I now live in a modern society that is forever pushing the frontiers of science. While science can explain the biophysics of the human body, the power of the mind to read and react to situations is more reminiscent of an art form. Having experienced the best of both worlds, my philosophy in karate is simple - give respect, command respect. Give respect by revering the knowledge you obtain, and command respect by sharing that knowledge with dignity and sincerity. As a cognitive neuroscientist, I would like to someday study the brain function of seasoned senseis, and learn how karate develops the body and intellect. Traditional karate training is like pursuing a lifelong Ph.D. program, as we continue to emulate the tenets of *dojo kun*: to seek perfection of character, be faithful, endeavor, refrain from violent thoughts and always respect each other.



Top: Anjali Krishnan, San Kyu (right) representing the Trichy region, 1996, Dindigul, India.
Bottom: Anjali Krishnan, Nidan (front), representing the Southwestern Region, 2011, Atlanta, U.S.A.

Karate Worlds Continued

What is magical about karate is that it benefits all ages: mentally, physically and spiritually. It is accessible regardless of means. All that is required is a space to practice, and the training itself is designed to generate new teachers. Now I can appreciate what my Sensei meant when he told me that I could walk into a traditional karate *dojo* anywhere in the world and feel at home. My global realizations were taking shape as I watched and waited for my events. For two days, I was primed with energy, expecting to be called at any moment. My events turned out to be delayed until last. All my teammates had finished their events, but many stayed to support me. They felt like family even though we only met days prior.

I was most nervous about the *kumite* (sparring) event. Our opponents were fast and ferocious. Although competition rules stipulate no physical contact, speed and unpredictability make getting hit a real possibility. The resounding advice was to

protect my face. After my *kumite* match I was elated. I did not win, but I had fought well and protected myself. I proceeded immediately to *kata*, my final event on the main stage. I was exhilarated. Everything I absorbed over previous days converged into an intense focus on my *kata*. I felt it was the best I have ever done!

I will never forget the warm welcome from my teammates when I arrived at the banquet afterwards. A remarkable and indelible bond has been created from sharing this experience with everyone there. I knew Poland would be an adventure. I did not expect the unique heartfelt experience nor the electric inspiration for traditional karate as an invaluable tool for enriching lives.

Ellen is a senior at Mira Costa High School in Manhattan Beach, CA. She has been training with sensei Nick Salcedo, Manhattan Beach Karate and Yoga, for 7 years. She achieved her first dan rank in July 2012.



Ellen Riley with Sensei Radoslaw Olczyk, Coach, Polish National Team at 2012 ITKF World Championship.



From Madison, WI to Łódź, Poland Continued

The youngest members of the US team showed great determination and concentration. Their *kata* and *ki-tei* performances rose to the occasion, with great spirit, no hesitation, and without a single penalty. The Cadets went first with *ki-tei* in *fukugo*. Allison lost with 3 to 2 flags to the second place winner. Maggie also lost a very close match with one of the more controversial judging mistakes of the tournament. One of the *Fuku-shins*, after arriving at an equal numerical score (due to penalties for the other competitor) announced *hiki-wake*, leaving two white and two red flags. The *Shu-shin*, upon advice from *Kansa*, rendered the final decision of awarding the win to the Romanian competitor based on his own vote. Upon protest, the score sheet of the *Fuku-shin*, which indicated a tie, was reviewed. It was subsequently determined that the higher score of the Romanian athlete before penalties should be ruled as a win in the match from this judge. This did not impact the final outcome, however. Maggie's opponent ended winning a third place in this event.

In the Cadet *kata* event with 18 participants, Maggie was first from the whole group to perform her *kata*, and ended up in 6th place in her pool. She was only a few tenths from the top eight. Allison's *kata* score was only 0.1 away from getting her into the top 8. Ellen had to wait almost 24 hours in order to compete, since the original

schedule was too optimistic. First she competed in *fukugo* (with 18 competitors in the event), doing *ki-tei*. Her opponent was a competitor from Poland, who eventually won a third place in this category. The flag score was 4 to 1 against Ellen, with only the *shu-shin* giving his vote to Ellen. The score differences were no more than 0.2 either way. Next was *kogo kumite*. There were at least 15 participants in the event. Ellen faced a competitor from Macedonia. In the very even match her opponent managed to get a *waza-ari*. In the next exchange (last of the match) Ellen came close but not quite successful to getting a match-tying technique. In *kata*, with at least 17 competitors, Ellen tied for the 4th spot in her pool. But when the high and low scores were added, she was 0.2 points away from placing in the top 8.

The 2012 World Championships in Poland was a great experience for the US team. As the AAKF broadens its base with more members and clubs, we can learn from other countries and strive to improve the development of all *karateka*.

Coach Peytchev received his Shodan from Sensei Shojiro Sugiyami in 1994. He received his Nidan (1998) and Sandan (2008) from Sensei Hidetaka Nishiyama, and serves as Head Instructor of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Japanese Karate Club.



Barry Power takes command during men's kumite at the 2012 World Championship.



Taichiro Kajijima, performing Unsū at the 2012 ITKF World Championship



Nick Swift with Sensei
Hidetaka Nishiyama
(circa 2007)



Nick Swift with Sensei
Mahmoud Tabassi
(circa 2006)

Member's Perspective: Lessons Immemorial Continued

My second story happened years later in another tournament. Sensei Mahmoud's students had been successful for years at these tournaments, competing skillfully and aggressively. This year there was a new competitor, a Brazilian who had traveled up from South America to Philadelphia. I remembered watching his first match and was impressed by his spirit, but more than a little concerned about his lack of control. In one of his later matches, he fought against Sensei Ali Tabassi (Sensei Mahmoud's younger brother). Sensei Ali earned the first point with a well-timed sweep and *gyaku-zuki* combination. As the Brazilian got up from the mat, his anger was evident. Upon *hajime* the Brazilian charged at Sensei Ali, grabbing his left hand and wildly swinging a right hook punch, hitting Sensei Ali on the jaw, dropping him to the mat and knocked him out cold. The Brazilian only received a *chui*. Sensei Ali ultimately won that match, but much hostility was evident in the room when I came up against the Brazilian later in the tournament. My training and experience served me well in spite of tensions in the crowd. Again, my mind was focused only on the fight. At one point in the match I connected with a sweep. The Brazilian went down but his stance was strong, and I also fell to the mat. He quickly sprung up off the floor, and came at me with a *mawashi-giri* to my head while I was still on all fours. Time stopped. I saw every detail with crystal clarity as though watching in slow motion. I knew I didn't have time to get up; I knew I was in a defenseless position, and I was pretty sure that that the *mawashi-giri* could kill me. As he unfurled his kick toward my right temple, I extended my right hand forward and smoothly rolled left. My hand

gently captured the momentum of his leg and guided it, and him, past me and sent him sailing into one of the corner judges. It was not a technique I had ever trained before; nor something I could teach someone today. But it was perfect in the moment, effortless and simple. Though I lost that match, that experience told me that my training was on the right path.

Karate has been a blessing to me, and I feel very fortunate to have Sensei Mahmoud Tabassi as my instructor. I am also blessed to have a family and three wonderful children, two of whom train karate. Nick, my oldest, has been training for over ten years. He won the Junior National Tournament in 2010 and 2011. This year Nick won gold in the adult division for team *kata*. Although I am quite proud of all of his accomplishments, my reason for mentioning him in this article is the fact that he's now at the same age when I chose karate over basketball.

He's the new, I'm the old:

"To search for the old is
to understand the new.

The old, the new
this is a matter of time.

In all things man must have a clear mind.

The Way:

Who will pass it on straight and well?"

Poem by Sensei Funakoshi

I hope to honor the legacy of traditional karate by doing my best to pass on what I have learned straight and well.

Remembering Sensei Penny Ringwood:

U.S. Women's Kata Team, 1st Place, 1991 ITKF Pan American Championship (Cuernavaca, Mexico). From left: Tati Eugenio, Susan Vance and Penny Ringwood.





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courtesy of: Vassil Peytchev, Larry Swift, Ellen Riley, Tati Eugenio and Anjali Krishnan

A Tribute to Sensei Penny Ringwood

By Sensei Tati Eugenio

Penny began training in karate around 1978-79, shortly after moving to Los Angeles from England. The West L.A. Karate School of George and Gene Takahashi was her first dojo, making her way up to Brown Belt there until 1982, when Penny transferred across town to the National Karate Institute (NKI) - more popularly known as the L.A. Central Dojo of world-renowned instructor, Master Hidetaka Nishiyama.

The 1980s saw Penny earn her Black Belt rankings of Sho (1st) Dan through Yon (4th) Dan from Sensei Nishiyama. At the same time, Penny began to compete in many Southern California tournaments (both AAKF and non-AAKF tourneys), on to the AAKF Western Regionals and eventually becoming a regular member of the California team to the annual AAKF National Championships. Penny quickly became known as an outstanding *kata* competitor and was AAKF National Champion in Individual *Kata* in 1989 (Minnesota), 1990 (Maryland), 1995 (Chicago) and 1996 (Chicago). As well, the Women's Team *Kata* from L.A. Central with Penny was always among the top 3 teams at the yearly Nationals, winning Bronze in '84 & '85, Silver in '86, '87 & '88, and Gold in '96.

Penny began to travel to international competitions in the mid-1980's as a member of the U.S. Team (1985 -1996). Her first international medal was a Bronze for Team *Kata* (with Karen Lundeen and Gloria Coble) at the 1985 Pan American Championships in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.



In 1991, she won two Gold medals – for Individual *Kata* and Team *Kata* (with Susan Vance and Tati Eugenio) – at the Pan Americans in Cuernavaca, Mexico. In 1992, at the ITKF World Championship in Montreal, Canada, she won a Silver Medal with teammate Ron Vance for a new event (at the time), Man/Woman *En-Bu*. She won another Pan American Gold for Individual *Kata* at the Championships in Puerto Rico (1993) and was 4th Place finalist in Buenos Aires (1995). In 1996, she took the Silver Medal for Women's Individual *Kata* at the ITKF World Championship in San Paolo, Brazil.

Around the mid-1990's, Penny began to teach karate, starting at a health club in Marina Del Rey and eventually opening up her dojo, Seaside Shotokan, in Playa del Rey. She kept a very busy schedule, teaching full-time at her dojo and presenting seminars in the area with former AAKF luminaries such as James Yabe, Ray Dalke, James Field and a number of area instructors from Shotokan and other Japanese styles. Penny received the rank of 5th and 6th Dan from Ray Dalke.

Penny was a very private person; to the end, she had the best interest of friends and karate family, *i.e.*, to not worry. So it was with shock and sadness to learn that we have lost one of our own so suddenly, to cancer. The Memorial Service was held on Sunday, November 18, 2012 at her beloved dojo, Seaside Shotokan in Playa del Rey, California.

Sensei Penny Ringwood

(January 7, 1950 – October 31, 2012)

May the journey on your next adventure be as joy-filled as your time with us.