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World Oyama Karate

Honbu Newsletter

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By Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

**SEEDS OF
KAI GAN 開眼**



“Te-Suru” - To immerse yourself totally and completely into your training



Seeds of Kai Gan



It's fantasy to believe your mind controls your body

August 28, 2007—Hot, Hot, Hot! Global Warming?

We have finally finished the *Uchi Deshi in America* script. Well, not completely finished, but the first draft is complete. All summer, Senpai Karl and I have been working on this dream. Now is where all of you come in. Everybody needs to buy lottery tickets, especially ones with big jackpots, like Megaball and Powerball. According to the movie producers I've talked with, we need at least \$1 million to make this movie, so start buying your tickets now!

This summer's news has been dominated by stories on global warming. I don't know what the truth of the matter is, but it's definitely hot in Birmingham. Everyday, we've had triple-digit temperatures. Senpai Karl and I sit in the dojo, look at each other's melting faces, and wonder if fall will ever come. It's easy to imagine that 2007 will be the year of eternal summer. World

Oyama Karate is probably the only place in Birmingham, maybe even in Alabama, with no air conditioning. Until recently, our water fountain was broken. Hot water was all we had to drink. But, we found a deal on a brand new one. The dojo, black belts, and other adult students all pitched in, and now we have ice-cold water with a million-dollar taste.

Each night, at the beginning of training, students are already sweating at "Seiza!" At "Mokuso!", they've got two or three lines of sweat dripping down their faces. At "Mokuso yame!", they open their eyes to the sting of more sweat, and at "Saiko Shihan ni rei!", the sweat splatters on the mat as they bow. By the time we finish warming up, each student is standing in a small puddle. I've become concerned about the condition of the students during class. Traditionally, you don't take water breaks during training, but I don't want anyone dying in my dojo. No one has died in this dojo yet, and I want to keep it that way. People have passed out or fainted, but no one has died.

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..... In reality your body is in control

August 30, 2007—We Have Hope—Fall is Coming!

It feels like the air is getting cooler in the morning and evening—we have hope. Maybe fall will come after all. This morning, I saw a red dragonfly in the dojo parking lot. I see them every year at the end of summer. In Japan, we call them *Akka Tonn Bo*. They symbolize the fall season. There's an old, beautiful song that all the schoolchildren sing about the *Akka Tonn Bo*. I don't know the words in English, so you'll have to take my word for it. When I was a kid, we'd catch dragonflies with a small net and put them in cases. We'd feed them worms until they died a few days later. Dragonflies live near bodies of water so they can lay their eggs. We don't have any water near the dojo, but still they come every year to say hello to me. Sometimes they even say, "Osu!" Whenever I see the dragonflies, my mind goes back to my childhood in Japan. I get a warm nostalgic feeling, remembering myself running through fields and trails with my net and case at

sunset.

The sky now seems to be getting higher and deeper. The blue is becoming sharper and more vibrant. I feel strong, ready to sweat and train. In the middle of summer, you don't have to try to sweat—it's automatic. You sweat when you stand, when you sit, when you eat or sleep. "Just Sweat!" It's easy to live the World Oyama Karate motto in summer. But in fall, I can feel my chi changing. It needs action, I'm ready for the real training to start.

So, all summer we worked on finishing the *Uchi Deshi in America* screenplay. I'll tell you, honestly, we have no idea where the funding for this movie will come from. But we have to aim high, continue chasing this World Oyama Karate dream.

September 1, 2007—The Heart of Kumite

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..... You must train with *contact* to see this point.

Football season starts pretty soon. I love football; I love all sports. The weekend is a great time for me. It's not just a time to play golf, or watch TV, or work in the yard, but it's a chance for me to sit in my office in a quiet dojo. It's a time for me to write, train, and see the big picture of what to teach in the coming week. I might think about so-and-so student, how he's so stiff, but still imagines he can kick some seven-foot-tall guy in the head. How can I make him see that *jodan mawashi geri* doesn't fit him yet, that he should aim for chest-high, or even leg-high?

I thought a lot about basic techniques today. *Kihon Geiko*, Basic Training, is very important—Kumite is the heart of Karate, and Kihon is the heart of Kumite. While most people agree on this point, few really understand how Kihon and Kumite are connected. Before I came to the U.S., my conception of Kihon training was just punching and kicking the air. I didn't see the connection between Kihon and Kumite, but I didn't

question it—I just followed what I'd been taught.

When I began teaching in the United States, I decided that I would be a *Karateka*—I'd devote my life to Karate. Once I made that decision, I began questioning the way I approached training. All styles, not just my former style, said "Kihon training is very important." But, as I mentioned before, Kihon training consisted of punching, kicking, and blocking the air. How did that connect to Kumite?

I had to discover the answers for myself. I delved deeper into my training so that I could find the answers and better teach my students. This meant that I thought about training at every moment, not just in the dojo. Whenever I watched other sports, saw a movie, or dogs and cats, birds, squirrels, I tried to connect what I saw to Karate. Sometimes I went to the zoo. I'd see the bears sleeping, and watch how they slept. I'd see the flamingos and wonder why they always stood in *tsuru*

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ashi dachi. Everything I saw—trees, flowers, beautiful women—I saw everything with a “Karate Eye”. Well, back to Kihon.

In many styles, whenever a new student joins the dojo, they learn all the basic techniques at the same time. All the punches, kicks, *shuto*, blocks—everything is taught together. Wait a minute. A new student is just like a kindergartener. You’re not going to teach them calculus at the same time as $1 + 1 = 2$. It’s the same with Kihon.

The Master and the Grasshopper

Whenever I start thinking, my imagination escalates. My mind travels all over the world, and goes back centuries, even thousands of years. I’ve read a lot about masters in swordsmanship and other martial arts (*Budo*) in ancient China and Japan. They didn’t teach just anyone that wanted to learn. (In World Oyama Karate, though, we’ll teach anybody—the door is always open). In the ancient days, there was no World Series or other sports, no cell-phones or email. People were only concerned with how to survive, get food, how to protect themselves and their family from wild animals or other people. Daily living was much simpler than now.

When some people heard of a *Budo* master, they’d think, “Oh, I need to learn his sword, bo, fighting, mind-control techniques.” They’d go knocking on the master’s door, but the master would hardly ever answer. The master in many of these stories is some kind of skinny old man with a long white beard down to his waist. People wanting to learn from him would keep knocking at the door for a couple weeks, or a couple months. One day the master would open the door. Maybe he’d knock the guy out, and go back inside. Or he might ask, “What do you want?” A person would be lucky to have the chance to speak with the master.

“Oh, master, I want to be your uchi deshi, I want to learn your techniques.”

Then the master would answer something like, “No, I don’t teach anyone. Go home!” and shut the door. At that point, about 99% of people would walk away, muttering, “Who needs you anyway? Stupid old man!” and never return. (These days, if we were to turn potential students away like that, they’d just say, “OK, that’s

fine. I’ll just go across the street where I can pay my money, learn some techniques, and get my Black Belt in a year.” The times have certainly changed!) Anyway, back to the story.

After being turned away, those few people with real guts go home thinking, “I’ve *got* to learn from this master. I’ve *got* to learn World Oyama Karate!” The next day, they knock at the door again. When the master opens it, they declare, “Please, master! I’ll do anything, whatever it takes, just please teach me!”

The master looks them over, and says finally, “Well, OK, you can clean up the yard. Cut down that bamboo, weed the garden, and sweep everything up.” The student would have to do this each morning *before* the master stepped outside. If he were to wait until the master woke up, greet him, *then* clean the yard, the master would most likely never give him another chance. So, the student would do the chores before the master got up. Once the master was awake, the student would sit patiently on his knees waiting. The master would stroke his long beard, sip his tea, and think, “That cloud is coming closer. I think today I will jump on that cloud, then hop onto the next one and float around for the rest of the morning.”

When the master stepped outside, the student would greet him with, “Osu! Good morning!”

The master would remain silent, surveying the yard. He’d stand stroking his long, delicate beard and maybe pick his teeth or sip his tea (this of course was before the age of Starbucks cappuccinos). He wouldn’t say anything, just point to the spots where the student missed a weed, or where the gravel wasn’t smooth, or where the dirt was uneven. The master wouldn’t teach the student anything for a while, but the student would still come to clean the yard, build fences, or whatever job he was assigned. During that time, he had to prove his resolve and respect. The master watched the student, evaluating his character and spirit.

The Lesson Begins

To make a long story short, in ancient times, a master that had discovered and developed fighting techniques was able to so only after spending an unbelievable amount of time training, fighting, sweating, and strug-

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gling. After years of hard work, he'd finally say, "I got it! Now I understand these basic techniques, this fighting strategy!"

Having gone through all of that struggle to make his discoveries, the master was loathe to share his knowledge with just anyone. Before he took on a student, he had to be sure of what kind of person the student was, what kind of character they had. So he'd test them, and test them...and test them, and test them...and test them, and test them...then test them again.

Finally, one day he'd say, "OK, I'll will teach you." But he still wouldn't trust the student, so he'd begin by teaching them indirectly, i.e. having them clean the yard. *Then* he'd teach them *one* technique, *one* stance. The student would spend hours upon hours on just that technique/stance. The master never taught *all* of his techniques at once; it would be impossible.

The master's first lesson might go something like this: "OK, today I will teach you *migi ashi mae Sanchin Dachi*. You need to read **Kyoten Volume I**, page 13. Many people think that the mind controls the body, but that is (*he strokes his long beard and chuckles*) fantasy. In reality, the body controls the mind, unfortunately for some people. Think about it—your body is always influencing your mind. If you stand with your weight *forward*, you feel more like taking action, more offensive. If you stand with your weight *on your heels*, you feel more cautious, more defensive. If you stand with a wide stance, with your knees bent, you feel strong, like you can use your upper body powerfully. When you stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, and bend your knees and ankles, you feel ready to move at any moment. You reserve your power. You can shift your center of gravity from left to right or right to left easily. You can execute kick techniques quickly. If you stand with your feet close together and your hips raised, you feel weak. If you make your fists tight and hold them close at your chin-level, you feel powerful. If you stand with your hands open and further in front of you, you feel more like waiting and blocking."

In all of these examples, the body dictates a person's thoughts and feelings. In Karate, other martial arts, or any sport, people practice the same basic movements over and over again. Why? Because they have to learn each movement/technique with their total body, not just in the mind. The only way to do this is through repeti-

tion; that's the only way to infuse each movement into their muscle memory. Once you've spent enough time training, you can execute basic techniques/movements automatically in an actual fight, game, etc. If you've taken the time to practice basic techniques sharply and correctly, you can win; if not, you'll be in trouble.

So, the master would begin by teaching *one* stance/technique. The student would practice only this technique for the next week, or month, or three months, etc. Then one day, the master would watch and say, "Hmm...that's good. OK, the next technique is *hiza geri*." In ancient times, before a student could begin training, the master would test them. Once training started, the master would still test the student and constantly observe them to see what kind of character they had, what type of potential they had; the master would watch them eat, drink, sleep, always evaluating them.

Back to Basics

I hope no one misunderstands my point. This is the way things were in *ancient, ancient times*. Dojos and other formal martial arts training schools are a relatively recent development. In Japan, when the Tokugawa Shogun came to power in the year 1603, the country entered into a period of inter-provincial peace. Only then did dojos as we think of them today begin popping up. But they still were very traditional in the way they taught and very selective when it came to taking on students. Today, World Oyama Karate accepts *anyone* age 6 and up who wants to learn. (Actually, some of our branches have students even younger, but here at the headquarters we take students 6 and up). The point is that it doesn't make sense to teach new students *all* of the basic techniques at the *same time*. Karate has many, many techniques, and each one requires using the body in a different way. It's impossible to learn them all at once.

Once I came to the United States, I decided that it's best for students to learn a limited amount of techniques over a 2-3 month period. Then, as they move up in rank, begin teaching them more and more. Essentially, I went back to the ancient traditions governing how Karate should be taught. That's why when we started World Oyama Karate, I wrote the textbooks **Kyoten Volumes I-IV**. With regular class attendance, it takes each student about a year to "learn" all of the basic techniques. This is to say that after a year, they have

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become familiar with all of the basic techniques; it takes much longer still to *truly understand* each one in their mind and body. So, for example, new students learn the following basic techniques: **hand**—*seiken, uraken, ago uchi*, **stance**—*sanchin dachi, zenkutsu dachi, kumite no tachi*, **kick**—*hiza geri, mae geri, mawashi geri, mae keage*. This is a lot to work on. For example, *seiken* is different depending on whether it is executed from *Sanchin dachi, zenkutsu dachi, or kumite no tachi*.

If you listen, basic techniques will talk to you. They might tell you that you need to stretch more, or work on your power, speed, or stamina. They'll tell you how to use your legs and upper body, and what stance is best. So, before technique, conditioning and body movement are more important. If technique is the sole focus, then why do boxers go jogging? Why does any sport use running as part of training? It's the same with Karate—you need to build up your conditioning and coordination.

Another important point is that you need to use *contact* in Kihon training. If you just punch and kick the air,

your basic training is not complete. Kihon training uses one breath to execute one technique only (unlike Kumite training, which might use one breath for two or three techniques, or two breaths for one technique). For example, when you practice *seiken*, you first punch the air, making sure to use a good stance, *hikite*, and squeeze your elbow close to your body as you punch. You concentrate on how to utilize the power of your legs in your punches. When you begin making contact, you combine your body and spirit into that punch. Most beginners' minds tell them, "I'm gonna hit! I've gotta punch hard!" This causes their body to stiffen when they make contact. During contact training, they can begin to understand how to relax their body for more power, how to smoothly execute a basic punch.

In other words, beginners tend to focus only on the hand that is punching (or foot that is kicking). They only think about the technique and don't see the bigger picture of how to utilize their total body to execute a punch/kick effectively. When they start making contact, however, they begin to understand what kind of *kamae* they need before the technique and how they need to control their body after the technique to finish



An old samurai receives for the new

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Sweat nourishes the seeds of *Kai Gan*

in a good position. Without contact, they could never grasp this essential training point.

If you don't practice with contact, your techniques will remain only in your mind. You need to *feel* basic techniques at the point of impact. Otherwise your training is just an illusion, without any basis in reality. This is an extremely important point to understand. Think about other sports. If golf players just swing their clubs in training, never hitting the ball, their time is wasted. Can you imagine if baseball players practiced by just *pretending* to throw the ball back and forth, throwing and catching nothing but the air? Many Karate styles don't practice with contact because they believe that if students were to actually punch or kick each other, it would hurt their opponent, or person holding arm-guards, or it might injure the person doing the punching/kicking, or in some cases, if you hit someone with full force, you'll probably kill them. Some instructors don't use contact because they can't afford all the insurance. (Actually, I can kind of understand that—insurance is expensive!) But, my point is, that there are plenty of ways for students to practice *safely* with con-

tact—hitting phone books, arm guards, chest protectors, e.g. Any instructor that says practicing with contact is too dangerous is full of baloney!

Often when I see beginning students practicing *seiken* in *Sanchin dachi* without making contact, I can tell that they have no image in their mind of actually hitting somebody. When I come in front of them and smack their fist, it crumples easily. At that point, they realize the importance of making contact. Once they start training with contact, students understand the basics with their total body. The technique speaks to them and tells them what they need to do to reach the next level.

That is the way to approach basic training. Later, you need to connect Kihon to Kata and Kumite. Each basic technique requires that you use your body in a particular way. In Kata and Kumite training, you begin to understand how to transition smoothly and effectively between different techniques and rhythms in order to develop a successful fighting strategy. As students spend time in basic training, they start to recognize that some techniques (punches, stances, kicks, blocks, etc.) fit together naturally, while others do not. When techniques

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don't fit together naturally for a student, he/she must ask themselves "Why?". If they listen close enough, the technique will tell them—"You need to build up your leg strength," or "You're using enough *hikite* when you punch; you're reserving the power on your opposite side for the next movement." When students listen to the techniques in this way, they can truly understand why Kihon is the heart of Kumite.

World Oyama Karate is both a modern and classical style. It uses both traditional and contemporary approaches to form the most effective system of fighting and training.

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To bring your karate to the next level, you've got to make each basic technique fit you physically and mentally. You have to put each one deeper in your mind and body. Many students never reach this point. The repetition required to reach this level burns them out, and they change their focus to something else. They give up before they are able to reap the benefits of their training.

Society today moves at a much faster pace than when I was growing up. We didn't have TV's, cell phones, or the internet. Time seemed to move much slower, like there was thirty-four hours in a day, rather than twenty-four. But life today is much faster; people often don't have patience for anything that takes time. So, sometimes you need to find different ways to practice the same basic technique in order to hold students' interest and still take the time to deeply get into the technique.

Take *seiken* for example. There are many different angles from which to approach a straight punch in Kihon training. First start in *Sanchin dachi*, using the fluidity of the legs and hips to execute the punch. Next, punch in *Zenkutsu dachi*. Try to feel how to transfer the power of the lower body into the punch. Next, punch in *Kumite no tachi*. See how the *hikite* position is different. Again, focus on utilizing the power of the lower body in punching. All of this is still Kihon training. If they train like this, most students won't burn out so quickly...but maybe a few still will. Karate training teaches students to be patient. Don't rush to finish life—take time to enjoy each moment.

I train everyday; I think about Karate all the time be-

cause I am a *karateka*, a professional. But most students are not. They have only a limited amount of time to devote to training. The rest of their time is reserved for work, family, school, friends, boyfriend/girlfriend, movies, concerts, video games. They come to the dojo maybe twice or three times a week. (It's funny, here at the Headquarters, students on a 3/6/12-month course can come everyday for the same price. The cost is the same whether they come once or four times a week.) Sometimes they come everyday for a while, then disappear, then come back again after a couple months. Whatever the case may be, the point is that they have only a limited to set aside for training in the dojo. In the end, they are often unable to put each basic technique in their mind and body and reach the next level of their training.

If you want to really get into a basic technique, it's not necessary that you train twenty-four hours a day. But you need spend enough time training so that you can plant a seed in your subconscious—you spend enough time training so that this technique is always in the back of your mind when you are not in the dojo. At that point, even while you're at work, with your friends, watching other sports, walking the dog, watching squirrels chase each other in the trees, whatever you might be doing, something you see will trigger your mind, and you'll say something like, "Aha! Now I understand!" You'll experience **KAI GAN**—an epiphany. This eye-opening moment is just the starting point. If you don't chase after it, it'll fade away, and maybe never come again.

There are plenty of examples of this happening in the maths and sciences. A researcher will devote all of their time in the lab or at their desk to a single theory or problem. But they can't stay there twenty-four hours a day. So they take a break, go on vacation, to a museum, listen to music, go dancing...then suddenly the solution hits them. If you plant a seed in your mind, the outside world will talk to you so that you can make discoveries that bring you to the next level. Have you ever heard about this kind of story? I've experienced it many times.

Recently, I've been watching lots of old Japanese movies. They take place during the Meiji Restoration, when the power of the Tokugawa Shogunate was declining, and Japan was opening its borders to Western influence. In one movie, there is a scene where a European general

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(I forget if he was French, Dutch, or British) is teaching samurai the Western style of running and shooting a rifle in battle. The general yells, “Run!” The samurai bend their knees, put their hands on their thighs, and run forward without moving their upper body. The general shakes his head and shouts, “No, no, no! Like this!” He then runs in the same way as we now think of running.

I started thinking about this scene, and realized that in order to shoot a rifle, you don’t need much leg strength. But to fight with a sword, you need a good solid hip position, like in *kiba dachi* or *zenkutsu dachi*; you can’t effectively wield a sword in *tsuru ashi dachi*. So, all of their lives, the samurai had trained themselves to keep a low center of gravity. That’s why they couldn’t just sprint off when the general told them to.

I always used to tell uchi deshi to think about karate twenty-four hours a day, not just in the dojo. You should put your training in your subconscious—see the world through training eyes. So, even when you watch TV, eat, clean, whatever, you connect it to your training. That way, discoveries will come to you.

So to reach the next level, you need to plant the seeds of discovery in your mind and body. You do this by focusing intensely in your training so that the seed stays with you when you are outside the dojo. I see lots of students who never get to this point. But for those who stick it out, the discoveries are immense.

I really enjoy teaching the Friday night Black Belt class. Everyone is so unique, so many different characters—mostly because they are almost all over 40 years old. But they still come and sweat. When they stretch, they used to be able to spread their legs all they way down to the floor, but now...But they all still have seeds of training inside them. Even when they’re away from the dojo, they can water their seeds. I believe that once you get a Black Belt, you can really enjoy Karate. You can better understand the training points, even if you make mistakes, you can still understand the larger picture.

Anyway, everyone loves the weekend; I love the weekend. But now I have to go cut the grass.

September 4, 2007—Meeting My Rival

It’s funny how just before a holiday, dojo attendance drops, then afterwards, it shoots up. I guess a lot of students get a guilty conscience about eating or drinking too much or being too lazy for too long.

When I was young, I liked to compete. At the time I started my Karate training, there were no tournaments, so my competition was in the dojo. Someday, I’ll write my autobiography, but for now I’ll just share a little bit with you. In the dojo, I always had a rival. He was the same age as me, and twice as big. In Mas Oyama’s book, he’s mentioned a lot. His name is Haruyama. He was a monster. Even my brother, Soshu (who’s a pretty big guy) respected his strength. He was strong both physically and mentally. He had the kind of face that made you look down. I don’t want to say that his face was *monstrous*, just very *powerful*. Some people just have very powerful faces. His was covered with pimples and scabs and he never smiled. When I started training at age 14, I was about 110 lbs., Haruyama was about 180 lbs., like a gorilla.

In the days before Mas Oyama had a dojo, my oldest brother, Hiroshi, was one of his students. He taught me a couple things when I was younger. By the time I started, Mas Oyama had a dojo, and my brother Soshu was one of the instructors.

On my first day, Haruyama, Soshu, and other Black Belts were there. At that time, each class lasted four and a half hours. The first two hours were spent punching and kicking—nonstop. All the beginners were placed at the front of the class, surrounded by Mas Oyama, Soshu, and other Black Belts—there was no escape. If you didn’t kiai, there were plenty of people around to smack your head or punch or kick you. We started with 100 *mae geri*, 100 *mawashi geri*, and on and on—kiai never stopping. I’m not sure why, but for some reason, I wore a Judo gi that first day. A Judo gi is much heavier than a Karate gi, and as mine became soaked in sweat, it got even heavier. The first 100 *mae geri*, I could reach the face, at the next 100, my kicks dropped to the stomach, and by the next 100, I could only kick groin level.

My kiai wasn’t a kiai—it was a constant scream for help, for someone to rescue me. I had to keep going. If I stopped, I knew the other guys would kill me.

Somehow I managed to survive the first couple hours.

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After that, we did Kata. Of course I didn't know anything, so I just bumped into everyone. Then we did partner training. My arms and legs were so heavy, I was desperately thirsty and hungry, but I had to keep going.

At the end of class, we did Kumite. At that time, ours was the only dojo that sparred with contact. People would get poked in the eye, kicked in the groin, knocked out, and would have to be dragged outside. I felt like I was in a slaughterhouse. I tried not to make eye contact with anyone. I was afraid that if I did, they'd call me next to fight. So I just looked down. But—*Da-da-da-dun!!!* I couldn't escape my destiny. I was called up.

Oh no! Why had I come here? (Later I'll tell you the reason). They called me and the smashed-pimple-faced guy to stand up. I was an ant facing Godzilla. I thought maybe there was a mistake.

"Me?" I asked. I couldn't stand up.

"You!" my brother answered.

"But I just got here today. I don't know how to fight."

"I hear you've been in lots of street fights...just like that."

I was living with my mother at that time, and to make a long story short, I was getting into trouble. I found out later that my brother had brought me to the dojo to straighten me out. But in my mind, I was a goody-goody; I never caused trouble.

"You fight at school, and everywhere else—now you can fight here," my brother continued.

"Stand up!" shouted Mas Oyama. I stood up and slowly approached Haruyama. I smiled, trying to talk nice. "Hey, I don't have anything against you."

Mas Oyama yelled "*Kamaete!*" and I shrugged my shoulders. He yelled it again, and I put my hands up. "*Hajime!*" The command to begin was just like a death sentence, like someone flipping the switch.

Haruyama came slowly toward me. I remember it

clearly. He was gave a low, deep kiai, "Isha, isha, isha!" It was like a whisper from Hell. All other students disappeared from my view. As he inched closer, I moved back. He lowered his eyes and growled like a demon, "C'mon!"

I punched at him. My fist stopped about a foot from his chest. I looked over at Mas Oyama and Soshu as if to say, "Is that good enough? Can we stop now?" Haruyama kicked my stomach, slapped my face, and did a *mawashi geri* to my head. I fell to the floor, seeing stars. My head felt like an atomic bomb had gone off. I felt like I was going to die, but something deep inside me said, "Damnitt, I'm going to fight, I'm not going to take this!"

I couldn't move. Some other students came and revived me. I could breathe again. I stood up. Haruyama growled again, "Yeah!" I tried to attack him, but he blocked everything easily. He hit my ribs, slapped my face, and kicked my arm until it was numb. I think it was a knee kick that put me down the second time, but I can't be sure. We kept going. I lost count of how many times I was knocked out. By the end, my blood and tears had transformed my innocent face into something resembling a smashed tomato. I don't know why I thought about this childhood memory today.

September 16, 2007—Get Ready for Action!

Today is beautiful. It's such a blessing to have changing seasons. The sky is a deeper, richer blue, and the air is fresh and crisp. All summer was hot and humid; everything seemed to melt from the absence of rain. But the day before yesterday, tropical storm Humberto delivered a cleansing downpour, washing away what was left of summer.

I feel refreshed whenever the seasons change. In the dojo, we change the class schedule each season. I'm excited to start the fall schedule tomorrow night. It's getting close to the Japan Cup. Next month, I'll travel out to San Francisco and Lakeland, FL for clinics and promotions. I'm excited to see all of those people and making them sweat! I love Karate; the coming of fall has made me refreshed and ready to train. I'm sure you feel the same way.

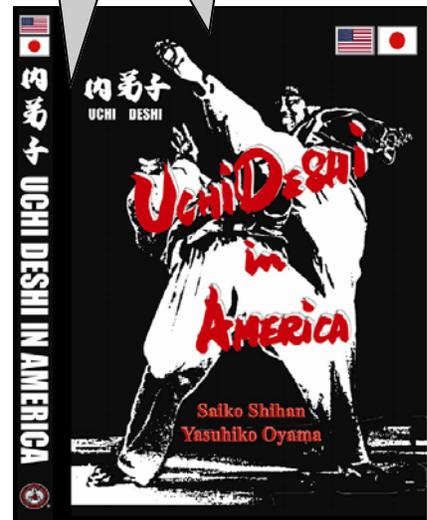
Just sweat! OSU!

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Editor-in-Chief: Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama
Editors: Senpai Karl Julian
Graphic Artist: Sensei Masa Takahashi
Technical Assistant: Senpai Tony Ching

World Oyama Karate Honbu Dojo
1804 29th Avenue South, Homewood, AL 35209
Phone: (205) 879-4841 Fax: (205) 879-4849
www.worldoyama.com

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