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World Oyama Karate

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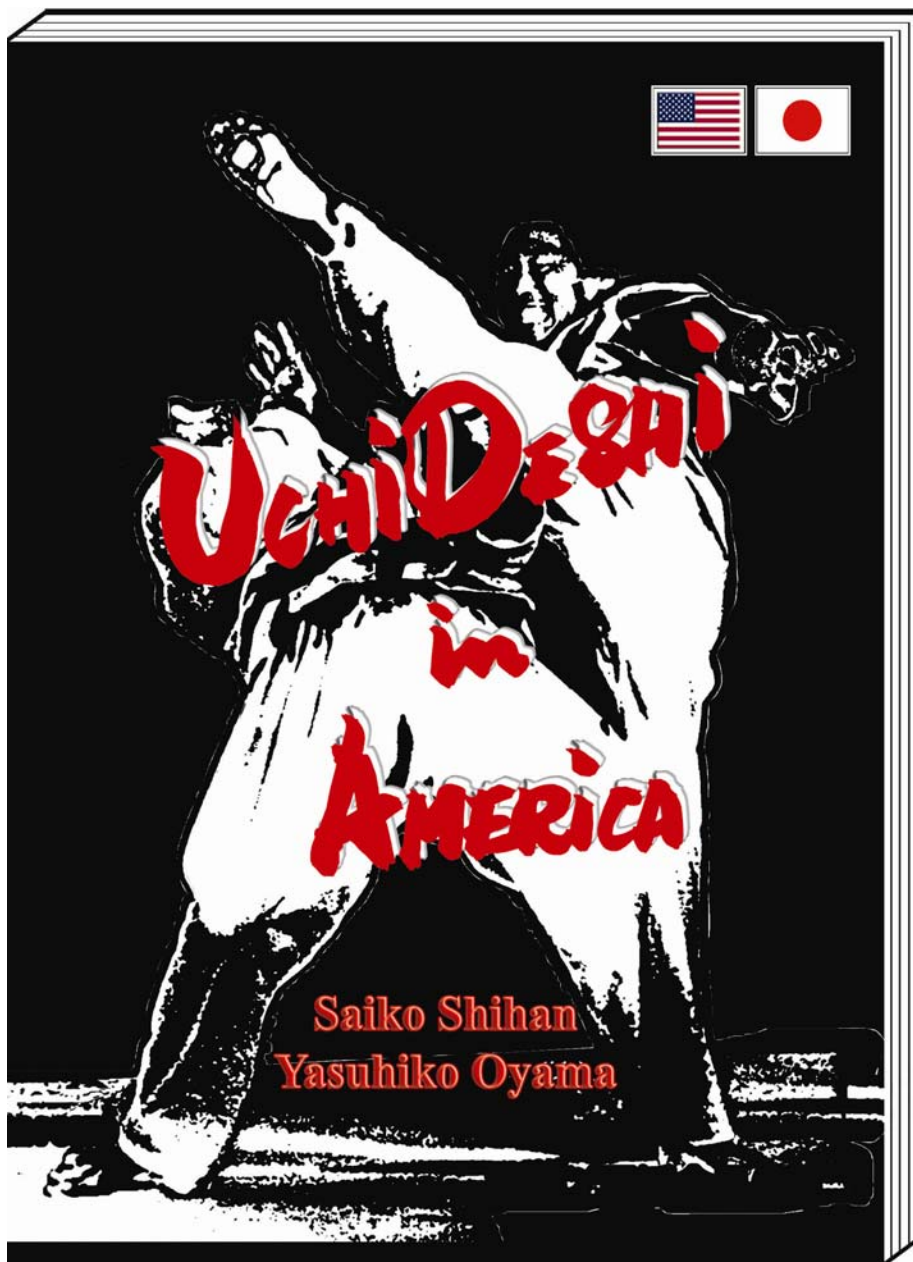
内弟子

In America

UCHI

DESHI

By Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama



Message from

Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

Founder, World Oyama Karate

Happy new year to everyone! At the beginning of each year, I'm always reminded of how lucky we are to be alive and in good health. If I don't continue to train and stay in good health, my passion and ambition will fade away. I can still see the sky, feel the warmth of the sun, touch the rain...all of those things are wonderful. We should appreciate each moment that we are alive and well and never take anything for granted.

When I first came to the U.S. about 35 years ago, I realized that I carried a tremendous duty and responsibility on my shoulders. I would have to work much harder in my new position. Back in Japan, I was the top instructor, but I never had to question the way I taught. I used the same system and methods as the instructors before me. I never questioned how basic techniques fit with Kata and Kumite, or how to connect Kihon, Kata, and Kumite effectively.

But once I'd gotten here, I thought to myself, "Wait a minute. I need to uncover the bigger picture. I need to get into each technique on a deeper level and discover the strong and weak points of each one. I need to figure out how to connect each one for a better fighting strategy." In America, I'd have to work much harder to get back to the origins of

Message From Saiko Shihan ... Continue

every aspect of Karate. I wanted to make sure that I wasn't teaching imitations or anything fake. I was already over 30 years old, but I felt reborn in my training. As I continued working harder, I felt the excitement and freshness of discovering Karate anew.

Over the years, I've produced many essays, books, and videos about Karate training. But I wanted to write something that would also appeal to people without training experience. What could I write that would appeal to a wider audience and make them feel a connection to the beauty of Karate training?

I'd read one or two novels about Karate but they weren't so great. I challenged myself to write a Karate novel that ordinary people could feel a connection to. Most any kind of book or movie about Karate showcases flashy techniques and superhuman feats. People fly through the air like Superman, and leap effortlessly from roof to roof. It might be great visually, but nothing about it is rooted in reality.

I wanted to write something where the audience could see their own life experiences in the story, something they could read and say, "Yeah, I've felt like that. That's the same kind of thing I went through." Somebody needed to write a Karate book like that.

So I tried. And continued trying harder and harder. Karate has made my life exciting, so I need to give something back to Karate. Something that could reach out to people beyond the limits of age, religion, and culture.

At last, my novel is finished.

I've taught many uchi deshi over the years. Whenever I teach them, I have to invest all of my energy into doing so because of the great dedication involved in their training. Each uchi deshi has their own personal story of challenge and struggle, a great human drama that everyone can relate to from one angle or another.

Uchi Deshi in America, my first novel, will hopefully be published by the end of this month or in February. Be sure to check the website for information about ordering the book. In this issue of the newsletter, I want to share with you some selections from the novel. I hope you enjoy it.

With the publication of this book, my dream, my passion, is not finished yet. I need to find the next goal. In a previous newsletter issue, I wrote about aiming high. If you aim high and dedicate yourself, anything is possible.

OSU!

Uchi Deshi in America

Prologue

"Alright, this is the final," the chief referee, Takahashi, told Antonio and I at the center of the mat. "Let's have a good fight. Show me good technique." As he looked into my eyes, his burning gaze told me that I'd better win.

The eyes of the entire crowd focused on us. I couldn't believe I'd made it to the championship. I had to win. I should win, I was an uchi deshi—I'd trained more than anyone. But only moments before, I could barely walk after receiving a straight back kick to my groin in the semifinals. Although I'd won from my opponent's disqualification, the throbbing sting was nearly intolerable. I didn't believe it would be possible for me to continue. But when they called my name for the final and I stood before Antonio and the chief referee, I felt no pain. My desire to be champion and the adrenaline pumping through my body transformed me into a different person.

"Judges ready!" Sensei Takahashi looked around the mat at the four corner judges. "Time keeper ready!"

He then bent down and addressed us, "*Kamaete!*" We squared off. "*Hajime!*"

I crashed into Antonio with a left-hand punch. He blocked my right reverse punch, but I landed a solid low kick to his left thigh. "Don't give him space, in-fight!" Sempai Kato coached me from the sideline.

I tried to attack Antonio in close, but he kept moving to the side so I couldn't catch him. Every so often, he'd check my movement with a front snap kick just above my belt, sending the pain flooding back to my groin. My chest, arms and legs shrunk at the impact. I grit my teeth, growled, and pushed forward. Despite of the pain coursing through my entire body, I had to keep fighting.

Antonio was extremely limber and had much more experience than me. He executed a smooth roundhouse kick to my face with his right foot. I blocked, and he immediately followed with a left back spin kick. The crowd gasped. I kept my hands up and continued pushing forward as his kicks shattered my forearms. If I gave him space to kick, his feet flew at my head like angry hornets attacking an

Uchi Deshi In America ... Continue



Top Samurais (former Uchi Deshis) - Sensei Tetsu, Sensei Taru, Sensei Hide, and Sensei Masa

intruder.

As long as I stayed in close, he couldn't kick. My punches and knee kicks had more power than his. I kept closing the distance, not giving him an inch. Everything moved in fast-forward. We fought for three minutes, but it only felt like ten seconds.

"Time!" shouted the timekeeper as he threw a small yellow bean bag onto the mat. Sensei Takahashi stepped between us. We stood on our marks and faced the front. "Judges, *Hante!*" Sensei Takahashi commanded. Two judges raised their flags for Antonio, but the other two and Sensei Takahashi declared it a draw.

As we prepared for overtime, Antonio looked calm, but I could hear his heavy breathing.

"You have a chance now, he's tired!" Kato shouted behind me. "You're an uchi deshi, you've trained more than anybody".

He was right. I faced Antonio and felt a surge of confidence. I was an uchi deshi. I'd trained more than him or anyone else. I had the advantage in overtime. This was my fight, my time. I wouldn't lose.

"Judges and time keeper ready!" Sensei Takahashi looked

around the mat. "*Kamaete! Hajime!*"

I shouted and charged forward, ready to destroy Antonio.

Mr. Cosmopolitan

For about a week after Yuriko dumped me, I couldn't do anything except get drunk and be miserable. But even alcohol didn't have its usual effects. Everything I saw reminded me of her. I couldn't relax. I'd lay in bed and stare at the ceiling. Flashing images of her and I would play in my mind. Hours would pass by, and suddenly the sun was up. My world had been turned upside down, and there was nothing I could do about it. For hours and hours, I'd just sit and stare at the wall, stewing in my own misery. As far as I was concerned, it was the end of the world.

Eventually, my emotional chaos started to settle down. I still felt miserable and drained of energy, but I could at least function on a normal level again. My parents were very careful around me, afraid that I might explode at any moment. On graduation day, I skipped all the parties and went to my room, drinking sake alone with the television.

During the next few weeks, I tried to get in touch with

Uchi Deshi In America ... Continue



Little monster against Samurai

Yuriko, but I couldn't get a hold of her. Actually, I just called once. The recording I got said her number had been changed. I got the message. For a month after graduation, I just stayed around the house, watching TV and sleeping late. I still didn't want to see any of my friends. Most of them already had jobs anyway. One day my father came home early from work. I think he felt it was finally safe to approach me. "Masataro," he said, "let's go out and get some dinner."

We went to one of his regular *yakiniku* restaurants in Ikebukuro ward. "You want beer or sake," he asked me as we sat down to order.

"Beer's fine," I answered. I usually liked beer, but recently, I couldn't taste it. The same with food. Nothing had any taste or flavor. The waitress brought the food, and my father started cooking the meat and put some on my plate. I took a few bites, but I really wasn't that hungry.

"If you don't eat, you can't get your strength back. You've lost weight the past month, Masataro. You should eat more."

I took a few more bites. We cooked and ate in silence. Finally my father said, "Masataro, why don't you go to America?"

"Go where? What do you mean?"

"You're not cut out for the white-collar business world. You don't want to sit behind a desk with mounds of paper all day do you?"

"Not really."

"I know, see? You should get out of Japan. See the world, study and experience a different life. America's an exciting place, why don't you go and see a different world?"

At first, my father's words seemed distant, caught in the fog that had surrounded me since the breakup with Yuriko. But words like "get out", "exciting", "different world" and "America" lit up my mind. I could escape. I wouldn't have to face my friends. There wouldn't be any Yuriko in America! I'd be free, in a brand new world. America! Yeah, I could go to America! The fog hanging over me began to clear; I saw my destiny on the horizon. America! Yuriko, I'll show you who I really am! I don't even need you, I've got America! Images of blonde girls with big breasts and blue eyes fluttered in my head. In America, there'd be sandy beaches and warm clear oceans. I'd drive around in a convertible and find adventure on the open road. I'd open the door to my balcony every morning and find blue skies in the land of opportunity waiting for me. Yeah, America! Everything in America would be big and glamorous and exciting. I could buy a house with a huge garden and a swimming pool.

But, how was all that going to work? I didn't speak Eng-

Uchi Deshi In America ... Continue

lish. Sure, I could make a new start, but how? I think my dad saw my thoughts as I pondered the logistics of my new adventure. “My old sempai has a karate dojo in America.”

“A what? Karate?”

“Yeah, he’s had a full-contact karate dojo in America for a long time now.”

“Karate?” My dad had a long history of involvement the in K-Karate organization in Japan. K-Karate was one of the biggest Karate organizations in the world. One of his *sempai* was Shihan Goyama. Years ago, Shihan Goyama had founded the World Oyama Karate Organization. Even so, my dad still kept in touch with him. Shihan Goyama was well-known in Japan. His picture appeared on the cover of various magazines and books and in the news. When I was in high school, my dad made me study K-Karate for a couple years at the headquarters in Tokyo. Once I got to college though, I played soccer instead and told him I was too busy with schoolwork to continue training. But now, was he suggesting that I go to America to study karate again? Before, America seemed like a shiny beacon on the horizon, but every time he said “karate”, the light faded.

“You can go to America and study karate as an uchi deshi,” he continued.

“You mean like ‘uchi deshi’ in the old days? That kind of uchi deshi?” I imagined an ancient warrior living in a dojo high up in the mountains, exposed to the elements, trying to cultivate his fighting spirit.

“Pretty much. I mean, it’ll be a little different, you’ll be in America, but you can train every day, study English, build up your body and mind...it’s a great opportunity! America is the ‘land of opportunity’, baseball, and Elvis. People from all over the world go there to make their fortune. Think of all the wonderful and interesting people you’ll meet.” He had this big smile. I wasn’t sure that I’d want to be an uchi deshi, but he made it sound so exciting. He continued, “You know, if I were young like you, I’d go in a heartbeat. Most people just go to America a couple weeks and sightsee. But if you live there, you have a chance to really experience American life and culture. You can get into the heart of the country, know what I mean?”

Dad kept smiling. I had a basic idea of what an uchi deshi was, it was a hard life. But somehow, being an uchi deshi in America seemed appealing. If my dad had said, “you can go be an uchi deshi in Hokkaido,” I would’ve replied



Training, Training, Sweat, Sweat, Sweat.

Uchi Deshi In America ... Continue

immediately, “No way! I don’t want to be a prisoner!” But whenever he said “America”, I automatically thought about sunshine and beaches and beautiful women.

“Masataro, I can see that you don’t want to sit all day behind a desk and talk to people about business—you’re not ready for that yet. If you go to America, you can learn English and have all kinds of experiences. You can become cosmopolitan!”

Yeah, “cosmopolitan”...I liked the sound of that. I’d become cosmopolitan and come back and shock Yuriko. I decided I wanted to go.

“I already called my sempai. He said you can come anytime. I told him you could come at the end of April.”

That was only about 10 days away, but I said OK. I was excited about my new future. I ate and drank a lot that night. Everything tasted wonderful again. I appreciated the opportunity my father had given me. I was going to be cosmopolitan.

Training

During training, the Shihan always held a *shinai*, a bamboo stick, in his right hand. His presence alone transformed the energy inside the dojo. My heart raced. The effect of the Shihan on the dojo’s atmosphere was like a lightning bolt striking the water inside a bathtub. When he was halfway down, he shouted, “Yanagisawa! Put on pads and receive for Kato. Totani, you’re on the bag. Takemori, put the pads on Masataro!”

“Osu!”

“Come over here, Masataro!” said Sensei Takemori. He pulled out two large pads from underneath the stairs and fastened them around my thighs with old belts and duct tape. The chest protector was made of black canvas and filled with hard foam four inches thick. I felt like I was wearing an enormous corset when Sensei tied the strings behind my back. He pulled the headgear down on my head and gave me two kick pads to hold. When he was finished, I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I looked like some kind of massive turtle-robot.

Shihan laughed as he stepped on the mat. “Looks good, Masataro!”

“Osu!”

“Alright!” Shihan announced. “First set is three minutes, then four, five, five, and four minutes. Five sets!”

“OSU!”

“Takemori, tell Masataro your combinations so he can receive it.” The Shihan walked over to the timer at the edge of the mat.

“Osu! My stance is right foot front,” Takemori began.

“Osu.”

“So, first I’ll do right foot *mae geri*, right-left punch, right knee kick, then I’ll push you back and do a *ushiro geri*, then either *mawashi geri* or *soto mawashi*, depending on the distance.”

I had absolutely no idea what he was talking about, and even less about what I was supposed to be doing. Takemori then added, “Sometimes, I might do a *ushiro mawashi geri* instead of a *ushiro geri*.”

“Osu. A what?”

“I got five different combinations I’m working on, but I’ll start out simple. You got it?”

“Uh, osu, um...”

“Let’s go!” shouted the Shihan, stomping the *shinai*.

“Just hold the pads up good and don’t move so much.”

“Osu.”

“Go!” The Shihan started the timer. I faced Takemori and hoped for the best. Takemori’s first hits rattled my chest. His punches felt like sledgehammers driving into my ribcage. His knee kick to my solar plexus knocked the wind out of me, and I doubled over.

“Keep the pads up!” shouted Takemori.

I grunted and gasped for air. As Takemori went to kick, I pulled my arms close against my head. The power of the kick shot through the pads and into my skull. I crashed hard on the mat with a thud. I just laid there groaning, unable to move because of all the equipment I was wearing.

“C’mon,” said Takemori as he hoisted me up. “We’re not finished yet.”

“Osu.” My vision blurred. The lights around me pulsed.

“You need to keep a good *kamae*. Bend your knees, and keep your center-of-gravity lower.” Takemori was scolding me. Like it was my fault for being knocked out.

“Masataro!” said Shihan. “You need to *kiai* more. If you don’t shout, if you don’t use your *kiai* when he’s attacking

Uchi Deshi In America ... Continue



Yoko Zuna Asa Shou Ryu with (former Uchi Deshi) Sensei Takahashi and Mrs. Takahashi

you, you won't have any power, all your energy will shrink up, and you'll wind up on the floor again."

"Osu!"

"Let's go!" shouted Shihan, standing beside me and holding the *shinai*. Takemori exploded into his attack. "Uh, sha!" I let out, trying to remain standing.

"Louder!" shouted the Shihan. He whacked the back of my thighs with the *shinai*.

"UH, SHA!" I jumped from the sting of the bamboo.

"Louder! More!" the Shihan smacked me harder.

"YEEAH SHAH!" As Takemori continued his relentless assault, I felt trapped beneath the pads. I couldn't escape. My senses overloaded. Shouts rang through my head from every direction. Buckets of sweat poured out from my skin.

"C'mon, kiai!" the Shihan smacked me again.

"YASHA!"

"Louder!" Smack.

"EEEYAASHA!"

"MORE!" Smack, smack.

"AAAAAGGGGHHHH!" My eyes glazed over. Tears began streaming down my face. I shut out everything around me. Takemori continued attacking from the front, the Shihan from the rear. I lost all sense of time and space. I could only focus on my screaming. On and on the nightmare continued. Then everything stopped. The five rounds were over. A puddle of sweat surrounded me.

Slowly, my senses returned. Takemori took off the pads and I stared at myself in the mirror. Steam rose from my body. My reflection seemed transformed in a way that I could not explain.

"Not too bad, Masataro," said the Shihan as he left the training mat. "Catch your breath, and then it's your turn."

"Osu?" I'd assumed I was already finished.

Uchi Deshi In America ... Continue

Strawberry Milkshake

Four days before the tournament, Shihan announced, "Starting tomorrow, you guys don't need to push it so much. Just check your form and rest up to re-build your condition." When he'd said that, a wave of relief swept over me. But I was also anxious about whether or not I had trained enough, if I was ready.

In the week leading up to the tournament, the energy of the dojo changed. Excitement and nervous tension filled the air. The day after our encounter, Antonio didn't show up. But the next day, he came on his own, not with Cynthia. Cynthia had been coming to train every day. She and Amanda, another student, were going to do a Kata and self-defense demonstration at the tournament.

During training, we never really had a chance to talk much, but every once in a while, we'd make eye contact. Whenever she caught my eye, she'd turn away. I didn't know what to do.

I wished I could speak better English so I could talk to her with confidence. At the dorm, we had a collection of English conversation books. I'd study them and practice in my room, but whenever I tried to talk to students, my mind would go blank, and it was anyone's guess what might come out of my mouth. I remember when I first arrived, I tried to speak with Caroline, one of the older female students.

"Hello, are you going?" I meant to ask her how she was doing.

"Going where?" She tried her best to understand me.

"Osu..."

"Going home?"

"Er, osu, thank you. I'm cleaning," I then hurried over to grab a broom and start sweeping.

I could hear her call after me, "Do you need a ride or something?" but I didn't turn around. I'd gotten a little better since then, but I still needed to learn more.

Besides fighting in the tournament, the uchi deshi are also responsible for setting up everything the day before. Some black belts from the dojo came to the gym to help us set up the mat, trophies, flags, seating, and everything else. We had to make a lot of preparations at the dorm too. Uchi deshi from New York, California, and other branches fighting in the tournament were going to stay at the dormitory. So in the afternoon, Kato and I went to buy enough food for everyone.

Staying busy helped me keep my mind off the tournament. If I started thinking about competing the next day, my



Run, Run, Run, Love to Run ???

Uchi Deshi In America ... Continue

chest got tight and I started to sweat. My heart would pound, and anxiety would surge through my body. I tried to keep busy so I didn't have time to think about fighting in front of all the people that would be watching.

Like most things in America, grocery stores are massive compared to what we have back in my hometown. When I walked in with Kato, the lights and endless rows of food overwhelmed me. I couldn't imagine how I'd ever learn to find my way around. But Kato just grabbed a cart and zoomed down the aisles as if he'd memorized the location of every single product. He amazed me by how quickly he filled the cart with chicken, pork, juice, beer, and vegetables as if the cart were driving itself and he was just holding on for the ride. Before heading to the register, we stopped in an aisle filled with cookies and cakes. I pretended not to notice him adding his favorite contraband, Oreos, to the cart.

"Masataro, you thirsty?" Kato asked in the parking lot.

"Osu!" I was always thirsty.

"I know a good milkshake place near here. Let's go."

"Osu!" We went to Dairy Queen. It's basically the same kind of restaurant as McDonald's but with lots of ice cream. It was late afternoon. A couple people were in the dining area, but otherwise it was empty. Behind the counter, a massively round, sweaty white lady was struggling to clean the coffee pot. As we came in, she turned to greet us with, "May I help you?" All the bones in her face were hidden beneath a chubby layer of fat, which made her head the exact shape of a basketball. She had the silhouette of a double-scoop ice cream cone.

At the other end of the counter, a tall skinny guy with a horse face was doing paperwork. "Masataro, I want a strawberry milkshake. You go ahead and order for us," Kato said as he went to sit down.

"What? Me?"

"Yeah, go ahead and order."

He sat down and I turned to face the smiling basketball-faced lady. I took a deep breath and gripped the counter with both hands. "Two...two... strawberry... milkshake."

"Excuse me?" Her eyes widened and a look of concern crept across her face. I replayed my order back in my head...yes, those were definitely the correct words. Maybe my Japanese accent was too thick. I tried slowing it down more. "Two...straw...berry...milk...shake." The response was the same. She looked over at Horse-face, then they both looked at me. I could feel the heat of everyone's eyes upon me. Off to my right, Kato had his head



Soshu and Sensei Saito

down trying to contain his laughter. He'd set me up, he knew this would happen! I took a deep breath and looked her hard in the eye, "Milk...shake...strawberry...two." She lurched forward as I spoke, trying to catch each syllable.

Again, she turned to Horse-face and they both stared at me with confused faces. Then suddenly, Horse-face burst out, "Oh! Strawberry milkshake!" with all the enthusiasm of having discovered fire.

"Oh! You're right, strawberry milkshake!" chimed the fat lady. She smacked the counter and began laughing.

"Strawberry milkshake! That's what he wanted!" she said to the workers in the kitchen. I hadn't noticed them before, but three women, two black and one white, had been anxiously watching the whole thing from the back. Once they heard what I'd ordered, they clapped their hands and

Uchi Deshi In America ... Continue



Mountain Training with Soshu

shouted “Oh, Strawberry milkshake!” like they’d just solved a mysterious riddle. They laughed and repeated “Strawberry milkshake” over and over, making it into a song.

Kato burst into laughter until tears streamed down his face. I was the only person in the entire restaurant who wasn’t laughing. My face was hot and beads of sweat were running down my neck. My arms were so tense that I thought I’d rip off the counter at any second. After a moment, the fat lady returned and placed four milkshakes in front of me. She was proud to have solved the riddle. But she grew concerned when she saw my face. “Two,” I tried to explain, “two, two.”

Puzzled, she looked over at Horse-face again. “That’ll be \$5.50 please,” he said to me. I didn’t want to go through the whole ordeal again, so I just bought all four.

In the truck, I was relieved to finally get out of there. “You know, Masataro,” Kato said between sips of milkshake as he drove, “everyone goes through that at least a couple of times. Relax; it was a good experience for you.”

I was still tense and sweaty and couldn’t really taste the milkshake. But after I calmed down a couple minutes later, I tasted the sweetest drink I’d ever had. I felt that I could probably drink all four of the milkshakes after all.

“One thing to remember, is when you want to say how many you want of something, always use your fingers, like this,” he put his milkshake between his legs and demonstrated with his free hand, “One, five, four, like that. Otherwise you might mix it up like today. Gestures are international,” he chuckled and returned to his drink.

Kato had tricked me, but it didn’t matter because the milkshakes were delicious. I just hoped that the lady and Horse-face would be there the next time I went in so I didn’t have to go through the whole process again.

Angel in the Dojo

Around the beginning of April, more and more students would show up for Thursday night fight class. There was a big tournament at the end of the month, so everyone wanted to get in shape. People without any desire to compete still came for the workout and fight training. Shihan Goyama would arrange the partners at each class. I was usually put with an older man, or one of the middle-aged women. I began to wonder why Shihan did this. Did he see me as being in the same condition as them? Was my skill level the same as theirs? Was he testing me?

One Thursday he called my name as he was matching up partners. “Masataro!”

“OSU!”

“Cynthia!”

A squeaky “Osu!” answered from across the dojo floor.

“Face each other!” He continued calling out names and arranging partners as Cynthia made her way towards me. When she stood and faced me, I nearly jumped back. Cynthia was no middle-aged mother. She was young, maybe 20, with a slender cat-like body. Smooth and graceful with piercing blue eyes. Her face was strong and soft at the same time, accentuated by her blond hair tied back and dancing on her neck and the collar of her dogi. I’d never seen the kind of blue radiating from her eyes.

Uchi Deshi In America ... Continue



Tournament Demonstration

Like the summer sky and cool ocean depths melted into a powerful trance of color.

I tried to look away, settle my racing heart and catch my breath. But the magnetism of her eyes would always draw my gaze back to her. I looked down and saw her brown belt hanging delicately from her supple waist. Brown had never before looked so beautiful. Initially, her expression was stern like she would pounce at any moment. But then she lowered her eyes and smiled and whispered, “Osu.”

“*Mae ri mashita!*” I nearly shouted, but I kept my lips tight, trying to coax the feeling back into my hands and feet. Once everyone had been paired up, Shihan shouted the orders for the drill. “This side roundhouse kick—face, middle, or low. Other side block!” The power of his voice hurled me back into reality. I remembered that I was training. “*Hajime!*”

We started moving around. Cynthia gave out these little high-pitched “ei-ei” sounds as she moved, like a sweet melody. I tried to figure out how to kick her. She was almost as tall as me, but compared to my other partners, she seemed so slender, fragile even. With my other partners, of course I controlled my power when kicking. But they were all big, like moving sandbags. I’d never worried that I might break them with the impact of my kicks. I kicked her about shoulder high, and she blocked it easily with a “ei-ei”. Her *kiai* sounded like a chirping bird, and made me feel warm and bubbly. As she moved, my eyes focused on her firm breasts, bouncing gently in her white sports bra.

Suddenly, I felt a stinging smack across my backside. I turned and faced Shihan holding his shinai and scowling at me. “Masataro! What’s the matter with you? Don’t you see she’s a brown belt! She can handle it; she’s not a

baby. Go ahead, kick harder!” As he said that, I looked into his eyes and saw he knew exactly what I was feeling. His expression was fierce, but his eyes gave out a knowing smile.

I turned back to face Cynthia. “It’s OK. C’mon.” She invited me to attack harder, so I did. She continued to block without any difficulty and I began to feel more comfortable, more relaxed. “*Yame!*” commanded Shihan. We stood looking at each other. My knees began to melt as her eyes pulled my heart up into my throat. I forgot all about Yuriko, Japan, and running eight miles. A sense of peace and hope spread over me.

“OK, other line attack! *Hajime!*”

Cynthia began moving a little differently, like a tiger on the prowl. Her *kiai* became a little stronger as she switched her feet and kicked hard at my face. Luckily my hand was there to block it. Where in the hell did she get all that power? As she continued circling me and kicking, I was amazed that so much speed and strength could fit in such a delicate, slender body.

I began to notice a pattern in her kicking. Whenever she’d kick at my face with her left foot, she’d follow up with her right to my left leg. Once I realized this pattern, I could block easier. After two or three times, she started the same attack again. I blocked the kick to my face, and saw her look down at my left leg as she prepared to kick. As she shouted, I picked up my left foot to block. She quickly switched feet and I felt a sharp thud against my right jaw as she kicked my face again. My body went limp and stars circled inside my eyes before everything went black as I hit the floor.



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10530 Old Hwy. 280, Chelsea
8231 Veteran's Circle, Trussville

(205) 879-4841
(205) 678-0433
(205) 661-6300

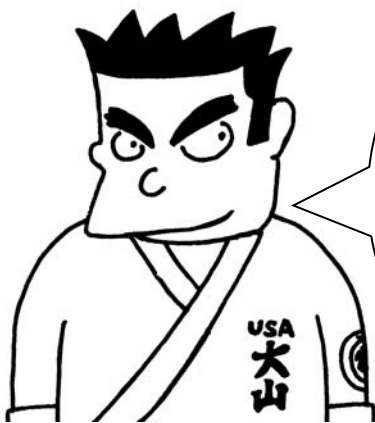
General Admission
Morning Kumite \$15
Knockdown Kumite \$20
All Day \$30

San Francisco Fighter's Cup - June 10

**HOT!
WET!**

Summer Camp

July 19th - 22nd - Gulf Shore, AL



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America."

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