

SHOTOKAN

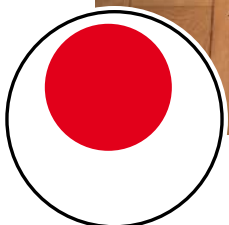
KARATE MAGAZINE

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**STUART
AMOS**

5th Dan HDKI

**KARATE
WITHOUT
BORDERS**



THE MAGAZINE FOR ALL SHOTOKAN KARATEKA



SHOTOKAN KARATE MAGAZINE

EDITORIAL

I've wanted an interview with a young instructor for some time now, and this one with 30 year old Stuart Amos does not disappoint. He started his karate journey from a very young age. Stuart stated: *"I've competed for 20 years, now I want to take my Karate in a whole new direction. Trying to move away from this focus on the 'shape' at the end of a technique, rather than the movement itself."*

You can sense the hunger for learning and improving in Stuart's words throughout the interview. It was good to hear the perspective of a young instructor with a very open-mind. Hopefully, many young students and instructors have Stuart's ethos, work-effort and humbleness, then the future of Traditional Shotokan Karate-do will be in extremely safe hands. Thanks to interviewer, Simon Bligh 6th Dan for his continued input for SKM.

The articles by Matt Price and Clive Young are on a similar theme, namely the ageing process with regards to training karate. I've decided to use both articles for the simple reason that there's a 22 year age-gap between the two experienced karateka, where we see the slight variance between the thoughts on the subject of Matt Price as a 50 year old karateka, and Clive Young, as a 72 year old karateka.

There is a comprehensive difference in the amount of 'hard-training' output/volume the 'average' karateka can do after

70/75 years of age. Then it's about quality over quantity! At around 50 years old I felt virtually the same physically as when I was 30 years old, in terms of fitness, speed, stamina, flexibility etc. I think that goes for quite a lot of karateka who have trained continually from their teens or early twenties or younger. But that second 20/25 year leap from age 50 to 75 is mega



Editor John Cheetham 5th Dan.

for most karateka. If you can still train with the high-intensity, speed and stamina of a 50 year old at 70/75 years old, you're a one-off! Once the wear and tear on knees/hips kicks-in after 50 plus years of training, you realise, it's totally impossible to comprehend at 50, what it's like to be 70/75 years old and still training!

Scott Middleton's story details his visit to the famous Hoitsugan dojo in Tokyo, the former home and exclusive dojo of the late JKA Chief Instructor, Master Masatoshi Nakayama. It's been a pilgrimage for many Shotokan karateka over the years.

David Stainko's article states, *"Those that advocate choosing to go to the ground in self-defence training should litter their training surface with rocks, broken glass, vomit, food and dog waste etc., to simulate the reality."* Then there's Slavko Bubalo's ideas focussing on the 'hidden techniques' within our Kata. And Mike Clarke's take on Kata, shines a very different light on the topic. The ongoing dissimilarity regarding karate Kata, makes for reflective thinking.

Apart from *bunkai/oyo*, Kata is also the 'aesthetic element' of Traditional Karate-do. Gaining 'total control' of Kata, physically/emotionally, for many, is equally relevant to the obviously 'invented application' ideas.

Good Health, Good Training, Editor.

IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR ALL OVERSEAS SKM SUBSCRIBERS: Please see Letters page for information.

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**FRONT COVER:
SENSEI STUART AMOS 5TH Dan HDKI. (Photo By Bernard Rose).**

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HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: THE HOITSUGAN. *By Scott Middleton.*



The Shomen of the Hoitsugan dojo.

THE HOITSUGAN:

The winding streets of Ebisu surely predated the planning and layout of a grid like pattern found in most modern cities. Although these grid systems are much easier to navigate, they lack in character, and the mysteries that seemed to be lurking around each corner.

As we approached the Hoitsugan, Richard Amos Sensei suddenly let out a loud guttural “Osu” that ricocheted off the sides of the close-knit buildings, and aimed directly towards the individual that was in the distance. The figure not yet recognizable to anyone but Richard, replied with his own, and equally energetic “Osu”! With our interests perked we quickly walked forward and met a smiling Leon Montoya Sensei. Richard and Leon embraced one another while we silently witnessed the two friends reuniting. I soaked up the moment, and meeting

Leon allowed me to check off one of the many items on the mental checklist I had compiled before travelling to Japan.

Leon’s journey to Japan began in 1986 with nothing more than a suitcase, a letter of introduction from Nishiyama Hidetaka Sensei, and a dream of improving his karate. When he arrived, Leon was instructed to report to the JKA Honbu dojo, and seek out Oishi Takeshi Sensei who would make both an introduction and enquiry on his behalf. The introduction was to Nakayama Masatoshi Sensei, who at that time was the global and spiritual leader of the JKA.

The enquiry was to see if there was any remaining accommodations at Nakayama Sensei’s personal dojo, the Hoitsugan. As fortune would have it, Nakayama Sensei agreed to allow Leon to occupy the one remaining room at the Hoitsugan. Well over thirty years had passed since

that pivotal day to the present moment for Leon, with much of that time being interwoven into the fabric of the Hoitsugan. Undoubtedly, Leon was the perfect guide and ambassador to welcome us to the Hoitsugan.

Following Leon, I took a moment to savor my first step across the threshold of these hallowed Shotokan grounds. The group seemed laser focused on getting to the dojo as quickly as possible, but I wanted to linger several paces behind to soak up every moment with no interruptions. At the risk of being accused of loitering, I noticed the row of metal mailboxes neatly lined up, and patiently waiting to be opened by the buildings tenants. The reward for lagging behind the group was in recognizing the *kanji* characters for Nakayama on the outside of one of the mailboxes (see photo below, opposite page).

It felt like I had passed some sort of entrance exam for the dojo by recalling these simple characters, but without anyone else around to celebrate with, I quickened my pace. As I caught up to the others Leon nonchalantly opened the door allowing the group access to the dojo. Of all the moments to suffer the burden of having a curious mind, this was a not a convenient time. Did Leon unlock the dojo previously in preparation of our arrival, or did I miss him using keys to unlock the door? I would later learn from Richard that the Hoitsugan is always unlocked, and is accessible during all hours of the day.

This information exposes the unparalleled uniqueness of the dojo, and the open-minded approach of Nakayama Sensei. The combination of jetlag and the building excitement of entering the dojo was too much for one member of our group as she innocently forgot to take off her shoes. Leon responded to this faux pas with the perfect mixture of being stern enough to get the message across, but expertly delivering it with the kindness reserved for a guest.

The first glimpse of the dojo instantly triggered my mental Rolodex into resurrecting the countless hours I had spent over the years attempting to absorb the information, and images found on the pages of the Best Karate series. Scrutinizing those pages in hopes of finding just a whiff of information that I could use to advance my karate was now in real time. Unmodified with the passage of time the Hoitsugan could have passed for a living museum that preserved the karate of Nakayama Sensei.

The wooden floor was scattered with

knots, and lacked a perfectly smooth finish, but was soaked in character. The walls were covered in wood panels that were dark chocolate in color, and adorned with various photos, and *kanji* scrolls. Wherever my gaze landed, I felt an urge to investigate as my curiosity was illuminated by the intense wattage of the Hoitsugan. Seemingly, every crack and crevice of the dojo offered something to explore, but the time to train was now nearby so I begrudgingly moved to the change room to prepare for the start of class.

The change room could only be described as utilitarian. There were no leather couches, stacks of towels, or freshly squeezed lemon water just waiting for members to rehydrate themselves with. In fact, there were no obvious comforts in the change room to attract or retain clientele. I anticipated this simple change room was a foreshadow of the training I was about to experience, and in some way reflected the art I consider to be my life's work.

EXPLORING THE UNEXPLORED:

To begin formal training the instructor or a senior member designated by the instructor will command those in attendance to lineup. Without hesitation, or risk the wrath of the instructor, the students quickly assemble themselves in perfectly straight rows in order of their rank. The significance of this ceremony may seem trivial to the casual observer, or the oblivious student, but the lessons are ripe for the picking.

The air of anticipation that lingered in the dojo immediately evaporated as the Japanese term, *shugo* pierced through the Hoitsugan. As the term implies we united as a group, and left behind anything inconsequential that threatened to tarnish the moment. As I knelt in *seiza* the comforting warmth of familiarity spread over my body, and provided a reference

point to navigate the physical portion of the training. I effortlessly rose from *seiza* with a rejuvenated intention to pour myself into the training. Unconsciously I found myself holding my breath, not out of anxiety, but to focus as Richard addressed the group.

There are few instructors, if any, that can captivate an audience better than Richard can, and this moment was arguably his finest. The narrative flowed from Richard as he invited us to join him thirty years in the past when he took his first step into the Hoitsugan. His story turned into a conversation as he turned to Leon, and stated that the first smiling face he saw after arriving at the Hoitsugan was his good friend. It was a touching moment that reminded me of an African proverb, "*If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together*".

The training commenced with Leon stating a few words of his own that were both compact and concise. Was it unreasonable to deduce that in some way his words reflected his compact physicality, and his concise karate? "*Heian Kata – Yukkuri*" was the extent of Leon's no-nonsense introduction.

Like the digits of our hand each of the five Heian kata are unique to one another. Individually, like our fingers and thumb, each one is important, yet remain incomplete until you bind them all together into a powerful system. As Leon set the pace, I fully explored and savored each action of the Heian katas. Perhaps it was my hypersensitivity to the ambience of the Hoitsugan, but I could feel each movement was providing the nourishment to re-energize my body.

As we finished the five kata consecutively, I could not detect any sign of exhaustion or the labored breathing that would be normally appropriate. With my curiosity aroused, and the slightest gap for a question visible, I seized the moment

by asking Leon, "*In your experience did Nakayama Sensei teach the movements of Heian Shodan using *jun-kaiten* or *gyaku-kaiten*?" The debate over whether to rotate directly or indirectly in the movements of such a foundational form as Heian Shodan, has been discussed on many levels. Of course, I have my opinions and methodology on the subject that I have personally debated, researched, and relentlessly tested in training.*

Similar to trial lawyers who never ask a question to a witness they do not already have the answer to, I wanted the unique and valuable perspective of Leon. These kinds of questions can be risky, but I softened the potential impact by phrasing it in a way that it was not necessarily the opinion or approach of Leon, but that of another instructor, leaving out the situational context in which he experienced it in. After a moment of contemplation, Leon expertly sidestepped the question by stating, "*I think so yes, but I can't remember*".

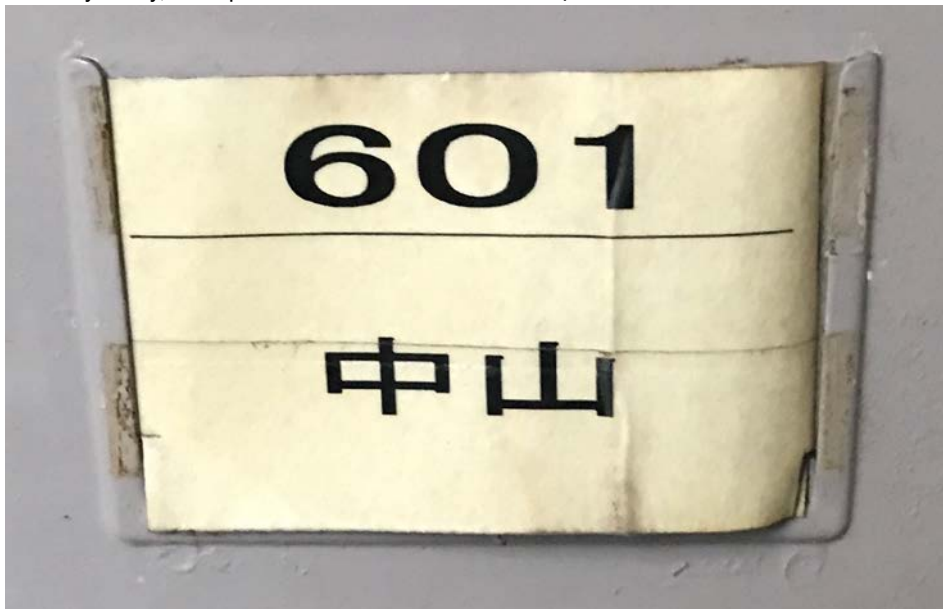
There is a tangible moment in every class when the instructor will switch gears from the warm-up phase to their planned theme. I resigned myself to the fact that my curiosity would remain unsatisfied for now, but what Leon demonstrated next was so unique that I was eager to move on.

Without uttering a word, Leon angled his feet outwards to approximately twice the width of his unusually broad shoulders. The only audible noise in the Hoitsugan was his controlled exhalation as he began lowering his body into a deep crouch. With his gaze fixated far off in the distance beyond the confines of the dojo walls, he connected his elbows to his body, and raised his palms upwards. Rhythmically he slid one foot forward, then the other as I visualized him pushing a massive opponent out of the *dohyo*, much to the delight of his adoring fans.

When he had reached the other side of the *dojo*, he slowly rose from his trance like state, turned, and encouraged us with an explanation. Leon stated that his training in *shiko-dachi* began many years ago due to his interest in *sumo*, but as he had no one to teach him formally, he began mimicking the training methods of the *sumotori*.

Innovation born from creativity requires movement so diligently he continued refining the exercises, eventually becoming confident enough to teach it to others. Leon was convinced that by including these supplementary exercises into his training regimen the chronic back pain he suffered from was controlled, and technically allowing him to isolate his torso from his lower body, and thereby improve his Shotokan.

Motioning us to the back of the dojo, Leon used a hand gesture that was understood in any language. Adding to the



The mailbox mentioned in the story. The Kanji of course is Nakayama.



Leon Montoya sensei (back to camera) and Canadian, Scott Middleton sensei 7th Dan WTKO.

pressure of the watchful eye of Leon in the front, Richard positioned himself behind me. If I approached this first round of *suri-ashi* apprehensively, awkwardly, or without a predictable timing, at best I risked being identified as a sincere amateur, or at worst be labelled as an irritant. I began my downward descent into a low crouch with an exhalation as I had seen Leon demonstrate only moments before.

The feedback was both immediate and humbling as I slid one side of my body forward, and then the other until I had reached the far end of the dojo. The efficiency of movement that is the by-product of repetition, or at least the goal, began to emerge after several more rounds of *suri-ashi*. When Leon called a halt, the output of physical energy was evident, but I felt that the class theme was yet to be revealed so I looked past the aching muscles.

With the end of the session looming, Leon, brought us back to the beginning of the class with a look at an important point found in the Heian katas. The optimal angle of the front foot in *zenkutsu-dachi* is another one of those risky points of discussion that have varying opinions. There are those, myself included, that feel a slight inward angle of the front foot to be ideal. Others, like Leon, suggest that the front foot must be directed forward.

Regardless of which side of the principle that one stands on, both sides could surely agree that the role of the front leg is to provide stability, and that the angle of the foot influences the degree of inner thigh engagement.

Leon's opinion regarding the angle of the front foot, and his choice of class content, started to paint a picture of his overall theme. The commonality between our partner in training, or the opponent we may have to face in self-defense, is that they will never put you in a position of superiority or comfort. As such, our training should reflect this potential reality as we nurture the skills of dealing with positions or circumstances that are anything but optimal. Although not confirmed by Leon, I concluded that the training in *shiko-dachi* and *suri-ashi* provided an opportunity to put tremendous stress on the inner thighs. Resulting in an opportunity for the practitioner to explore the depths of these crucial stabilizing muscles.

BEHIND EVERY GREAT MAN:

With the class concluded, and with the formalities out of the way, Leon announced that the fee for the training session was 1000 yen each, which converted into approximately \$12 Canadian. A measly fee for such an experience. He continued by stating that the fees would be given to Mrs. Nakayama after we all changed, in case

anyone wanted to join him. Irrationally fearful the others would leave me behind, I quickly returned to the utilitarian change room with the speed that I changed into my dogi to begin class.

As we climbed the stairs, I was giddy with excitement, and the knowledge that I would soon meet the wife of the legendary Nakayama Sensei. After reaching the door, Leon stated to the group that although Mrs. Nakayama was ninety-eight years old, she continued to carry on her husband's legacy and the spirit that the Hoitsugan was founded on.

As Leon gingerly knocked on the door, I could sense a change to his demeanor. It was not apprehension or fear that I detected it was a genuine respect for the person on the other side of the door. With each passing second, and no answer from within, my hope of meeting Mrs. Nakayama began to erode. Just at the moment that all hope was lost, the door ever so slowly opened to reveal an elderly woman with an enormous and welcoming smile. All those huddling together on the intimately spaced landing bowed in unison. As Richard and Leon spoke to her in Japanese, I could not help but imagine how she must have felt.

Over thirty years had passed since her husband's untimely passing, and practitioners from England, Ireland, Norway, Switzerland, Columbia, and Canada were at her door paying their deepest respects. I received my answer to how she felt with the noticeable look of emotion on her face.

Pictures were taken, and each member of the group had a moment to exchange pleasantries with Mrs. Nakayama. As I sheepishly approached her I recognized that words were not enough or even possible. As I cupped her hand with both of my own, I simply smiled and bowed. She accepted my smile and returned it with one of her own, and uttered a sentence in Japanese. I smiled again, and nodded to pretend that I understood, but I turned to Leon in hopes of a translation. He smiled and said, "Mrs. Nakayama says you have a lovely face".

Rather than basking in her kind observation, I was struck with the realization of the role she played in her husband's impact on the karate World. Over the years, the caring and nurturing words of encouragement to so many practitioners from around the World would be just enough to balance the harshness that is often found in the dojo. Appropriately, Mrs. Nakayama initiated our goodbyes by slowly closing her door. As the door closed her beaming presence faded away leaving us to hold our bows until we heard the door latch. Time was of the essence as we quickened our pace down the stairs to the street level. We had a train to catch.