

## St. Louis and Memories

By Nori Sakatsume

One day, a good friend of mine asked me if I was interested in joining Karate class that was taught on the University campus, I was surprised to hear that there was a Karate class held at the school. Because of his constant inquiry, I finally agreed him that I would come to the class for a trial. On the first day of the class, I was excited to participate in the class but didn't expect myself to like it so much as to become a member of the dojo. As the class started, we ran, jumped, and stretched. Then we practiced punching as each student counted in Japanese. After that we kicked focus pads with front snap kick. Our instructor Shihan Mina Ludwig kindly demonstrated me how to execute each technique in a way I could follow. Shihan Ludwig understood and highly respected the tradition of Karate and its culture. Shihan made the concept of Karate easier to grasp for beginners like myself. Shihan made the practice was very focused and efficient. During the practice, the students were very serious and sometimes even intimidating. However, once practice is over, they were all nice and respectful of others. By the end of the first trial, I had decided to join the dojo.

Often times, after the end of practice shihan read a part off of one of her favorite martial art books. Her readings helped me understand much deeper roots and concept of martial arts beyond fighting.

One great surprise about Yoshisu dojo was the strong tie among its members. Once in every few weeks, Shihan would invite all the members to her own house for the "fight night", a potluck party. I was not used to this in the beginning since I had never been invited to my instructors' home even though I played various sports throughout my school years in Japan. However, I founded fun and relaxing. Through these gatherings I got to know more about the other members of Yoshisu dojo and also meet other Karate practitioners from other dojo.

There are also so many other activities planned In Yoshisu dojo for strengthening the family tie. One of them being the trip we took in September to the Japanese Festival that was held in St.Louis, Missouri. Prior to the visit Mr. Dave Lowry, an established martial artist and writer had kindly invited us to the festival. I was very curious to see what would be at the festival. We arrived in St. Louis the night before the festival, and we dined at a sea-food restaurant that seemed to be popular in the area. Surprisingly, the restaurant served many Japanese dishes such as Edamame, various sushi and beer. We ordered several side dishes and Asahi beer, which reminded me of my father who loves to drink it after a long day of work.

Contrary to our excitement, our second day in St. Louis started out with rain. We left our hotel around 9:30 A.M. for a shopping center to purchase raincoats and umbrellas then headed to a local diner for breakfast. The diner seemed fairly popular among the locals and there was no space for a company of eight to sit. After a long wait, we were finally seated and enjoyed piles of pancakes, eggs, hush brown and lots of good coffee. Although I always loved food from my own country, I found myself loving American diners because of their hospitality and simple, yet excellent food. By the time we came out of the diner, it had stopped raining. We hoped the martial arts demonstrations that we had looked forward to would be there.

As soon as we arrived at the festival, we received warm welcome by Mr. Dave Lowry. I had always imagined that this well establish martial artist was intimidating and unapproachable. Contrary to my imagination, he turned out to be very soft and kind gentleman. He informed that all the demonstrations that were scheduled to be held outdoor had been canceled. Instead of watching the martial arts demonstrations, we decided to contemplate Bonsai and Ikebana that were displayed on the first floor of the main building. The strange thing for me was that although I grew up in Japan where Bonsai and Ikebana were all around, I had always thought they were old people's hobby and had never paid close attention to them. This time I paid close attention to the details of Bosai and Ikebana for the first time and

was surprised by how carefully plants and tree trunks are *sculpted*. All the Bonsai seemed like just miniature trees at first glance, but every single piece was purposely formed into a certain sculptural representation.

Since it had stopped raining, we decided to walk around the Botanical garden. As we walked outside of the building, there was a street performer who dressed in Kimono and performed various entertaining tricks using most traditional tools such as rice paper, umbrella, a spinning top, and chop sticks. What surprised me was that even though he spoke little English and his performing style was very traditional, the audience seemed to enjoy his show throughout.

After watching the performance he walked around the large Japanese garden and enjoyed the calming views, Koi fish and numerous sculptures that were placed all over the garden. After the walk, we visited the food court for lunch. I was very excited to find Japanese cuisines like Yakisoba, the pan fried noodle and Okonomiyaki, the vegetable pancakes, and of course Japanese beer. We ate, talked and laughed until our stomachs were cramped.

The next day turned out to be bright sunny day. Since we hadn't seen any of the martial art demonstrations, we decided to stay longer at the festival. The first demonstration was Sumo wrestling. This turned out to be fun, but also inspiring in terms of training. We watched how those enormous wrestlers warm up and train. We were especially stunned how flexible they are. Everybody's jaw dropped when the four hundred pound wrestler executed split in front of the audience.

We also watched Kendo and Koryu demonstration by various different practitioners including Mr. Dave Lowry. I felt very fortunate to see the rare martial arts that had been descended for hundreds of years.

All the demonstration we watched were inspiring and all the things and people at the festival reminded me of my childhood. Throughout the trip, we ate, talked and laughed like a real family. Since my whole family is over in Japan I felt like I had another family in the U.S. I feel very fortunate to be a part of Yoshisu dojo and would like to be a part of its future growth.