

My Karate Journey -- Part 4: A Lesson Learned Well

Asai Sensei's departure from Hawaii had a huge impact on me. I felt abandoned and depressed! Nevertheless, I vowed to carry on his legacy through my training and teaching. When Asai left, Japan had not assigned another instructor to teach in Hawaii. Therefore, the club's most senior member, Kenneth Funakoshi, was appointed to this position. He was a local martial artist who had trained under Hirokazu Kanazawa, who was responsible for starting and building the Japan Karate Association branch in Hawaii. Kanazawa Sensei, as I had been told, was young, handsome, and had a very caring and friendly presence, quite unlike Asai Sensei. Thus, he was able to quickly build the KAH organization and had a sizable following. Two years later, he was replaced by Mori Sensei, then Asai Sensei. Unfortunately, I never had a chance to train under either Kanazawa or Mori.

Funakoshi Sensei was the club champion when he took over at KAH after Asai Sensei left in the late 60's. The pressure of taking over the reins of such a prestigious karate club taught by champions from Japan undoubtedly caused him to believe that he had to prove himself to the senpais (seniors). Throughout our training, we had been taught and expected to show control of techniques whenever we sparred. Punches and kicks were always pulled back before full contact was made to reduce injuries.

No one had a clue that Funakoshi had decided to put down the black belts with uncontrolled punches! When I sparred with him, he hit me so hard in the gut that my whole stomach cramped and tightened into a solid ball! I could not breathe and fell to my knees. This may sound funny, but at that moment my body was ready for the strike, but NOT my mind! This was the very first time that I had gotten the wind knocked out of me, and the feeling was foreign and shocking!!!

I hated being so vulnerable, and told myself that this was the first AND LAST time that someone would put me down with a punch to the gut. To this very day I remember the feeling of that punch, and taught my mind how to handle the shock of the strike! And, to this very day, NO ONE has put me down again!!!



