

My Karate Journey -- Part 6: Going to Battle!

I love to train! I love to teach! Which do I love more? Both have opened wonderful unexplored worlds for me. Training taught me a lot about myself, most of it mental — how to push through inexperienced pain, stress, and learning to find, explore, and then exceed my limits! Training also made me realize how hard, yet rewarding karate is, and forced me to evaluate my learning versus my teaching styles.

Teaching is a whole different “animal!” When you train, you are a participant, a small part of an engine. You wait for cues, and act on them to complete your specific task. When you teach, you ARE the engine, delivering cues to start, rev, run, and stop this machine of multiple participants. A good teacher runs a smooth and efficient “machine”, and I have strived to be one!



Although my teaching responsibilities continued to increase, I also continued to train at my usual pace. Our club seemed to have caught tournament fever, for we were constantly in competition with other clubs around the state. There were stretches where we found ourselves in a tournament almost every weekend, sometimes twice in a day!



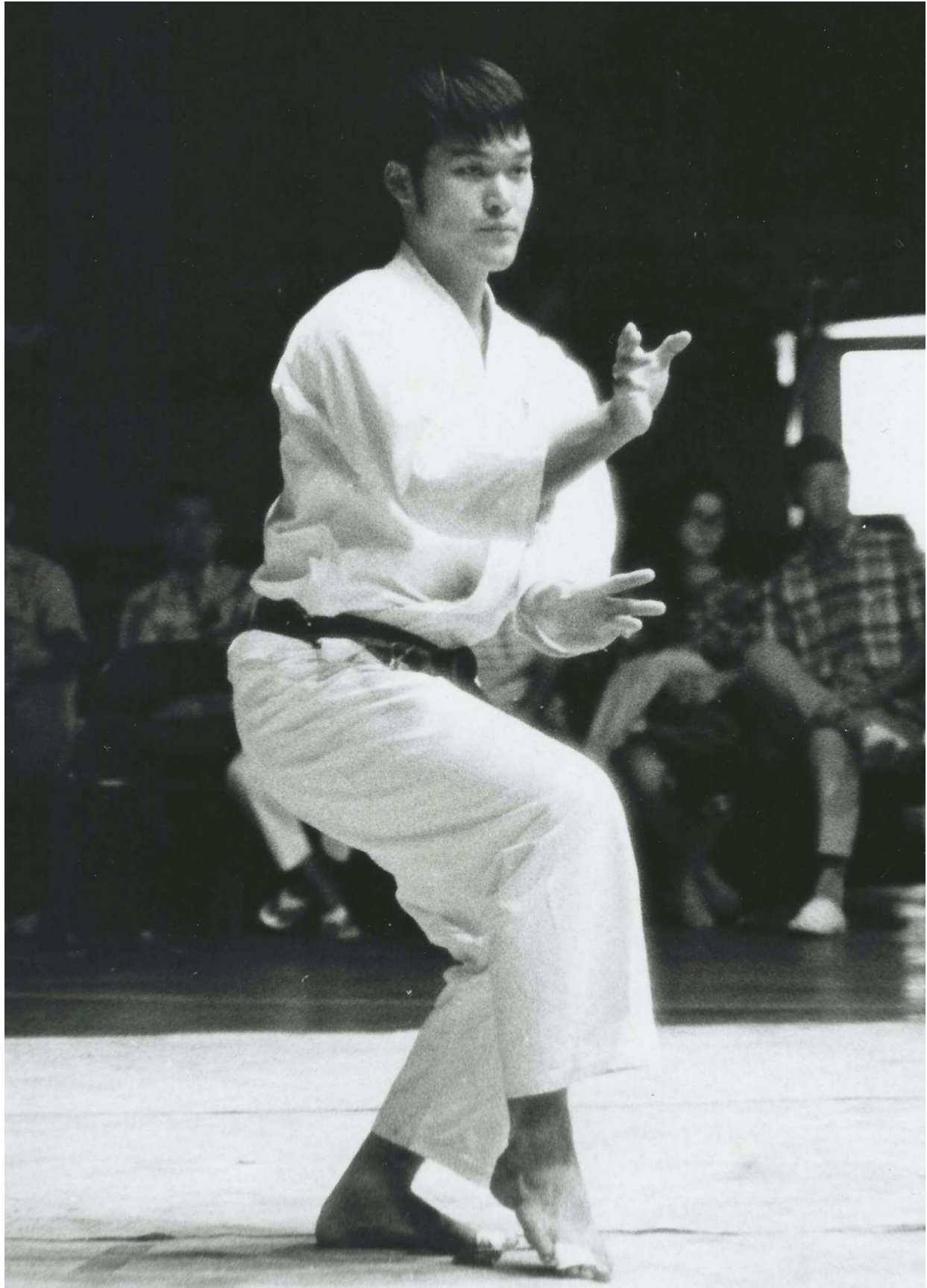
We competed in only kumite (sparring).





However, I have always loved to do katas (forms) more than I did kumite. In fact, I still consider myself a kata-man, and love the self-challenge it poses to constantly improve your techniques, timing, lines, and balance. Katas are pre-arranged movements that you perform as if in battle with imaginary foes attacking you from all directions. They feature the beauty, grace, power, and explosiveness of the art. The challenge is to train so hard and long as to make your performance look easy to duplicate. Those watching think to themselves, "I can do that!" yet when they try, they quickly discover how incredibly difficult the movements are!





Unfortunately, my dreams of becoming a state, national, or international kata champion never became a reality. Although I did not have a passion for kumite, I participated in the open tournaments because it was my “duty” as a Senpai (senior). To my delight, I became a KUMITE champion instead, winning many tournament titles, including the All-Hawaii State Championships in 1972!!! These results solidified my belief and faith in the Shotokan style of karate.



Most styles of karate that I have observed in tournaments show absolutely NO connection of their katas to their kumite. It's like they are two completely separate and disjointed entities!! One NEVER relies on the other to ensure continuity of the style ... or the result!! I noticed that in many styles of karate, a kata champion may not be a kumite champion, and a kumite champion rarely is a kata champion!!!

Shotokan karate, on the other hand, bonds kata forms and kumite techniques closely together. I am a good example of this! As I stated, kumite was not my passion. Yet, I excelled in it because of my dedicated efforts in kata!!! I truly believe that in Shotokan karate, if you are great in kata, you will be great in kumite, and vice versa!



I participated in every tournament that our club entered, and many different clubs competed as well. Karate clubs seemed to have the better competitors, techniques, control, and sporting attitude. Kenpo clubs, however, earned the reputation as street fighters, showing little control of techniques, temper, or attitude. For them, it was a free-for-all, and they were just out to hurt someone!



Throughout years of this type of ordeal, Paula came and supported me in ALL my competitions! I knew that she hated the feeling, and the thought that I might get seriously injured. Yet she painfully watched and worried about my well-being each time I competed. Although I worried for HER more than I did myself, she was the guardian angel who kept me safe!! THESE WERE BATTLES FOR LIFE!!!