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FOR TRADITIONAL MARTIAL ARTISTS

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## **Master Kanazawa's Shotokan**

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# The Chris Clifford Story

## Part III

### The Man & the Teacher

*The final part of the Chris Clifford story - this part concentrates on his school in this Bromley & his views on teaching his disciples. Mike Clark picks up on the story so far...*

MAP. How long after your first visit to Japan did Yonemoto Sensei visit England?

CC. It was two years later when Sensei came to England, this was after a lot of effort and planning.

MAP. How so?

CC. Well, I didn't have any money at the time, so myself and some student friends staged our version of the London to Brighton Race. We walked and ran barefoot to raise the money needed to fund the visit. The road had just been resurfaced, so we had to choose between loose chippings or the nettles on the verge! It took all day and we only just made opening time! Our Dojo at the time was using the facilities of the local pub. The sacrifice made everyone appreciate Sensei's visit.

MAP. Can I ask you about your time as a Doorman?

CC. I was a doorman for a while, but not for long, it was only to make ends meet. I didn't see the sense in standing in the doorway looking after someone else's business and risking my own life for them at the same time, so I went into the special bodyguarding service.

MAP. How did you get into that?

CC. I was recommended by Japanese contacts to VIP's visiting the West. I organised personal protection, and this led onto specialist assignments and contracts all over the world.

MAP. What kind of things did you do?

CC. That's confidential!!!

MAP. Alright, back to the present day. How do you run your Dojo?

CC. It's a small Dojo with a big heart. There's a friendly atmosphere and each disciple must bring self-discipline with them. Usually, I give a three to six month probation period, and like to meet and include the families. This helps me to understand the disciples more deeply.

MAP. Where do the families fit in?

CC. While we study the children run around laughing, playing, and shouting. Bonkers (his dog - Ed) jumps up and runs through our legs. Our partners relax, talk, and drink, and we all happily coexist in the same environment. Karate isn't separate from day to day life. I still love my wife and children while I study, and there is always a space for them in my heart. Through their love for me, I find my happiness and peace of mind while I study.

MAP. Is this the traditional way?

CC. I don't know if this is the traditional way, but it is my way... The old masters studied in their back yard with normal life going on around, they didn't shut themselves away. As for tradition, what does it mean? Isn't that when one's past, and when one's future begins? I'm not sure what Karate is?

MAP. Would you call your Karate traditional then?

CC. No, definitely not, I study Grandmaster Ichikawa's Karate. Although the name 'Goju-Ryu' is used, this is a label to help other people identify it. Grandmaster Ichikawa does not teach traditional Goju-Ryu, this is the legacy of the Okinawans. Grandmaster Ichikawa's legacy is the Bubishi which he studies and reintroduced this and other knowledge



*The family party after the special mastery lesson*



from this, and different sources into Goju-Ryu Karate. Traditional is the starting point - not the end.

**MAP. What feeling does your Karate have?**

CC. One spirit, but many feelings. Sometimes I practise Goju-Ryu's forms with the feelings of what others may call Tai Chi. Slow and firm. Throughout the day I have many different feelings which are reflected in my Karate, but always with the underlying thought of 'kill or be killed'.

**MAP. How do you discipline your grade?**

CC. In Grandmaster Ichikawa's school, grades are levels or ways of studying knowledge, i.e., the way of the carpenter, the way of the baker, and the way of the gardener. These are but some of the ways we study. Without these ways, Dan grades are empty and worthless. We should be searching for the understanding, not for the next grade! The teacher must know the disciple so that they may be aware of their level of thinking and doing. Understanding throughout ALL the years, not just for an hour or two under a grading panel. The Dan is awarded when the teacher feels it is the right time, not when the disciple feels it's time, or gained for money.

**MAP. You use the term 'disciple' where many would say 'student'. Why is this?**

CC. Because students just turn up, then go. Taking things from you as they go. A disciple studies from the heart and hopefully one day from the soul. If I feel that their heart is good, then I will open mine, little by little. It is not talking that is important, often it is the silence. Many hide behind words. Techniques without heart are empty, so they must come from inside with true feelings.

**MAP. When do you teach?**

CC. Every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday morning. Each is like a get-together, depending on what I feel is needed. Sometimes we study forms or basics, but always we study fighting.

This is most important, no two lessons are ever the same. When I return from Japan in May I will begin holding a morning lesson in the park from 5 - 7am, during the month's of May through to October. I find this is useful for the disciple must learn to control the body and develop will power. Feeling the sun warming us as it dawns energises us for the day ahead.

**MAP. Do you teach children?**

CC. Yes, I do. The martial arts are very important for children, if taught correctly. It can be a foundation for life. I teach 'play' Karate, not how to kill or excessively harmful techniques. In this way children learn self-discipline, and learn to take the knocks that life dishes out, and coming back to try again. Failure is positive as long as we keep on trying. My son Cody studies Judo under **Brian Jacks 7th Dan Sensei**. Judo is good for the young ones, it allows for the strong contact without injuries. Grandmaster Ichikawa and Yonemoto Sensei both have children's classes, this is important for a teacher as it requires patience and an understanding of their difficulties.

**MAP. You also study Judo under Grandmaster Ichikawa, why do you not teach your son?**

CC. Grandmaster Ichikawa's Judo is a little different, it's not playful. To throw is to smash, it comes from the forms of the Goju-Ryu Karate, plus his own ways.

**MAP. How is the teaching structured for the adult disciples?**

CC. Each year we study a different Kata. In addition to this we study it's relationship to Sanchin as a correction Kata to all other forms. Studying correct posture forms technique and order of applications within Kumite. Then the disciple is led into discovering the feelings, mysteries, and secrets of the Kata. Then in their fifteenth year they will study the Crane Kata (Tsuru). Around this time the level of 4th Dan can be obtained. Grandmaster Ichikawa may then grant permission for the disciple to open his/her own Dojo to further his own knowledge. This decision is not made purely on the

physical side of the martial arts. He looks for humility, humbleness and sincerity. At this level we become really involved with the deeper mysteries and then the work really begins.

**MAP. Can you tell me more about the Crane Kata Tsuru?**

CC. Tsuru - the Crane Kata is the form that is the essence of the Bubishi. It's creator was said to be a young woman named Fang Chi Niang, who's father despite being skilled in Monk's fist, was killed. One day she heard a commotion coming from a Bamboo grove. On investigation she discovered that there were two white cranes fighting. Fang was fascinated to watch their intricate manoeuvring, coupled with lengthily attacks at each other. Intending to scare away the birds, she through a stick at them. But, their awareness was such, that even before the stick landed, the flew away. This encounter was to be the inspiration for the system know as Ba Hok Pai Kuen Fa (or White Crane Fist). In Japanese it is Hankutsuru Ha Kempo. I teach the Crane form to my wife - Lisa Marie, and my daughter Giorgio. As being created by a woman, it is most suitable for them as it emphasises the underlying power of the soft way.

**MAP. I know you hold a special lesson each month. What does this**



*Technique from Sam Grayham Sensei (Sepai Kata)*





*In depth discussion during the special monthly lesson*

CC. First the special lesson is to gather all the disciples of the Dojo, with their families if they wish, so they all understand the importance of sharing. Everyone is required to bring drink and food that they prepare themselves. When we share, a bond of unity that brings us closer. At these times I like to cook for the disciples (**I'll remember that -Ed**), and share my house with them. During the lesson we examine the underlying principles of the martial arts more deeply. It is at these times that I answer any questions, although usually I find I answer these before they are asked. Thoughts and problems are openly discussed. It is also a time for laughing and drinking. I have become a 'drunked and a gardener', and since have begun to understand many greater mysteries. All people should see me for what I am, I don't believe in being a 'two faced teacher' who only drinks on his own, and stands at the front of a class, but never studies himself. My feet are firmly on the ground and I always take the last lump of modesty, but never try to teach a 'pig to sing', it annoys the pig and gives me the hump!

**MAP. Do you use the traditional Makiwara?**

CC. I have many different Makiwara. The first was a gift from Grandmaster Ichikawa, a pocket Makiwara that I had to carry at all times. Most things can be used. I use Makiwara's of different

textures - tensions and depths. Some are water filled. At the moment I am developing a new concept in Makiwara that develops a penetrating punch while no causing damage to the hands. It is the cousin of the 'Power Web' and will be available in six month's time. The Makiwara practise is very necessary to develop feeling within the punch to damage vital points using correct depth and force. Energy waves must penetrate and STAY inside the body to cause internal deterioration.

**MAP. You often say "All fighting arts are the same." Why is this?**

CC. I see no difference in the art of Judo, Aikido, Tai Chi, Kung Fu, etc. It's the level that one's at themselves. To study one way only, is to limit oneself. The great teacher teaches always from one way. People often look outside their art for the answers, but we must also look inwardly. The biggest comes from the smallest - like the explosion that comes from splitting the atom. One should study the very small things to understand the very big - and vice versa.

**MAP. I have seen a disciple ask a question, yet despite your obvious knowledge, you reply "I'm not sure." Why is this?**

CC. As I've said before, at 5th Dan I understand only 40% of Grandmaster Ichikawa's Karate. I teach with a true

heart so if I don't know, I say so. I don't pretend. We say to our teacher - "Onegaihimashi" - Please teach me. But really, it is the teacher who is the true disciple, for when we begin our studies we know a little about many things - In later years, we know much about few things.

**MAP. Where do you see yourself in 20 years time?**

CC. An older, but hopefully wiser "gardener and drunked."

**MAP. You use the term "gardener and drunked" to describe yourself... why is this?**

CC. They are concepts of different levels of meaning. A gardener plants, tends and cares for things, while a drunked is a wise fool travelling through life, that other people often try to avoid. Don't be fooled by the appearance of a drunked, a drunked isn't always drunk with alcohol. Sometimes he/she is drunk with life!

**MAP. I have heard stories of Grandmaster Ichikawa bending spoons like Uri Geller, is this true?**

CC. Yes, both I and several of my disciples have witnessed this. It is just a party trick that demonstrates the development of 'Ki' channelling that leads on to the control of the enemy.

**MAP. Can anyone attain this level?**

CC. Everyone has the potential, although I feel we need a teacher to show us the way. If our teacher has not been there before, and does not know, then we may be held back by their lack of knowledge. Study your teacher carefully - you will grow to see the truth.

**MAP. Can we talk of Yonemoto Sensei?**

CC. He is not just my senior master, he is also family. For many years he has given me an education that I truly feel I cannot describe. He shares not only his great Karate knowledge, but also his heart with me. He has seen me rise up in life and late- fall down in fortune. He



has always been there for me. This is the true meaning of what we call the 'magnet' technique - when people are either attracted or repelled by each other. I am not what I would call academic or educated in the way of words, but then we have never needed them. To become a great teacher one needs great qualities throughout life. Yonemoto Sensei has these. We have studied the higher levels of Karate called 'Hente' (meaning changed hand), together very closely like no others. This has brought us feelings of great joy. He has taught and shared many secrets such as the cormorant technique. Sometimes we feel like we will be swallowed up and spat out again, but we must perceive even if it is too much.

**MAP. What is the cormorant technique?**

CC. This is a special method that allows the receiver of chocking techniques to continue breathing by control of the throat muscles. You see, in Japan, this bird catches fish - swallowing twice - holding the fish

inside it's gullet without chocking. You should study this bird deeply to understand this technique.

**MAP. When will Yonemoto Sensei next visit England?**

CC. He will visit again in August of this year for two weeks staying at my home. There will a special lesson for the Federation of Goju-Ryu Karate, of which my disciples and I are members,

**MAP. I know you recommend the your disciples study the ways of other schools. Why is this?**

CC. This helps them understand where they are. By studying, NOT following other people's ways. For this reason I joined the GFK, which enables my disciples to talk to others. As my school is so different it helps the disciples to grow. Sharing knowledge and Kumite is good for the development of Karate - as long as it is done with a good heart. **Dave Morris Sensei** and **Mike Clark Sensei** of the GFK came to see my school when I first enquired about the association.

Since then we have become good friends and now they are studying the way of my school.

**MAP. I understand you take one or two people to Japan with you each year?**

CC. This year I am taking Mike and Dave to study with Grandmaster Ichikawa and Yonemoto Sensei. I consider it is important that everyone who studies in my school should visit Japan and meet these two great masters and see what true Karate is for themselves.

**MAP. What are you studying now?**

CC. Life, I have no other words to describe it other than I am now learning to fly!

**MAP. What, fly an aeroplane?**

CC. Not quite, again it is an answer that has many different meanings... I will leave that one with you.

**MAP. Do you have any last advice for those without teachers?**

CC. Study Kata and Kumite very deeply - don't just assume and accept, always question and examine by testing in Kumite. Above all true martial arts comes from the soul. The real depth is spiritual and Karate is embraced by Bhuddism, we must defeat the 108 demons and desires that distract man from following the way. Suparinpei Kata brings us to this level. Only then can we know 'Busaganashi' the God of Budo and Rice, who's figure is often seen on Japanese and Okinawan shrines. Man is like rice - we grow and after fruition we are cut down. Things die so that others may live, this is 'Do' the way - the universal circle of kill or be killed - creation and destruction. If we open our eyes though, we can see this and understand the mysteries of life and death.

**MAP. Thank you for sharing a part of your history with our readers.**

CC. My pleasure.



*The disciples having some fun with Yonemoto Sensei*