

## ***Kenzo Dozono Sensei (7th Dan – Canada)***

*Interview by John Jackson-Mauchel*

Today I met a really nice, gentle and kind person with a wonderful outlook on life. A family man, who is very proud of his wife and children and who loves them dearly. He is 55 years young, very fit and agile, with a way of communicating his zest for life that is contagious. Oh, and by the way, he is a 7th Dan in Shotokan Karate and Canada's S.K.I.F. Chief Instructor. He is also a Jun-Shihan for Tai-Chi, an International Referee, a kata and kumite judge. He was Canadian Champion for four consecutive years from 1975-78. He was both coach and a competitor in the Gold medal winning Canadian Team at the S.K.I.F. World Championships held in Dusseldorf, West Germany. He has been awarded the Commemorative Medal for the 125th Anniversary of the Confederation of Canada and inducted into the Belleville Sports Hall of Fame. He has trained 6 Canadian Champions at his dojo. His daughter Yoko (Yoko means "Child of the Ocean") is a current Canadian Champion and the only person to win triple Gold at the Ontario State Championships. She won on consecutive years. So as you see this man has been there and done that. His name is Kenzo Dozono sensei. I not only had the privilege to meet and train with a man of this calibre I also got to speak with him in depth about his thoughts and ideas about karate and life. From that conversation I know he would much prefer to be known as a good and gentle person than a 7th Dan or a proud and kind family man than a Gold Medal winning Champion because that is the sort of man that he is. Here are some of the other things we talked about.

***Sensei how do you feel about the push for change as we try for Olympic recognition? For instance the A.K.F. are looking at suggestions for awarding two points for certain techniques in kumite. Jodan Mawashi Geri is ippon where as Jodan ushiro mawashi geri will be awarded nihon. Although each technique may have been equally as devastating to the opponent the push seems to be for, how can I put it, the more showy techniques.***

We are not narrow minded people we are broad minded, however I do not believe in change for the sake of change. You must have a very good reason to change something. If showmanship is the reason then what difference will there be between Karate and the World Wrestling Federation? My answer is this, Olympic recognition must be for Karate-Do. If we have to change to a position that is no longer Karate-Do then we are better off without Olympic recognition. Nihon, hmmm, as we only have one life how can we be killed twice?

***Bruce Lee once compared trying to learn how to fight by doing kata to attempting to wrap up water in a brown paper parcel. What do you think of that comment sensei?***

If Mr. Bruce Lee said that, then unfortunately, I think Mr. Bruce Lee never understood kata and that his answer is just an easy way out. Kata teaches the feeling of technique. People learn to swim without learning the techniques of swimming. It means that they can swim, yes, but how much better would they swim if they were using correct technique? Or take boxing for instance, it is an art, you cannot be a great boxer like Mohamed Ali because you are a street fighter. No, you must start with learning the correct boxing techniques. Mr. Bruce Lee talks about fist fighting, but true fighting is fighting with disease, is fighting with sickness,

accidents and injuries and when we win those fights we live longer. That is a true fight. The best fighters lead a long and healthy life. Yes we can fist fight but when people reach 70 or 80 years of age why the hell would they want to fist fight? Kata is for all your life, it is our activity and preventative medicine, you can fight with yourself for as long as you live. Kata therefore has more depth than kumite. Something else, a very good kata technician is usually a good fighter. It is not always the same in reverse.

***Quote: "Never be afraid to make a mistake. You will make mistakes throughout your life. Only when you die will you cease to make mistakes and then you have just made the biggest mistake of your life. Dozono sensei.***

***Sensei do you think we are too concerned with the external appearance or visual appeal of our kata? ( ie depth of stance or height of kicks). In other words, are we more concerned with looking dynamic rather than being dynamic.***

When you only seek to look dynamic you are wasting your time. It is a fake, camouflage or make-up. You have to feel the kata and ***be dynamic*** as you will never improve by only seeking to look dynamic. You must feel a kata and also practice a kata. If you practice 100 times you feel it a little better, 200 times a little more, 1000 and you begin to get a taste for it and so on. Anyway, when you *feel dynamic* you will also *look dynamic*. Looking dynamic is just how others see you. That is not as important as your own feeling towards the kata. Children learn so quickly by memorising. I can teach them Kanku Dai, they can memorise it and perform it. It is from remembering it not from feeling it. There is a great difference. Unfortunately, some karateka and judges think that performing a kata such as kanku dai is better than performing heian shodan. This is not true, it is not a competition of the names of kata. It is how well you feel it and demonstrate that feeling you have inside.

So, we can say it is no good building a castle on sand. Sure you have a beautiful building very tall, nicely painted and so on, but when the wind comes it will fall over. We must build on a secure foundation and then the castle will never fall no matter how hard the wind may blow. Looking dynamic will never work. You must be dynamic and feel dynamic.

***Do you agree with the translation of the dojo-kun that we use here in Australia.***

Yes, it is OK for a direct translation. But that translation is a little shallow and could be deeper. There is more meaning to it than that version shows.

***Training with inspiring men such as Kanazawa kancho, Shiro Asano sensei and Frank Nowak sensei has always 'lifted my spirits' . Which men or women have you found inspiration from?***

Two people immediately come to mind. Kanazawa kancho and Dr. Masami Kuni. Kanazawa kancho you know about and you understand why I mention him. Dr. Masami Kuni is the founder of the “ Masami Kuni Educational Creative Dance Foundation” in California USA. He is a very active 94 year old who taught dance to my wife. He is also a philosopher and I have learnt from him on many, many subjects indeed. His idea on life is very similar to Kanazawa kancho. Now, if a person is very great, a painter, musician, whatever, great people always seem to have a common idea about how to deal with their precious life. Not only their life but they wish to share it with others. They all have the courage to give to other people in order that others may appreciate their own lives. However, to leave this question there with the mention of two people would not tell the whole story. My karate activities allow me to meet other people all the time and those people, such as the Australians that I am privileged to meet at the moment, it is those people who also ‘lift my spirits’. For I am similar to, say a tree, Kanazawa kancho is the sunshine beaming down on me but I also need water for me to be able grow. The water is the inspiration from all the people that I am lucky enough to meet through karate. I need both sunshine and water. So I am so lucky that I took up Karate-Do because I receive inspiration daily from all the people around me as well as direction with the sunshine from Kanazawa kancho. So although I receive direction with the sunshine from the Master without you people I will not be able to grow, I will go nowhere.

***After living in Canada for 30 years, sensei. What is your favourite thing about Canada?***

I enjoy being surrounded by nature. After training you can go fishing, you can go hiking. It is wonderful to be surrounded by nature. The countryside is beautiful, however, all countries are beautiful in their own way, with their own character. What stands out in Canada are the people they are so friendly and nice. Canada is a country of true freedom, it is utopia.

***Quote: “Garbage is garbage! Even if you practice it a thousand times it will still be garbage. Dozono sensei.***

***Your home town of Belleville has a population of 40,000 yet you have produced, from this small base many champions. What is the thrust or focus of your training to be able to accomplish this success rate?***

If I have 100 students I want 100 successful students. If one student is struggling then it is the responsibility of all the students to lift the struggler up and help them. There are two types of students, some blossom early and some blossom later. If they are late bloomers and cannot manage by themselves it is then the responsibility of the others to help their comrade. I say to Yoko, "you are a champion, but you remember how you started and never turn your back on other students." So all my students know this and always help one another. There is no low or high in the dojo. All are equal. Always look after the children. They are our future. Always look after new students and remember how you started. At tournaments I tell the students, "do not come to me and ask questions I will be too busy with my duties." You must coach each other and work together. When a student is a late in blossoming and then becomes a champion after many years of trying, look out, they are usually dynamite. So our success is working together each helping the other. Teamwork.

***I once asked Asano sensei about his training regime when he won the All Japan Kumite Title. He told me while he was studying at University he would train 6 hours a day, 6 days a week. Two hours before classes began two hours at lunch time and two hours after classes finished. Each lesson began with 100 punches on the makawari board. Was it as grueling a schedule for all the instructors such as yourself, sensei?***

Yes. I would take three lunch boxes to junior high school, high school and university. The first lesson before school and the last lesson would be until dark as we were training outside. We did not have an indoor dojo. However, we have evolved since then. With today's sports medicine we have a better understanding of our bodies now and we are smarter and have a better system. Instructors now are also smarter, more efficient, we have more quality control. It is better quality training now. Then it was bully training, yes, bully training. Now when we train we don't say I had to learn this way so you must, no, if we know a better way we use it. Now when we train we are thinking how to make sure of safety and how to remain injury free. Then it was different. As I have said we are not narrow-minded. If we can see a better way then we adopt it. Yes, I trained the same way as Asano sensei, when we were training, because of the heat, you might fall over. The sempai's would get cold water and pour it over you, you got up and continued to train. You might climb a mountain get sick and fall down. Yes it happened but it was quite dangerous, even life threatening, sometimes students died. But now we say, if it not good for their health or their safety, then it is bad. So we have to understand how to maintain safety, how not to get injuries.

***Lessons with Asano sensei and Nowak sensei would always take students to the edge of their endurance. Of course some black belts look back and love to recall to the younger ones, stories of these grueling lessons that they had endured, when sweat was considered the only way to improvement.***

People like Kanazawa kancho and Asano sensei are survivors but many fell by the wayside and do not now do karate. Our responsibility is to take care of everyone, to make them better, to make them healthier not to destroy them. So, I do not believe in training student on the edge of endurance. Some students can take hard training some cannot. I would rather a student trained for one hour and gave their best for one hour. Then they become better, little by little, they will live longer and they will enjoy life. That is the bottom line to me.

***Master Funakoshi said he felt that karate was an unfinished art and that it would continue to grow and change as man's knowledge and circumstances changed. Do you feel, however that Master Funakoshi would approve of today's karateka?***

Funakoshi sensei would never approve of sports kumite. Because sports kumite is only for the younger generation, when you become 80 or 90 years old you don't do that. But you can enjoy kata and you can do that forever. Today's sport karate is not art. It is mealy a temporary thing. Karate is like classical music. People can appreciate it 100 or 200 years later. But sports karate is like breakdancing it comes and it goes. Yes, karate is like classical music and if you love classical music then you don't change a note. You don't

look at Beethoven's 5th symphony and say oh, I will change these notes or that passage. It is the same with kata, the master made it so it is a masterpiece and you don't change it. Karate should be changed only as I responded in the above question.

*Quote: "I hope to discover much more about karate as I grow older. I am only 55, so I am still raw material." Dozono sensei.*

***Sensei, you have trained with Master Funakoshi as a young child and your father was his friend. You have also lived in Canada for 30 years. With your background do you feel Western Countries have, for the most part, missed out on the main aims and values that were say, taught to Master Funakoshi? I would like to add to that, because different cultures have different view points, not better, not worse, just different, would we indeed see the benefit of those values?***

Firstly, we are not all that different, we are all human beings with the same needs. Secondly any little differences can only make karate richer. Now the main value was 'Jinkaku kansei ni tsumuro koto' to cultivate our character. That you do cultivate your character is more important than how you cultivate it. For instance you may cultivate it through Aussie Rules Football or Rugby. So it does not matter which nationality you are as long as you endeavour to improve your character. 'Doryoku no seishin o yashinau koto' to foster the spirit of effort.

I remember Funakoshi sensei saying to me "if you continue to train, no matter what, then you will achieve". He also said, "Dozono-kun, the most important thing is your heart." If you have a strong heart and good character everything will come to you, you don't have to go there for it. It will come to you. Opportunities, luck, it will come to you. That is why I never worry.

***Did you always want to teach sensei?***

No, it just happened. I am not a teacher, but a sempai to many. (I know a little more karate than most). I did not foresee it, it was just luck. I am happy to be part of people's lives. But it was just luck. It does not matter what the reason was, it needed to be done. I have this great opportunity to associate with people and they have become my good friends.

***Sensei, in teaching what has been your happiest moment?***

I once had a student who trained very hard. However his school work was very poor. I got on his case. I argued with him and I said "Why don't you work as hard at your lessons as you train in karate? If you did that your school work would be easy." I also said, "If you get another bad report you will have to fight me." His next report was just as bad and I pounced on him. Bang, bang. Anyway, I kept on his case and he slowly began to see the importance of his future. He worked much harder at his school lessons and has become a very respected Doctor. He is my family physician and was the Doctor for my babies. It was wonderful to see him succeed.

***Shintaro Ogawa ( The Okinawan Commissioner of Education) recommended back in 1902 that karate be taught in school. When you see children blossom and grow while learning karate you realise what forethought Mr Ogawa had. Sensei what do you feel is karate's greatest gift to children?***

Karate is physical education. If a student is not healthy then they cannot study. Karate improves so many things without the children even realising it. It improves their physical health, it improves their mental health, their confidence, their attitude, their attention span, even their time management. When they learn karate they learn discipline. They are more able to cope. In Japan they say 'If you want something done ask a busy guy.' A busy guy knows how to manage his time and get the job done properly. Karate is the greatest education to many children. Therefore the karate instructor must become an educator who can teach the philosophy of life.

***What are your ambitions, sensei? For yourself and for Belleville.***

For myself, I wish to live a very, very long life with good health. I wish to be able to practice Karate-Do and Tai-Chi when I am over 100 years old. I also wish to be able to assist all the citizens of Belleville for the betterment of their lives.

***Sensei, which style of Tai-Chi do you teach?***

Yang style.

***Quote: "We cannot control desire, that is why we struggle. But without struggle we can never achieve anything." Dozono sensei.***

***Sensei, win or lose, what is the most important lesson a person can learn from competition?***

Appreciation and respect towards others, sportsmanship and recognition of hard work. I try to learn from others and be able to apply whatever I have learnt to my training and teaching.

***What has been the most important lesson karate has taught you , sensei?***

To be courteous and to work hard. If you continue to train you'll be better. If you work hard you will accomplish what you want.

***Do you feel, sensei, that Tai Chi is complimentary to Shotokan, and why?***

Tai Chi is complimentary not only to Shotokan, but to all martial arts and sports. Tai Chi has improved my breathing, flexibility, balance and relaxation. But more importantly it can be used for physiotherapy and rehabilitation of injuries. For example, I was able to recover from 7 broken ribs with Tai Chi breathing exercises in 4 weeks. I also was able to recover from a torn anterior cruciate ligament in 2 months with Tai Chi exercises. So I also use Tai Chi as my medicine. Tai Chi is a drug-free medicine.

***Is there a martial art that is complimentary to Shotokan, sensei?***

Yes, anything is helpful. But first you must master one art before you can appreciate another. Shotokan Karate-Do is an art. Because it is an art, we must train properly. We can be creative, but creativity must be based upon good foundations and sound principles. It is not an easy task, to master an art. It will take a long time. It is like studying science. To be a scientist you must first of all study mathematics. After you have studied mathematics you must study physics. After you have studied both mathematics and physics you must study chemistry. You cannot understand physics unless you first understand mathematics. You cannot understand chemistry unless you understand both mathematics and physics. Mathematics is kihon (basics). Physics is kata. Chemistry is kumite. Remember kihon is our air, food and water. Without them we cannot live. Without kihon we cannot improve our art of Karate-Do. We have to struggle to study kihon correctly because upon kihon everything else is based .

***Quote: "Everybody wants to copy Kanazawa kancho's technique, but nobody want to copy how hard he works."***

I hope you have found Dozono sensei's remarks helpful. I certainly did. He lives by everything he says. I have watched in total admiration the demonstrations he has given. I also enjoyed the training with him immensely and learned so much. If there is ever a chance of training with him in the future I will most certainly be taking it. I would like to thank Dozono sensei for the time he took and the thoughtful answers he gave me for this interview. Canada is certainly a lucky country.

I asked Dozono sensei for a last remark that he would like to leave Australians with. He replied:

***"Sho shin wasureru bekarazu."  
"Always train with a beginners mind." Dozono sensei.***