



The Feminist Karate Union is a 501c3 non-profit

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FKU Punchline

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 2

SPRING 2008

An Interview with Kiera Azar, First Blue Belt *Eileen Michel*

What made you decide to take karate, and how long have you been training?

I was looking for a long-term way to improve my health and get some exercise. I heard about FKU through a self-defense class, and also through another student's mom, so I signed up. I have been training for about 2 years.

I know that you have some kind of visual disability, but don't know the details. Could you talk about some of the challenges this presents for you in your karate training?

I'm completely blind in one eye, and have no peripheral vision. I don't see depth, so the floor was the first challenge. When the floor is white everything looks flat, but when I get to the color it looks like it's on a different level. When I'm doing kata it's easier to do it on the colored part, so it looks like it's all on the same level. It's a brain issue. Plus, I had to memorize where everything is in the dojo, so I don't run into a pole or run off the mat. Now I pretty much have the dojo mapped out in my head.

I also have some hearing loss, and it can be really challenging to know who's talking when there are a lot of people around. Since I don't have visual cues, it can get really confusing at times.

Sometimes I'm getting more feedback than I can handle, but I'm starting to change my view on that. It can get frustrating, but now I know that when an instructor is giving me feedback it means she knows I am capable of doing it. Also, I finally realized that even when I'm feeling overwhelmed I know my brain is working on it, and I'll get it eventually. How I deal with it in the moment is to just do what I can, and let the rest settle – to trust my brain.

That sounds like a lot to deal with. Did you ever feel in the beginning that it might be too much, and that you wouldn't be able to do it?

For me it's all in mental attitude, knowing I can do it and being determined to do it. Sensei Aleeta once told me that I could go beyond what I thought I could, and I believed her! At first my goal was to get to blue belt, but now I'm there, so I guess I need a new goal.

You recently mentioned an incident where you had to defend yourself against your aunt's caregiver. Could you talk about that?

He was drunk and made a grab for me. The first thing I did was yell at him at the top of my lungs – "Stop, back off now!". Then I took fighting stance and got ready to hit him, and then he just looked at me and left. For the first time in my life I didn't feel like a coward, because there was something I could do. *(Continued on p. 4)*

Surviving Senseis and Sea Turtles *Alicia Crowley*

"Three more weeks. Three more weeks. Two more weeks. Two more weeks. One more week." This was my mantra until I arrived in Hawaii in March for my shodan exam. Black belt testing is an intense, rigorous process and the few months leading up to it are tough. Many hours were spent in the dojo figuring out one-step sparring routines, practicing kata and bunkai and tormenting ourselves with enhanced basics six days a week. This year I was the only student testing for black belt, but Joanne, Kim and Tracy were all along for the ride as my partners in paired sparring exercises and bunkai. Sensei Aleeta guided me through the daunting process with unwavering support, attention and torture regimes. I cannot thank any of them enough.

We reached Hawaii for the final week before the test when the real work began. My mantra became, "Almost done. Almost done". "Get it over with. Get it over with" became my mantra once we reached Hawaii. With less than a week to go, the real work began. Training in Hawaii is always intense. There are several dojos on the island of O'ahu and typically students attend classes at only one or two of the dojos. But when we visit, we spend hours a day dojo-hopping, attending as many classes at as many dojos as possible. Within the first three days of our visit in March, we got in thirteen hours of classes – I counted.

We practiced and worked out on our own at the cabin and I was studying for the written test and wrote my essay on the four major styles of karate-do and their philosophies. But I shouldn't make it sound so incredibly tiring. In our free time, we were at the beach! Kailua beach is the most gorgeous place I have ever seen. With powdery white sand, deep turquoise waves and slender palms, it is the epitome of paradise. I made my first acquaintance with a sea turtle this trip! I saw the turtle swimming towards Kim and me, standing waist-deep in the water. I pointed and yelled, "Kim, look! It's a turtle!" We both shouted and swam fast, in opposite directions. Kim booked it back to shore while I went after the turtle. Our new friend hung around our part of the beach for several days. I still can't believe it; I swam with a sea turtle! It was a first for me.

The training experience in Hawaii is invaluable. I remember on my first trip what a shock it was to kneel down for meditation behind Sensei George Kotaka and Sensei Elisa Au and watch them, two legendary athletes in my eyes, casually begin class in a way very similar to what we do at home. Swinging arms forward, backward, stretching. I feel incredibly lucky to be able to see the top of the top do their thing and be taught by them. During classes, Sensei George, Sensei Maile, the other black belt instructors and sometimes Sensei Kotaka himself find the time to focus on us mainland visitors, giving feedback and corrections and telling us to pull more. "Pull your hand. Pull. Pull harder."

I also consider it useful to my training to watch Sensei Kotaka's many young black belt students. Watching them practice and perform, I see how they incorporate the teachings in the way they move and use speed and power. I walk away with new ideas to bring back to the dojo in Seattle and incorporate into my own practice.

The hardest part of the test is at the beginning – enhanced basics. It is during this portion of the test that my mantra turns into, "Ten more. Ten more. Just ten more. Ten more." But after you push through the basics, the killer part is over and the rest of the ten hour test seems like a breeze in comparison.

This time around felt much more relaxed to me than last time. For my first black belt test in March of 2007 I didn't know what to expect, so it was a much scarier experience. During my shodan-ho test, when we were doing roundhouse kicks from front stance (the hardest part of enhanced basics in my opinion), I actually remember the words running through my head, "Why am putting myself through this? Is it really worth it?" But I struggled through and not only survived, but passed. This time it was more like, "This really isn't so bad. I've done it before, I can do it again."

Suddenly it was time for the final meditation and the test was over. New mantra: "I made it! I made it! I made it!" What a rewarding feeling, accompanied by a beautiful tropical breeze blowing in through the door.

We went back to the cottage and my final mantra was, "Beach. Beach. Beach. Beach." Kim, Tracy and I celebrated by diving into the ocean at Kailua. And we partied with our sea turtle friend all night long.

Letter from Sensei Aleeta

Dear Students, Family Members, Teachers and Friends,

I would like to thank everyone who planned, helped to prepare, participated in and attended this year’s Feminist Karate Union/Seattle IKF demonstration and celebration. I am extremely pleased with how well everything worked: the location was great, the food was plentiful and delicious, the performances were strong. The audience was wonderful, supportive and appreciative. Even the weather cooperated.

It is thrilling to see how the school has grown and developed over the last few years, and I am very proud of all of my students. I have a great deal of respect for the adult students, and the way they manage to train in spite of demanding jobs, careers, and family responsibilities. I am particularly proud of my high-ranking students. I think they are a remarkable group with a tremendous variety of wonderful skills, talents and interests. They are a long-lived and long-suffering group. The school is what it is today because of them. They have been critical to each other’s development and to the survival and development of the school. It is wonderful to be associated with them.

I am also extremely proud of the level of performance, participation, discipline and attention among the junior students. The most wonderful thing is, although the discipline was taught by adults, it was modeled by and learned from the advanced juniors. This is a milestone. The children are learning from adults, and they are learning from each other. That is truly exciting. There was a time when I thought that I would never enjoy teaching children, but boy was I wrong. I not only enjoy it, I continually learn from teaching them. I wouldn’t be the same teacher without the experience of working with children.

In addition to family and friends taking time to attend, many pitched in and did whatever was necessary to make the day run smoothly. It’s hard to express adequately how grateful I am for the support of all kinds that was given.

A strong sense of community seems to grow and grow within our school. The teamwork at the demonstration was superior. In many ways we seem like an extended family all working toward the same goal, rather than just a martial arts school. We have a strong core of students and parents who recognize the quality of training our school offers and the potential it has for the future: That core is you! You all bring ideas and energy into the school and work to keep it strong, fresh and growing. I am so lucky to be a part of this. The Feminist Karate Union is a dream that started long ago. Thank you all so much for helping to keep this dream alive and thriving.

Sensei Aleeta

Those roundhouse kicks are looking pretty good! Students performing at FKU Spring Demo.



Yes! I want to help FKU support women and children in martial arts

The Feminist Karate Union is a non-profit organization and your donations help us fulfill our mission of providing affordable, quality martial arts training to women and children.

Enclosed is my gift of:

- \$25
- \$50
- \$100
- Other _____

Comments: _____

PROMOTIONS

Kanji Quarterly *Text and Calligraphy by Nancy Yamaguchi*

KARATE-DO

10th Kyu-ho: Sara Baker; Zachary Check; Nolan Miller; Sophie Morada; Kelly O'Hara

10th Kyu: Klaus Bachhuber; Silver Denovan; Nicholas Marsh; William Mueser; Willow Sullivan; Benjamin Sutton; Nicholas Williams

9 kyu: William Mueser; Jake Shields; Nicholas Williams; Aileen Zeng

8 kyu: Mac Beveridge; Declan Farr; Blake Snodgrass; Linda Xu

7th Kyu: Audrey Musselman-Brown; Amanda Triandafilou

5th Kyu: Melissa Hancock; Eileen Michel

4th Kyu: Theo Floor; Maggie Hargus; Amelia Hooning

3rd Kyu: Kinny Kimlinger; Nancy Yamaguchi

Shodan: Alicia Crowley

Yondan: Aleeta Van Petten

KOBUDO

10th Kyu: Galen Chuang; Audrey Musselman-Brown

7th Kyu: Eileen Michel

4th Kyu: Theo Floor

News Flash

During her last trip to Hawaii, Sensei Aleeta was (apparently unexpectedly) promoted by Sensei Chuzo Kotaka to the level of Yondan (4th Dan). This is quite an accomplishment, and an honor for our school. Congratulations, Sensei Aleeta!

"DŌ," The Way, the Path, and Dōjō, "place where one walks the path"

In our last issue, we introduced the kana and the kanji, and showed the kanji for "karate," or "empty hand." In this issue, we focus on "DŌ," meaning "the way" or "the path." Accordingly, "Karate-dō" means "the way of Karate."



To write this, we simply add the symbol for "dō" to the symbols "karate" we learned previously. The kanji symbol for DŌ appears here. (Note that the line appearing over the "o" indicates a long pronunciation.)

The three strokes at the left side are intended to represent a foot walking on a road. The nine-stroke radical to the right means "head" or "neck" and indicates pronunciation.

The kanji "DŌ" also appears in many words you may have already heard, such as the



martial art "judō," and "bushidō" or "budō," both of which mean "the way of the warrior." It also is the lead character in "DŌJŌ."

The second character, JŌ, means "place." It is a 12-stroke character, and the three-stroke radical at the far left means "earth." The second portion has the connotation of purifying a religious site. Dōjō literally means

"the place where one walks the path." At a karate dōjō, the path is karate, but the word dōjō also means gymnasium, arena, and Buddhist seminary. This adds an extra level of meaning to our dōjō. It is not only a gymnasium where we do physical exercises that look like karate- it has a connotation of a place of study and a place of the spirit as well.

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Kiera Interview (continued from page 1)

Wow, that is really inspiring! What do you think it was that enabled you to have that kind of confidence?

I really feel like karate changes you in a lot of ways. At first you think you are coming in to learn how to punch and kick and defend yourself, but I am amazed at the increase in self confidence that spills over into the rest of your life. And you know when you experience that that you won't go back.

Earlier you said that now that you've reached your goal of blue belt you needed to find a new goal. Have you thought about what that might be?

My next goal is to get to second blue belt, and to be good enough to come to the Wednesday night (advanced) class, so I can do weapons. I also want to be able to walk without looking down, and I feel that karate can help me develop that "sixth sense".

Is there anything else you would like to say?

I want to thank Aleeta and all of the teachers and students for their support and kindness. There is so much that this school has given to me. It feels like everyone is pulling for you, and so supportive of you making it. One thing I have realized is that we can't reach our goals by ourselves. Of course we need teachers, but we also need the whole group. Everyone is important.

Returning to Training part II --

Some Thoughts on the Importance of Rank, or the Lack Thereof by Eileen Michel

Recently a small white belt child said to me that she *really really* wanted to be a yellow belt. It seemed that she said this with all her heart and soul, as if it were all she wanted out of life. I tried to explain to her, perhaps misguidedly, that once she was a yellow belt she would want to be an orange belt, and so on, and that the important thing was to focus on improving her basics and she would be promoted soon enough. She did not look at all convinced, and I was moved by her innocent yearning.

Yet it is not just the very young who sometimes have a hard time maintaining perspective on the issue of rank. When I first returned to karate about 2 ½ years ago, at first I was so thrilled that my body still worked that I really didn't care what I used to keep my gi closed. After a little while, however, I have to admit that at times it actually felt humiliating to tie on my white belt. After being "at the top", it was difficult to be training minus the respect I had previously had as a black belt student and teacher. The funny thing is that when I had it I didn't think it was all that important to me. I mean of course advancing through the ranks in karate, noticing my improvement and skill development, and finally reaching the goal was important, but whatever social status came with it did not really matter to me. Or so I thought. But once I was back in karate without it I realized that it must have been more important than I had thought, because I missed it!

My feelings about this varied as time went on. There were times when I didn't think about it at all, and just enjoyed the training. At other times I felt like a 5 year-old playing Chutes and Ladders, after landing on that long chute up at the top and having to go all the way down to the bottom again. On occasion I even felt like throwing the board over, so to speak, as a child I used to play the game with was inclined to do.

Of course we want the validation from our teachers and the recognition by our peers of the progress we've made that is signified by a promotion. Obviously if our primary reason for training is so that we can some day strut around and brag that we are a black belt, we are seriously missing the mark. More positively, though, striving for the next rank can motivate us to improve our karate, and obtaining the rank helps us to mark our progress. However, as thrilling as it can be to receive the external rewards – the belts and certificates and maybe trophies or medals – those moments of excitement are fleeting. I am reminded of the Zen saying, "Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water." After our great achievement, whatever it may be, we show up for the next class and continue our training – and there we are with the same pesky little "training challenges" we had yesterday.

As time went on and I continued to struggle with the issue of rank on and off, I came across an article that helped me to see things in a different light. In his essay *The Gateway to the Martial Path*, Dave Lowry, (who has written many books and articles on various aspects of martial arts training, and I highly recommend any of them to any karate fanatic), demonstrates his humility when a visiting student questions whether to call him *Sensei* or *Shihan*. He tells the student that he is neither, but rather he is a 'nyumonsha' – a beginner. He explains that the kanji for this word means "a person entering the gate" – (perhaps Nancy-san will explain it further in a future Kanji Quarterly). He then goes on to say that in traditional Japanese architecture, due to the frequency of warfare in old Japan, buildings were designed so that one entered an external gate, and then had to go around in a spiral through a series of openings in order to gain access to the interior. He likens this process to martial arts training, and says that "if we are serious about our journey along the martial path, we must always think of ourselves as 'nyumonsha'. There is always another gate before us, another turn, another discovery to be made." My hope is that I can keep this idea in mind as I continue with my training, so that I can more fully realize that advancing is going not higher, but deeper.

Summer Camps for Martial Arts

Still working on your summer vacation plans? Enhance your depth of knowledge and appreciation of the martial arts through these camps. And have FUN!

FKU's 7th Annual Kids' Camp is July 28 – August 1. A new guest instructor each day will teach a facet from their art, and our senseis will further our students' skills in fitness and karate.

All students at our main dojo and karate students at Lowell may enroll. Camp is also open to siblings of current students, students at other martial arts schools, and select applicants with Sensei Joanne's approval. To register online go to FeministKarateUnion.org/summercamp.html.

Two great martial arts camps for women are run by the **National Women's Martial Arts Federation** (NWMAF) and by the **Pacific Association of Women Martial Artists** (PAWMA). Both organizations are non-profits whose missions are to further women and girls training in the martial arts. Both camps are smorgasbords for all different arts at all different levels.

NWMAF's camp, called Special Training, is July 17-20 (and the accompanying self-defense instructors' conference is July 16-17) at Hobart & William Smith College in Geneva, New York. ST offers a large variety of classes in different styles with some of the best women martial artists nation-wide. Visit NWMAF.org for more information, or speak with Sensei Joanne.

PAMWA Camp is August 22-25 just outside Eugene, Oregon. Similar in nature to the NWMAF's ST, this Camp is usually held in a more rustic, scenic location. This Camp is a great opportunity for our students, particularly because it is close to Seattle and because of special programming for teen girls at a great price. The area around Eugene is renowned for arts, hiking, and world-class wine, so consider making PAWMA Camp part of a larger vacation. Visit PAWMA.org for more information, or speak with Sensei Joanne.

DIY* Self Defense *Deb Schaack*

Joanne Factor, Deb Schaack, and Willow Sullivan enjoyed a recent sunny Sunday evening in May at the Vera Project, Seattle's all-ages music-art center. And no, they weren't there to slam-dance to the latest band. Equipped with punching shields, this FKU trio was leading the "hands-on" portion of a self-defense workshop organized by the Vera Project for members of the local Seattle DIY community.

After a series of preliminary presentations by other organizations, everyone was ready to try their new self-defense skills. In no time at all, Joanne had the group using their voices and practicing strikes to key self-defense targets: eyes, throat, groin, knees. Willow and Deb fearlessly held the shields so everyone could experience the sensation of hitting something solid. Although it was a very brief introduction, all attending took one step closer to being more self-reliant – through basic self defense.

*DIY, or Do It Yourself, refers to the ethic of being self-reliant and doing things yourself as opposed to paying others to do it. For more information about the local DIY community and the Vera Project, go to www.seattledi.com and www.theveraproject.org.

Board Notes

For the last couple of years, Lowell parents Jeanne Hoppe and Brenda Winter-Hansen have served as representatives to the FKU Board of Directors. Since the Lowell community comprises about half of the FKU dojo population, it is important that Lowell offers up one or two representatives as liaisons to the FKU Board.

Jeanne and Brenda will be stepping down from the Board in the coming months. Therefore, the Board is currently looking for one to three Lowell parents to fill vacancies in the fall of 2008. Board duties include: meetings once a month, decision making concerning general operations of the dojo, fundraising, event coordination, scholarships, recruiting new students, and marketing. Representatives from Lowell on the Board at FKU are able to help Lowell karate students and families become more integrated with the wider FKU community. They provide important influence, support, and insight to the FKU Board, especially where the school calendar is of concern.

FKU Board meetings are held the second Wednesday of every month at 6 pm in the dojo's office. Children of Board members are welcome to join the evening class held during the meeting. The meetings are always open to any and all who would like to attend so you could go and sit in any time. The upcoming fall Board meetings will cover the Lowell Open House (held at the dojo) and the annual Kickathon fundraiser. Both are events where Lowell representatives are greatly needed.

Please consider lending your skills and time to the service of FKU's Board of Directors. You would be benefiting both the dojo as a whole and the interests of Lowell karate students. To learn more, please talk with Sensei Joanne or get in touch with the dojo office at 325-3878 or via e-mail with FKU's Office Manager, Donna Hargus at donna@feministkarateunion.org. Thanks!

Treasurer's Report — Spring Demonstration 2008

Submitted by Melissa Hancock, Treasurer

Spring Demonstration Expenses:

Community Center Rental	\$292.00
T-Shirt Printing	\$251.35
Program Printing	\$30.09
Flowers	\$86.19
Total Expenses	\$659.63

Spring Demonstration Income:

T-Shirt Sales	\$349.00
Bake Sale Donations	\$348.00
Total Income	\$697.00

Events Calendar

June 14	15 th Annual Sacramento Karate Championship. Sacramento, CA
June 29	Pride Parade
July 9	Board Meeting
July 16-20	Special Training, NWMAF; Geneva, NY
July 19	Dojo Clean and Purge
July 28- Aug 1	FKU Summer Camp
Aug 13	Board Meeting
Aug 22-25	PAWMA Camp – Outside Eugene, OR

Board of Directors

Chair:
Aleeta Van Petten
Treasurer:
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Tracey Drum
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*Come discover your
strongest self*