



# FKU Punchline

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## Lessons from a Tournament

By  
Tracey Drum

The Feminist Karate Union is a 501c3 non-profit

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Tournaments test you. They test you physically; but much more than that, they test you mentally. Sensei Joni's bi-annual tournament held last November at Seattle Central Community College was no exception. Scads of us at FKU participated, and everyone performed beautifully under the pressure, winning a great number of medals and trophies, and adding to our experience as students of karate. The tournament experience is one that challenges you in multiple ways, asking you difficult questions and putting life in perspective.

It asks you, how do you deal with humiliation? There's really no other way to describe getting punched in the face repeatedly but humiliating, and, well..., painful, of course, but, pain confounded by humiliation. Put together, it's extra humiliating. I watched two ten year old boys sobbing after one of these experiences, and one of them had to pull himself together before sparring in another match. It's amazing how much choice we have in how we respond. You can allow it to consume you, taking you off your game, or you can remain focused. This choice presented itself to me in my final sparring match where I remember thinking, "Wow, I seem to be taking a lot of punches in the face. But, they're not scoring my opponent any points, so I'll just keep doing what I'm doing -scoring slowly on roundhouse kicks and reverse punches, and getting punched in the face." This approach worked for me. I remained calm and focused, and my opponent grew frustrated, which didn't help her performance. I, somehow, took the situation and turned it around and put the humiliation back on her, winning the match.

Tournaments also ask, how do you deal with unfair treatment? No matter what happens at those judges' meetings, we all interpret the rules differently. What one judge thinks is a penalty, another thinks is a point. We interpret what we see through our own filters, and what comes out is different for everyone. It matters how you respond to the contradictions and varying opinions, trying not to take anything personally or let it affect your state of mind and your performance. I've been wearing the judges' uniform for at least five years, now; and still it feels new and awkward to me. I sat in one corner of the ring while one of our very own talented FKU students performed. I'd seen her perform many times in the dojo, and knew this wasn't her best performance. When it came time to score, I gave her the lowest score of all three. My score was not just lower, but lots lower, like .5 lower than the others. Holding the score cards up, I wished I could retract it and let my interpretation blend in more with the other two. But, that's part of the tournament experience. It's initial reactions and quick decisions, and the filters through which their generated. She took it like a champ and held her ground in sparring. Understanding this and not letting quick judgments bring you down is just part of the experience.

How do you deal with being told you're next, but you're still sitting three hours later? There are many places in life where you have no control over what and when things happen. Tournaments are a perfect example. It's how you respond that matters. When there's nothing you can do to change a situation, and you feel powerless, you still have control over one thing- your reaction. This can be good, or it can be a detriment. The challenge is to stay clear-headed and relaxed, even if you have a life outside of karate to which you'd like to return.

I certainly have my history of dreading tournaments, and at times questioned their overall value. But, the more I attend, the more I realize how I have the power to make them valuable. It can be thought of as an exercise in dealing with life. We can practice learning how to handle pain, humiliation, injustice, and the sense of feeling powerless. We can take these experiences and apply them to whatever life throws at us, because, within the walls of the sweaty-smelling, anxiety-filled gym, we choose the lessons to be learned.



## Kanji Quarterly

By  
Nancy Yamaguchi

### PROMOTIONS

#### Empty Hand

10th KYU-ho: Mairead Galloway, Morgan Galloway, Eli Kaufman, Nicholas Marsh, William Mueser, Willow Sullivan, Benjamin Sutton

10th KYU: Aileen Zeng

9th KYU: Kiera Azar, Misty Benham, Andrew Biehl, Yukimi Haraguchi, Angela Yu

8th KYU: Alexander Hoppe

7th KYU: Nick Hall

6th KYU: Ari Kaufman

4th KYU: Deb Schaack, Jennifer Sweigert

2nd KYU: Amanda Rose Smith

#### Weapons

10th KYU: Nick Hall

9th KYU: Melissa Hancock, Ari Kaufman, Eileen Michel

8th KYU: Melissa Hancock, Eileen Michel

6th KYU: Deb Schaack

5th KYU: Theo Floor, Maggie Hargus, Amelia Hooning

Have you ever been curious about the Japanese characters written on your diplomas, or on the belts of the sensei? There are three scripts used in written Japanese: *Katakana*, *Hiragana*, and *Kanji*. Katakana and Hiragana are phonetic scripts; that is, the characters stand for sounds, such as *ka*, *ke*, *ku*, *ko*, *sa*, *se*, *su*, *so*, and so forth. The Katakana script is used to spell out foreign words, such as the names on the belts. This often has a humorous element, since the alphabets generally end with a vowel sound, and some sounds in English simply have no Japanese equivalent. “Tracey Drum,” for example, is spelled out on her belt as “To-re-shi Do-ra-mu.” Close enough, yes?

The Kanji are the most complex and interesting elements in written Japanese. Part of the visual interest stems from the fact that some of the characters are pictographs. They are essentially simplified drawings of the objects they represent. Others are diagrams that represent an abstract concept. The kanji for the number three, *san*, for example, is three parallel lines. Some kanji are combined-meaning characters, where placing two symbols together provides a new meaning. Reading and writing Japanese is thus a daunting task—even a child in Japan

must learn the two phonetic scripts plus hundreds and then thousands of kanji.

Kanji were adapted from the Chinese characters, much as karate was adapted from martial arts introduced to Okinawa from China. The Okinawans called the art “*Te*,” or “Hand.” The original characters used in the word *kara-te*, in fact, meant “China Hand.”

Yet the word “*kara*” also means “sky” or “empty,” and in 1933 Sensei Funakoshi Gichin changed the reading from “China Hand” to “Empty Hand.” The kanji compound presented in our column today is *karate*, “empty hand.”

Note that writing a kanji is much like performing a kata—each stroke in the kanji must be drawn, and drawn in the correct order and direction. To illustrate this, the kanji for *karate* is drawn a second time, with each stroke numbered as it is

written, and with the number appearing at the starting point of the stroke. That is, stroke 1 of *kara* starts at the top and extends down, then the brush is lifted and stroke 2 is top to bottom, and stroke three is left to right, and so on.

These are the basics of the Japanese scripts. In future issues, we will present other kanji and how their shapes convey meaning. As we will see, sometimes the way a kanji is drawn reveals a deeper and more satisfying meaning than a simple translation. Beautifully rendered kanji by skilled calligraphers can be works of art, conveying emotion and drama, much like a kata performed by a skilled karateka can convey the sense of drama and urgency in an empty hand battle.

## Follow Up on Returning to Training Article

By Eileen Michel

The Fall issue of Punchline contained the first half of my article about reflections on returning to training, after some years away. In the current issue I had intended to finish with some thoughts on the meaning or importance of rank, but due to space constraints and having several other wonderful submissions I have decided to hold off until the next issue. Truth be told, between then and now my thoughts on the subject have varied widely, and at this point in time I guess I would have to say that I think that rank is both all important and not important at all. (How's that for a Zen attitude?) Rank is an issue that we all deal with in one way or another. Ideally we are able to keep it in perspective, but there may be a tendency to either make it too important, to the detriment of our happiness and enjoyment of karate, or else to pretend that it doesn't matter, and thus fail to strive as hard as we might. In the next issue of Punchline, for what it's worth, I will write about my thoughts on the subject at that time. Since it will be several months from now, I hope that my thinking will be at least several months more evolved from what it is now!

## Also Coming in the Spring Newsletter

- Alicia Crowley on her experience of training for black belt
- The second installment of Kanji Quarterly
- An interview with blue belt extraordinaire Kiera Azar
- AND MORE!

### Report on Verbena Workshop *By Joanne Factor*

On Sunday, January 20, the Feminist Karate Union once again opened our doors for a dozen brave participants of the Verbena Women’s Health Challenge to experience karate training. Verbena’s goal for this Challenge is to motivate and empower sexual minority women to take positive steps toward increasing the quality and years of healthy living through education, diet, exercise and a supporting community. Participants get to try various activities and learn about all aspects of fitness.

Taught by Joanne Factor and Deb Schaack, this 3 hour session covered the history and mission of FKU, warm-up and conditioning exercises for building strength and fluidity, karate basics, and a touch of self-defense. The participants showed great “fighting spirit” and humor as they sweated through the session. And, at the end, they agreed it was well-placed effort.

“I cannot say thank you enough for yesterday’s session. I know that everyone enjoyed themselves so much and we will definitely be back next year after the challenge begins. . . . For me personally this was the best challenge yet!” — E. Houston LeBrun, Verbena’s Health Access Coordinator.

Verbena’s mission is to build vibrant communities for lesbians, bisexual and queer women, and transgender individuals through healthy advocacy, education, support and access to care. FKU is proud to be able to contribute to their efforts.



### BOARD NOTES

It was an eventful autumn with an Open House at the dojo for Lowell students and their families, the Kick-a-thon and Annual Meeting, the AAU Tournament at Seattle Central Community College and the annual Hawai’i Tournament over the Thanksgiving weekend. The Board would like to thank all who participated and congratulate our many impressive students who did so well in all those events. The Kick-a-thon raised in excess of \$1700 (!!) and those funds are to go toward scholarships, upgrading our website, and dojo improvements. The Board has already engaged someone to help us with our website and has begun discussions about our scholarship funds and policies.

Copies of the 2007 Cash Flow Report are available at the dojo. Many thanks to Melissa Hancock for her work on this.

**The Board meets the second Wednesday of every month at 6pm at the dojo and welcomes your participation any time.**

#### Board of Directors

- Chair: Aleeta Van Petten
- Treasurer: Melissa Hancock
- Members: Tracey Drum, Charlie Smith, Jean Hoppe, Marisa Muniz, Brenda Winter-Hansen
- Office Manager: Donna Hargus
- Newsletter: Eileen Michel, Donna Hargus

## 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: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Dojo Hosts Lowell Families

On October 20, the dojo hosted Lowell Families at an informal Open House. Families of current Lowell students were invited to the dojo at 10:00 to mingle with other karate families. When the new students were dismissed at 10:00, the advanced students demonstrated various kata and bunkai. The demonstration ended with a rambunctious game of dot tag which captivated the attention of all present. At 10:30, all the students were dismissed and invited to join with the Senseis in welcoming new families and answering questions. All enjoyed Starbucks coffee (thanks Starbucks!) and homemade baked goods (thanks karate moms!).

We hope to make this an annual event to encourage Lowell students to get familiar with their dojo and be comfortable training there on Saturday mornings. There is no additional fee for the Saturday classes. Students will train alongside students of all belts, many of them former Lowell students themselves. In addition, Lowell students may train at the dojo during school holidays. Classes are held Wednesday nights from 6:00 to 7:00. Blue-belted students are welcome to train Tuesdays and Thursday from 5:30 to 7:00 during Lowell breaks.

## Events Calendar

Feb 20 & 21	Evaluations -- Adult Class
Mar 14 & 15	Black Belt Test in HI
Apr 12	Spring AAU Tournament -- Edmonds
Apr 20	FKU Spring Karate Demonstration
July 28 - Aug 1	FKU Summer Camp



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We're on the Web!  
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*Come discover your  
strongest self*