

# The Question

By: Sensei Bruce Anders

What's the question you haven't asked? Too often we don't realize there are questions to ask and then suddenly find out that the person who could have answered has died or just plain doesn't remember. And then ..... we're stuck. Another bit of history lost. An opportunity unfulfilled. I got thinking on this with the recent passing of some long time martial artists.

In 2011 I had the pleasure of visiting Sensei Keiko Fukuda in her San Francisco dojo. She was 98 years of age at the time. I walked in, bowed, asked for permission to watch class and hoped to speak with her afterward. Sensei was clearly in poor health and needed occasional help in moving about. She taught class from a director's chair. She was living history. The first female Judo judan in the world. Her family background? For starters, her grandfather taught jujitsu to Jigoro Kano. How's that for history! I had meant to visit her for years. And didn't until that night. My mistake.

I wanted to ask her questions regarding our own Danzan Ryu. You may not have known that in the 1950s she taught classes at Prof. Ray Law's dojo in Oakland. Although she taught Kodokan Judo and not Kodenkan Jujitsu at Law's , she had certainly seen the DZR boards and was a native Japanese speaker. She likely had spoken with Prof. Law about our Kodenkan system. I had seen old footage of her in Law's and the boards were clearly visible. What an opportunity to ask her about the Japanese meaning of the upper boards of Shinin, Shinyo and Shingen! We have no verifiable kanji for those lists despite what some people claim. The precise meaning of the boards is debated and has been the source of political leverage for some. So, at the end of class I asked. Even if she didn't have input of the kanji, she could have been a source of clues. Unfortunately, she could not remember seeing the boards or if they were there. I tried to approach the subject from a few angles in hope of jogging her memory. She simply did not recall and seemed to be getting a little stressed. I had to accept the situation and respect her health. Graciously she asked me a bit about my own background and asked if I'd like a picture of us together. Wow! That was nice, and another road of insight closed. She'd died February 9, 2013 at age 99. She almost made it to 100. Lots of time studying Judo. Lots of worn out judogis.

So what's the point? For a full martial arts experience, there's more than just learning the techniques and principles. There's a "spirit" to the arts that must be communicated. It's people who live that spirit and transmit it. Sure some it is done by your instructor, and hopefully you do your share, but there is more. A lot of people have gone through a long and winding road to get us to what we have now. The road is still being traveled. Talk with people while you can. Some of the old timers you see at events have



tremendous stories of their history in martial arts. It's sometimes shocking to find out who knew who, and who is quiet about what they know. It can be inspiring to find what keeps a person welded to the martial arts. And it does not necessarily have to be a "name" martial artist. Sometimes the person you see in class regularly has insights and a background that you might otherwise never know. Some of the most insightful martial artists I've met are not on the magazine covers and could care less about notoriety. The brand new middle aged jujitsu white belt may have a background in and out of the arts that s/he does not share ..... unless you ask. Their experiences may give you surprising insights that make a difference. Their stories are worth recording. Sometime somewhere, someone is going to care, and you'll kick yourself for not having done so.

The problem with something important happening is that we usually don't realize it at the time. It's in retrospect that we see the significance. How much of our own DZR history is lost and debated because someone simply didn't think to document the details! If you've done any digging, you know the answer to that.

Not a writer? Don't need to be. Voice recorders are handy. Most of us now have smart phones that will record interviews and video. It's easy. It can be stored for later. (Make a backup copy!) Make voice recordings of your recollections of your own experiences and those of others. You can find someone who will put pen to paper later. A casual conversation today could be a vital record later. And there is such a thing as speaking with a person more than once. We sometimes remember different things at different times.

What would you have liked to ask Henry S. Okazaki? Find out who is around you while you can.

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*Bruce Anders began his study of martial arts in 1969 and is continuing the journey with no end in sight. He has experience in several arts including Kodokan Judo, many forms of Karate, and of course, Kodenkan Jujitsu which he began in 1998. He is currently ranked sandan with the Pacific Jujitsu Alliance and awarded the PJA's mokuroku in 2014.*

April 2017