

HAWAII GASSHUKU 2012 – A SPECTATOR’S PERSPECTIVE

By Janie Burstein

My first summer trip in ages! Hawaii take me away!

DAY 1

Stumbling around in a sleepy fog at 3:30 a.m. How many others are “sleepwalking” to the airport this morning? Drive to Medford in the dark to park the car in the storage unit. Watch Robert pull the huge 40 ton crane out of the garage at 4:30 a.m. so he can park his little bitty Scion in the back corner of the unit. We seriously like avoiding the airport parking fees – we need to send Emmett to college soon.

Then we “DO” the airport thing – fly headlong into LAX...the commotion, the crowds!! How much is that sandwich? Wide awake now! Just get us out of this place, please!

Land in Hawaii....Soke’s friendly face is there to greet us! He presents me with a lei made with my favorite flower, one I have not smelled in well over 12 years...the tuberose! Ahhhhh, heaven!

Soon we are meeting up with those who have arrived before us –it’s like seeing family again! Everyone looks so great! Many hugs and smiles. The anticipation grows as more world travelers arrive! It is SO great seeing everyone again – we are so happy....and HUNGRY! Robert and I sneak off for a quick spam Musubi....someone tell me, how and why are these SO TASTY?? It’s spam, for crying out loud!

Margaret’s name is called over the airport intercom. Her suitcase has decided to take a side trip to Texas - good thing she is a savvy packer and had essentials in her carry-on!

We are delighted to meet Soke’s longtime and very delightful friend Sensei John Isabelo. Family members have come together to help shuttle us around. We load up and head off for a delicious Hawaiian fast food meal, and then to our home base for the next week, Camp Erdman.

Once we arrive, we family volunteers watch closely as things begin to transform. Camp T-shirts, teams with team leaders, and....what....demerit badges on a lanyard around the neck? Rules too? Things are getting serious around here – there are things to remember! Whistle commands? How many blasts mean what? Initial attempts to get in boot camp mode are near futile. This will take some getting used to!

We get our cabin assignments, dole linens out, choose our bunks, make our beds. Sleep will be divine tonight! I hang my lei over the corner of the bunk, look out to the ocean and sleep like a baby as the wind drifts through the window slats. I do have one question

though....what makes that LOUD squacking noise at night?

DAY 2

No way...that sound comes from a gecko? That is just plain a m a z i n g! Could have sworn it was a pterodactyl or something!

Marcia (Shihan Ubiratan's lovely wife and the Brazilian camp mother), Eric (Samantha's talented husband ~ camp photographer extraordinaire), Consuelo (Sophia's absolutely delightful mother who joins us from Chile), Kristin (Soke's right hand gal) and I take up our cameras and begin to document this Gasshuku. (Check out Facebook!)

This is the day training begins. The mood becomes more attentive. Beach runs, sweat, the shock of exhaustion, salt water and sand dripping off bodies, chafing, grimaces, smiles.....Train hard, remember, TRAIN HARD!

Off to the cafeteria for our first "family dining" experience. Amazingly, to me the food is not only edible, it is tasty! We all enjoy a good breakfast and help to clean up. Not bad at all! I can totally do this!

"Team Kata in the Sand". Note: sand is not cooperative. Sand moves all over the place. Everyone tries their best to balance in quicksand. I must say though, it's amazing how lovely Kata looks with the beach and ocean as a backdrop.

Kihon, Niseishi, Pinan 1 - 5 Courses....there's intensive training today. Campers really look like they are getting in the swing of things.

The highlight for the day is Haiku around the campfire. Once the initial shock of being asked to write a poem wears off, it's fun! Hard to get the mind to be creative – too relaxed, and physically tired from the challenges of the day. How wonderful to hear everyone's poems! Sensei Liz shows her stuff and writes the most incredible Haiku!! I decide she is a Haiku Sensei.

DAY 3

Awakened by a cacophony of bird calls and the golden sunlight. I love this.

Campers assemble for morning workout **IN** the ocean. Campers appear to be struggling **IN** the ocean. Ugh – this does not look to be a great deal of fun. But, for me, the billowy clouds make it look so serene, from my viewpoint, another lovely day in paradise....

Then it's off to the mess hall for a much needed breakfast and C O F F E E !!

Next on the agenda....Cabin Inspection! We women thought sure we had it clinched....but alas, the men's cabin took the win! Now seriously, how can THAT be? Have to sneak over and see what we missed!

Later that morning - a field trip! We all pile into cars and vans and head out to Waimea Falls and Arboretum. Wow! Enormous tropical trees, colorful birds, incredible landscaping! This is my favorite stuff! And something I have to say really impressed me.....no greasy pigeons scavenging for food scraps at the Food Court here in Hawaii.....no, they have full grown bright blue peahens and their babies wandering around the tables! There is a sign that says "Please Do Not Feed the Birds". Amazing to think they are a nuisance to anyone! Had my first Hawaiian Ice – sweet and best of all, ICY cold. Some of us swim at the falls, others watch all the tourists. So much to see here.

Back to camp for "Team Kata on the Grass". Obviously this is quite a bit easier than "Team Kata in the Sand". Kata is lovely under the old canopy trees on the soft grass at sunset too.

DAY 4

It's Wolf's birthday! Our youngest camper! What a lucky kid to be in Hawaii with his extended family on his special day!

On to the ocean workouts, which by the way do not appear to be getting any easier. I'm just saying....these sore-muscled folks are being put to the test!

Kata Courses today. Everyone is in full training mode now. You can feel the spirit of the group as they train. It is inspiring to see people from different parts of the world joining together to train all doing the same Katas, all moving in unison – and all of a sudden I realize how amazing this is to witness.

Consuelo and I steal off for a walk down the beach to visit and have a swim. Divine!

Next is "Team Kata on Concrete". Lovely, solid, smooth, cool concrete....in the bowl of the amphitheater. By now these Team Katas are so polished, so well executed. All the practicing I have seen during free time really makes a difference. I am mesmerized!

Camp Erdman's staff of crazy counselors entertain us tonight with raucous songs around a huge bonfire in the wind. I'm not much of a yeller so this is a stretch for me! We yelled our heads off for at least an hour, and some campers participated in skits. A good time was had by all!

Ahhhh....bed.....and I'm not even training!

DAY 5

Whistle blasts. Beach workout - again! I decide to lull around in bed this morning so as to not add to the bathroom queue. All quiet...guess I will go get some coffee and stroll down to the beach at my leisure. As I sit with my toes in the cool sand watching this morning's strenuous beach workout, sipping my hot coffee, I think to myself, "Wow – look at them training – that is SUCH incredibly hard work!! Look at them sweating! That concentration on their faces! But gosh, just look at this lovely morning! Sun glistens off the ocean. Soft breezes. Hummm. Oh, look at that. My coffee is gone ~ guess I'll have to stroll over and get more....." OK, I just am just being mean now, I know.....

Cabin Inspection again. Really....? We didn't win again? We sure worked together to clean up, just sure we had it clinched! Oh well. Our Cabin Boss Shihan Ceci tells us she will fill us in on what went awry.

In the afternoon, a fun and interesting self-defense-from-a-chair class! Who would have thought there are so many techniques you can do from a seated position! Amazing.

Some relaxation time – swimming pool games, tanning on the beach. We are in Hawaii after all! This much needed break brings campers back refreshed.

That afternoon we all packed up and headed out for a high point of the trip. We had the pleasure of meeting Soke's parents and family at their home on the North Shore. We enjoyed sack lunches from the camp and were serenaded by Soke's nephew Steven's delightful ukulele solos. We also met Soke's brother Burt, and I have to say I was just plainly and simply amazed by the gorgeous custom marlin fishing lures he makes. What a gift! We were happy as clams to find out we can buy fresh smoked marlin at his house as well. What a tasty surprise!

Next we headed off to The Polynesian Cultural Center. The native artwork collections here are unsurpassed. There were so many exhibits of intricately carved handiworks from the South Pacific Islands, shows of all kinds, and hands-on classes – one to make fish woven from palm fronds! We broke up into groups and explored all there was to see. The fashion show that featured clothing, dance and songs indigenous to each South Pacific Island was fun - each island represented was on a separate boat steered by an oarsman! My favorite show was the Samoan comedian who showed us how to make fire with only sticks. He was absolutely hysterical.

I learned the friendly staff at PCC are mostly all students at the BYU campus. Students who come from all over the world are employed there to help defer their college costs. Of

course, our group brought a lot of attention and questions from the employees!

The highlights of the trip were the buffet featuring foods from the different islands (I ate in Tonga – White fish in Coconut Milk, delicious Seaweed Casserole, Taro Root Chips, moist shredded pork in sauce and Poi cake for dessert). And the grand finale was the action-packed musical extravaganza “Ha – Breath of Life”.

DAY 6

The final day of Camp! Already?

Skit rehearsal, swimming, a bit of relaxing. Soke was nice enough to take us on an afternoon shopping trip to Haleiwa on the North Shore. (Finally.....now we're talking!). We scatter looking for great deals on stuff you just never see in Oregon!

Anticipation grew after dinner as the skit presentations began. I must say each group did a wonderful job hamming it up and making us laugh. I was actually amazed at how clever and different each skit was, which can, of course, be attributed to the high levels of team secrecy over the past few days. We sure have some talented folks in Karate!

The evening closed with the presentation of certificates. There were heartfelt testimonials and many pictures taken. I felt so glad that I came along to experience this week of training and camaraderie.

DAY 7

Down to packing, cleaning, and the last meal in the mess hall. I find I will actually miss dining with 40 or so of my new closest friends! Next comes linen collection and counts. Load the cars and vans, then we pile the people on top. That's how we roll.

We are off to the Miramar Hotel in Waikiki – back to civilization.

Soke's celebration banquet of his 50 years in Karate at the hotel was a real treat. It was delightful to hear all the guest's testimonials, stories of Soke's lifetime in Karate and how he has touched so many lives. The beautiful Brazilian team gave a powerful kata demonstration, and we enjoyed food, dancing and lots of visiting. It hits me now how much I will miss all of these wonderful people. I am sad when the time comes and we all go our separate ways!

In retrospect I am happy to say that this was a powerful, fun, and insightful journey. I am so thankful I was able to attend with my family. A special thanks goes out to my husband Robert for making this happen for us!

And mostly, many, many thanks to Soke for all his hard work in planning every little detail of this Gasshuku, making this such a memorable trip for all of us. I feel we all owe him a debt of gratitude for how much he gives of himself to all of us. We can learn a lot from his example. We need to always remember, and never take for granted, how very lucky we are to have him in our lives.

Thank you, Soke!