

“Long-Lost Secrets of Karate Finally Revealed”

**Bruce Clayton (California, USA) as
interviewed by Gary Simpson (Perth, Australia)**

on Thursday 17 May 2007 – 10.36am.

Gary Simpson: Welcome Bruce Clayton, Kyoshi, 6th dan exponent of Shotokan karate, from Mariposa, California, USA. Bruce, just to introduce our readers to you, perhaps you can tell us a bit about your current organization and then we can work back a bit from there.

Bruce Clayton: Our organization is called San Ten Karate, founded by Hanshi Vincent Cruz around 1978. Hanshi Cruz is a 9th dan in San Ten, now in his 51st year of karate training. He was a combative measures instructor in the Strategic Air Command of the US Air Force. In that role he returned to Japan many times for training in multiple martial arts.

Gary Simpson: Can you tell us who some of his instructors were?

Bruce Clayton: Sure. He was instructed in a comprehensive program by Masters Kyuzo Mifune and H. Kotani in judo; Masters Isao Obata and Hidetaka Nishiyama in karate-do; Master T. Tomiki in Aikido; and Master M. Hosakawa in Taijō-jutsu.

Gary Simpson: Bruce, how do you fit into the San Ten organization? What is your role?

Bruce Clayton: My role in the organization is that of *consigliere*. I act on behalf of the master to conduct his day-to-day business so he can concentrate on curriculum and ranking issues. The *consigliere* is the assistant who has “the right to be wrong.” Without that right, a karate master simply can't have an assistant.

Gary Simpson: I note on your website that the San Ten Organization welcomes instructors from all over the world to join...

Bruce Clayton: Indeed it does. San Ten welcomes the ronin of karate: people who have lost their affiliation with their original teachers and don't know where to turn for affiliation and quality instruction. Our website is www.santenkarate.com.

Gary Simpson: Before we turn our attention to other matters, just for our interested readers can you explain what San Ten means?

Bruce Clayton: “San Ten” means “Three Heavens.” It refers to Cruz’s philosophy combining mind, body and spirit.

Gary Simpson: What got you interested in karate and who was your first instructor?

Bruce Clayton: It all began in New York in 1962. I was horrified by the story of Kitty Genovese, a young girl, who was brutally murdered when I was twelve years old. Kitty was stabbed repeatedly in full view of dozens of people, but no one tried to help her. She lay on the sidewalk for an hour before anyone even called the police. Nobody wanted to become involved. Thirty-four witnesses watched her bleed to death.

I decided at that point in my life that I could not be that kind of person. I realized that I'd better learn how to fight.

While I was an undergraduate at UCLA I spent two years apprenticed to Briggs Hunt, the famous Olympic wrestling coach. Hunt taught a down-and-dirty self-defense class. I repeated that class six times. Even better, I received personal instruction from Hunt while ghost-writing a self-defense textbook for the course.

Gary Simpson: I'm glad you mentioned that. I want to probe that a little more and reveal something, with your permission of course, to the martial arts world for the very first time in a public forum.

Bruce Clayton: (laughing) Yes, Gary, you did warn me about that when we met in Los Angeles a few weeks ago. I'm ready for it. That 30 year secret WILL finally be revealed.

Gary Simpson: Ah, good. I was hoping that you would agree. Please continue.

Bruce Clayton: There was a Kodokan Judo class next door, so I spent a lot of time in there, too. I broke my nose and my arm but it was worth it.

After college, I enrolled in a traditional Shotokan Karate school in Los Angeles, led by Ken Osborne who was a student of Master Ohshima. These studies were interrupted by graduate school in Missoula, Montana, where I spent three years with the Big Sky Tae Kwan Do organization.

During this period, I won first place trophies in both kata and kumite in the 7th Annual Big Sky Championships. That was another turning point in my life. I won by being more *clever* than my opponents, not by having greater skill. I made fools of them. I dealt out humiliation and some injuries. In return I received meaningless plastic trophies.

Gary Simpson: Do I detect a little irony in your voice here?

Bruce Clayton: Yes. You do. You see, winning that tournament offended my conscience. I took up the martial arts because I hated violence, but tournament karate

glorified violence. I thought that over and decided not to do any more tournament competition.

Gary Simpson: Well, I agree with you very strongly on that point. I, too, detest violence in every form. That is why I have rarely competed in any sparring tournaments. If you do what you know then there can be only one result and, like you, I simply don't want to hurt anybody... unless, of course, I am attacked, or even worse, a loved one or a friend is attacked by some thoughtless fool. If that happens then they have just sealed their own fate. They have given me permission to hurt them. But please continue...

Bruce Clayton: Over the years I eventually realized how much I agree with Master Funakoshi's belief that a true master doesn't have to fight. His self-confidence disarms his opponents. That's the kind of master I want to be.

Gary Simpson: Indeed. That is the master that ALL karateka should aspire to be. That was a wonderful piece of advice Bruce. As a very senior karateka now, who would you say has been the greatest influence in your development?

Bruce Clayton: (Grinning) I sense a yawning chasm opening in front of my feet...

Gary Simpson: Well, Bruce, tell it like you see it. I am not one to pull too many punches in my interviews. I like to give the readers the meat with the potatoes, so to speak.

Bruce Clayton: The fact that I studied self-defense and judo before coming to karate has had an enormous impact on my development. I could see vicious self-defense and grappling techniques in the Shotokan katas. However, it was apparent from the first day that my hard-style teachers were not prepared to explore this side of their art. All they understood was punching, kicking, and blocking. As my experience grew, I realized that their grasp of punching, kicking and blocking wasn't that good, either. They had a powerful weapon in their hands, and didn't know how to use it.

Gary Simpson: I feel that this is leading to another revelation for our readers...

Bruce Clayton: I sincerely hope so. I felt that part of the answer fell into place when I encountered Hanshi Cruz and the San Ten Shihans.

Gary Simpson: How so?

Bruce Clayton: Well, compared to other organizations, this group emphasizes powerful basics through detailed study of the "basic principles" of technique, mainly as presented by Cruz's teacher, Master Hidetaka Nishiyama. To summarize, impact is the sum of body momentum plus delivery: stepping, shifting, raising, lowering, expanding, contracting, whipping action, pressure reaction, hip vibration and multiple types of rotation to generate momentum; then posture, internal and external focus, timing, pendulum

action, and spirit to direct and transmit it. Even a petite beginner can hit hard enough to jack-knife a grown man and send him flying by using these skills properly. In my experience, most sensei don't understand this and don't teach it. The power of my personal karate has grown tremendously under Cruz's direction.

Gary Simpson: I know through our hundreds of emails and discussions back and forth over many years now that you have a very deep respect for Hanshi Cruz.

Bruce Clayton: Cruz is like a force of nature. When he enters a room, he fills it.

Gary Simpson: Just moving back to what you were saying before I interrupted you. You were discussing the merits of basics in technique...

Bruce Clayton: Yes. In my opinion, most sensei are just *forging* the weapon, rather than swinging it. Sword makers are not sword fighters. Practically nothing in the Shotokan arsenal applies in a real fight.

Gary Simpson: That is an interesting comment. I'm sure that many instructors of Shotokan who read this will be provoked by what you just said. In fact, some will probably be annoyed or even insulted. Do you want to explain it?

Bruce Clayton: Well, let's put it this way. I have a friend who is a judoka. Someone once asked us who would win if we had a fight... karate against judo. My friend's answer was perfect. "Bruce gets one free hit as I move in," my friend said. "He'd better make it count, because I'm going to choke him to death one second later."

Real fights quickly move into hug-and-grunt range where you have your teeth sunk into the opponent's ear. You can't see his face, hands or feet, and the range is so intimate that even elbows and knees are hard to use effectively. You are too close for a reverse punch, you can't block at all, and kicks are out of the question. How do you fight in that situation?

Gary Simpson: Tell us. Go for it.

Bruce Clayton: Fortunately, the answers lie in the katas. The problem is that hard style sensei cannot interpret the katas. The block/punch/kick applications they see there are stunningly inappropriate, both to the katas and to real life. The challenge ahead of us is to reopen the katas and put the knowledge back into them.

Gary Simpson: And I understand that in your forthcoming seminar, which you have so graciously invited me to attend, that you will reveal this.

Bruce Clayton: We all have to learn how to do it. The seminar will show how it is done.

Gary Simpson: Hmm. I will definitely want to cover that for our readers. Start planning now, Bruce, for a second interview to cover that seminar.

Bruce Clayton: (nodding his head) I had a feeling that you were going to ask that.

Gary Simpson: Bruce, just to preface my next question, you are a Ph.D. with a degree in zoology and botany. You have been interviewed by many national television programs including the *CBS Evening News*, *The Tomorrow Show*, *Today* and *60 Minutes*. You have also appeared on many radio programs in the US, Great Britain, Canada and Australia. You are the author of many technical books including *“Life After Terrorism – What You Need to Know to Survive in Today’s World”* (a particularly frightening read if I do say so myself). You are the author of *“Shotokan’s Secret – the Hidden Truth Behind Karate’s Fighting Origins.”* You are an amazingly well-credentialed author. With respect to *“Shotokan’s Secret”*, what prompted you to write that book?

Bruce Clayton: I wanted to know more about the men who trained Funakoshi, thinking that this might shed some light on the applications of the katas. I found photos or sketches of all of the mentors except for Azato, who was not only Funakoshi's first instructor but the greatest martial artist Funakoshi ever met (to quote from Funakoshi's writings). I made a two-year hobby of searching for a picture of Azato, during which I dug into the history of Okinawa as only a trained researcher can do. In doing this, I discovered a whole new perspective on Shotokan.

Gary Simpson: I think we are nearing the heart of your research. Can you just explain that last comment?

Bruce Clayton: Sure. For me, the research brought Funakoshi's teachers dramatically to life. It cast a bright new light on both the past and future of karate. The information was so compelling that I just had to share it with others who were interested. If anybody wants to know more then it's all in the foreword of the book. So I won't bother to repeat it here. Let's move on!

Gary Simpson: (laughing) Settle down Bruce. I'm the interviewer. (Bruce has just given me one of his intense stares.) Now, you have also written a four volume best-selling series under a pseudonym. Since that was way back in 1979 and it has been such a well kept secret now for almost 30 years, would you like to reveal that secret here?

Bruce Clayton: OK. It seems appropriate now. In 1978 I submitted a manuscript on *jintai kyusho* (vital points) to Paladin Press. They said they would publish it, but they felt my style suffered from "an over exposure to textbooks." They wanted me to liven it up for their readers.

Gary Simpson: Well, I figure that they had the right man for the job. This interview has certainly been very lively so far. I know from our earlier discussions on what we were going to cover that it is all set to get a whole lot more interesting. Please, continue...

Bruce Clayton: That's where the *Black Medicine* series came from. I rewrote the manuscript using a macabre sense of humor that was a bit over the top. This made a great book, but the author came across as a crazed vigilante.

Gary Simpson: Here we go. I don't want anybody to miss this. Take note. Here comes one of the most tightly held secrets of the last thirty years in martial arts publications.

Bruce Clayton: I decided to use a pseudonym for those books, and asked a Japanese friend to recommend an oriental-sounding name. He suggested "Mashiro" and I used it. The infamous Dr. Mashiro went on to publish a total of four volumes with the trademark *Black Medicine* skull on the front covers.

Gary Simpson: So, finally, after 30 years we now know that N Mashiro PhD is in fact Professor Bruce D Clayton!

Bruce Clayton: Yes. I am Mashiro. Or, more correctly, I am the person who created Mashiro. Twenty-five years later, after I had learned a lot more Japanese, I suddenly realized that my friend had played a subtle joke on me.

Gary Simpson: As many of our Japanese friends tend to do. What did he do?

Bruce Clayton: He had actually said "Ashiro," meaning "white." The *Black Medicine* books were written by "A White Guy." I was stunned to realize how subtle he had been. (The *Black Medicine* web site is [http://mariposa.yosemite.net/mashiro/.](http://mariposa.yosemite.net/mashiro/))

Gary Simpson: How deliciously devious of him. Bruce, you and I are both very interested in kata interpretation, what is your favorite kata and can you share a couple of your favorite applications from that kata?

Bruce Clayton: I have always been frustrated by how little we know about the hard style katas. Soft stylists seem to understand their forms pretty well, but hard stylists typically can't explain their katas beyond saying "this is a block" and "this is a punch." About the time I was a sandan I rebelled against this.

Gary Simpson: You rebelled?

Bruce Clayton: A figure of speech, Gary. For example, I thought it was insane for a person to study Nijushiho when he couldn't explain Heian Nidan. At that point I abandoned all the "advanced" katas and returned to the Heians. I decided to start over from the first move.

In my opinion, the Heians are the richest katas in karate. They are not ancient. As of today they are only 102 years old. We know their author, Funakoshi's second teacher, Master Itosu. We know the life Itosu led as an unarmed bodyguard to the unarmed kings of Okinawa. We know the enemies he faced and how they were armed and deployed. When you apply that knowledge to the Heians, significant insights begin to reveal themselves.

Gary Simpson: I am finding this rather fascinating. So... your favorite kata is...

Bruce Clayton: My favorite kata is Heian Godan. The first third of the kata is a step-by-step lesson in taking a knife out of the hand of a struggling attacker. The first kiai is the point where you twist his arm behind him and run the knife into his kidney. In the next move you drop him on his back - on the hilt of the knife. The knife twists violently inside the body... which is the most brutal "finishing blow" I've ever seen.

The middle of the kata is another step-by-step lesson. This time we're in taking a rifle and bayonet from a soldier. History reveals that Itosu once faced two companies of US Marines armed with Springfield rifles and fixed bayonets. Heian Godan plays out just like a lesson in the current US Marine Corps bayonet combatives manual. The lesson ends with putting your foot on the man's chest and using both hands to pull the bayonet free from his ribs. That's an essential point in bayonet combat because the blade gets stuck in the enemy's body.

The final cluster can be interpreted as a very elegant katana-stealing technique. Itosu shows us how to mug a samurai to steal his weapons. This was a critical technique for the Shuri bodyguards, who often faced sword-carrying samurai barehanded.

That in itself brings up an interesting point. Many karateka admire the samurai and try to follow budo, the way of the warrior. In Okinawa (where hard style karate was invented), THE SAMURAI WERE THE BAD GUYS. Karate was the art used by the enslaved Okinawans to fight back against samurai atrocities. As karateka, we should NOT admire the samurai. The samurai were, in fact, the enemy.

Gary Simpson: Hmm. That certainly was another interesting revelation. Who are some of the more interesting karateka that you have met and what has attracted you to these identities?

Bruce Clayton: I've met some great masters and some great teachers. I've admired some great performers. Overall, the karateka who impressed me the most was a little boy named Shawn.

When Shawn put on his uniform for the first time he was skinny, painfully shy, and absolutely terrified. He kept his gaze on the floor. He couldn't even look me in the eye.

Gary Simpson: Bruce, I could hardly blame the poor kid for that! You can be pretty intimidating when you want (chuckle).

Bruce Clayton: When we did basics, I was amazed to find that Shawn did not know how to walk in a straight line. Every time we started across the room doing punches, Shawn would curve off to the left and run into the wall.

I turned the class over to my sempai and spent the next hour teaching Shawn how to walk in a straight line. One leg was taking bigger steps than the other. One foot was turned out more than the other. We had to pry his eyes off the ground just so he could see where he was going.

Shawn stayed with us about a year before his family moved away. In that year he learned to stand up straight, to look you in the eye, to shake hands firmly and to stride confidently across the room. Shawn traveled farther in a few months than most of us go in a lifetime.

One of the great truths of karate is that every single student can teach you something if you just let them.

Gary Simpson: Bruce, sometimes you simply amaze me. That was a very emotional answer. It certainly shows how a true sensei can affect the lives of those who are willing to receive the information. It reminds me so much of the precept: *"When the student is ready, the master will appear."* Well done. Well recalled. That was a most impressive answer. Next question... every karateka has a favorite technique – one that they would use instinctively if backed into a corner. What would yours be?

Bruce Clayton: In America we have a saying: *"A Smith & Wesson beats four aces."* With that in mind and in a life or death ordeal I will not resort to using my karate until I've run out of bullets. On the other hand, a *shuto* makes you just as dead for just as long.

Gary Simpson: Bruce, I know precisely what you are saying here and, after our precursory meeting in LA, that will be one secret that I will not be revealing in this interview. Some things are best left as secrets. Moving right along...

Bruce Clayton: OK. I must ruefully admit that I have accidentally injured practice partners with my *teisho* to the chin. When we close to elbow range, that palm-heel strike just comes out of nowhere. Lightning doesn't ask my permission to strike and neither does that *teisho*. I wish I had it under better control, actually. I don't like to hurt people.

Gary Simpson: On that score I know exactly what you mean. I too have several techniques that seem to be on auto-pilot. They just happen... without conscious

thought. It must be the years of training. But... thanks for identifying yours. I'll keep it in mind during our sparring. Please continue...

Bruce Clayton: Three times in my life I've been in dangerous situations that were about to erupt into violence. Each time I made a plan and set a mental trigger. I didn't do anything or say anything, but somehow the aggressors knew. They lost their nerve and backed away. I don't know what you call that technique, but it has to be my favorite.

Gary Simpson: I think you have just described the technique that the other Bruce made famous in "Enter the Dragon." He called it "*fighting without fighting.*" Bruce, knowing your love for karate history who, in your opinion, was the most influential karate pioneer and why?

Bruce Clayton: Sokon Matsumura seems to be the Okinawan pioneer who first realized that strong legs can beat strong arms. I believe, from my research, that he pioneered the style departure from traditional soft-style karate. Up to that time, novice pugilists spent three years doing *Sanchin* kata while carrying heavy weights. These isometric exercises built up huge arm, chest and shoulder muscles. Matsumura abandoned *Sanchin* completely, substituting katas with deep stances to build up leg power.

Funakoshi, for instance, spent his first three years squatting in Tekki Shodan's insanely low horse stance. From those hard and muscular legs a hard stylist can leap forward and strike like a battering ram. That was the technical revolution that led to Shotokan and the other hard styles.

That said, we would not know about Matsumura's revolution except for his remarkable student, Yasutsune Itosu. Itosu was very interested in taking Matsumura's lessons and making them available to a wider audience. Itosu created (or extensively modified) half the katas in Shotokan and led the first public karate classes in 1901. He unveiled the Heian katas in public classes in 1905. Without him, Matsumura's revolution might still be a secret on Okinawa.

These two masters paved the way for all of the hard styles. If you are on the hard path, you owe them your allegiance.

Gary Simpson: Thanks for that short history lesson Bruce. I found it most insightful and I'm sure that our readers will too. We are nearing the end of the interview now so can I ask you what your prediction is for the future of karate, both in the States and world wide?

Bruce Clayton: Okinawan karate flowed and moved like a stream. The Japanese took this flowing stream and tried to lock it in a box. They embalmed a living art and almost succeeded in killing it, but there is new hope.

Today some people are still trying to preserve "traditional" karate within the locked box of Japanese teaching. The problem is that your box can never be as large as your teacher's. Your students live within smaller boxes still. After a few generations the boxes are too small to hold anything of value. This is why Japanese karate styles have withered.

Gary Simpson: Actually, that is a very good analogy. I have similar thoughts on that matter but this is your interview. Please go on...

Bruce Clayton: In the last few years the hard karate styles have undergone a cultural revolution - bursting out of the locked box - all over the world. The original Japanese sensei are passing out of the picture, and control has shifted to thousands of western sensei who have built up half a century of experience in the meantime. That's more experience than Funakoshi had when he founded the Shotokan style! Most karate organizations are now run by western teachers who play by western rules. Karate is coming to life again.

Suddenly we are free (like the old Okinawans) to study multiple arts with multiple masters. We can ask questions without being punished merely for being inquisitive. We can experiment, research, and share our findings. Karate's hundred-year sleep is ending. I think this is a very exciting time for all of us. Nowhere is this more exciting than in kata interpretation, where a former vacuum is suddenly erupting with new knowledge.

Gary Simpson: Well, those last few comments might put a few of noses out of joint. But I am not going to ask you to temper your words. Yet again, Bruce, I am finding myself agreeing with you. My own independent research has shown that karate kicks, punches and blocks are only the tip of the iceberg of knowledge that lays hidden from view. Finally, is there anything that you would like to add for our readers, any comments or advice for those embarking on a karate future?

Bruce Clayton: I have a parting thought, not for the beginners but for experienced karateka. It consists of a question and an answer.

The question: Why are Japanese karate words so hard to pronounce?

Think about that for a moment. The example is "shuto uke," the knife-hand block. It isn't pronounced "shooto-ookie" (American) or "shoo-tookey" (British). This term is pronounced "*stokay*." People around the world mispronounce their karate words every day. Why is that?

The answer: Japanese words are difficult to pronounce because *they are spelled wrong*.

Japan's Ministry of Education dictates how Japanese words will be spelled using the

Roman alphabet. They don't understand western phonics, so the official spellings are phonic gibberish. When we stumble over these miswritten words, are we just being stupid *gaijin*? It's *our* alphabet, not theirs. How can they expect us to read the words correctly when they write them down so badly?

This is an example of something the Japanese do very badly, and then insist that the problem is ours.

Be very careful with that thought. If it gets loose in your mind, it may rearrange your most cherished beliefs. It could unlock your box.

Gary Simpson: Hmm. That was quite unexpected. I will have to think about that myself. Bruce Clayton, thank you so much for such a thought provoking and revealing interview. I am sure that some of your comments and beliefs will be challenged by many, embraced by some and thought about strongly by all who read this interview. You have exposed so much and, along the way, revealed some very interesting secrets. Thank you Dr Mashiro.

About the interviewer: Gary Simpson is a 7th Dan Master Instructor of Zanshin Kai Karate Do. He is a member of the Australian Martial Arts Association Inc (SA) and the International San Ten Karate Association where he holds the title of Kyoshi in both. He is also a member of the International Society of Okinawan-Japanese Karate Do. He lives in Perth, Western Australia.

INTERVIEW AGREED BETWEEN BD CLAYTON & GR SIMPSON on Thursday 17 May 2007 – 10.36am.

Bruce D Clayton:
Interviewee

Gary R Simpson:
Interviewer