

Shoyo Sensei's Dharma Message

Eulogy of the late Mr. Robert Kinji Shibuya by Bob Kinji Shibuya, Jr.

** Robert Kinji Shibuya, our long time-temple member, returned O-Jodo on May 3rd very peacefully and calmly, surrounded by his family members. Fortunately, I conducted the final "Good By Service" with the immediately family with the sutra chanting and the exchange of words of sincerest love and appreciation for each other. His funeral service was conducted on May 16th. The eulogy by his son, Bobby, was appreciated by us all. He kindly agreed to share it with me for this newsletter. Deep appreciation to Mr. Bob Kinji Shibuya, Jr.*

Although my Dad retired from wrestling over 3 ½ decades ago, I am continually reminded of the many lives he impacted when I encounter people in business who often ask me if I am somehow related to the great wrestler Kinji Shibuya. When I glowingly reply that I am his son, the conversation almost always digresses from a business discussion to a spirited conversation about my Dad's illustrious career and his various wrestling moves including the infamous "Sleeper Hold" and the "Karate Chop." The usual outcome of one of these encounters ends, with me getting some favorable consideration in a business transaction since I happen to be the son of one of their childhood idols. After such meetings, I always make sure to call my Mom and tell her about my run in with another fan of Dad's. This inevitably leads her to share another wonderful story of their experiences traveling the world together where they visited interesting places and made lifelong friendships. Through hearing these stories, I am reminded of the many people my Dad influenced and touched and the positive impact he had on all those he met along his 89-year journey through life.

So today we are gathered on his 89th birthday to remember and celebrate my Dad's extraordinary life and to show our appreciation for all that he did to help make our lives more fulfilling and enjoyable.

Although my Dad would tell his fans he hailed from Tokyo, Japan, his actual beginnings were much less cosmopolitan having been born to Kinkichi and Kura Shibuya in the rural Salt Lake City community of Devils Slide, Utah in 1921. As the second youngest of five boys, my Dad's stories of his early childhood involved watching his older brothers help their Father in his coal retailing business and staying close to them for support when he had to defend himself at school in the pre-color blind society of the 1920's. When the family moved to Los Angeles in 1933 to pursue a better life, my Dad continued to rely on the support of his brothers who encouraged him to follow in the Shibuya family tradition of playing competitive sports. By his teenage years, it soon became apparent that my Dad's athletic talents were best suited to football where his size, strength, agility and balance allowed him to favorably compete among the best athletes in Southern California. Unfortunately tragedy struck in 1938 when his mom passed suddenly from a fatal stroke. He decided to join his older brother Sam in Hawaii where he could work in the family trucking business and play football for the University of Hawaii.

My Dad's Hawaii years, from 1940 to 1951, offered some of the most pivotal and rewarding experiences in his life. While playing football for the University of Hawaii, he distinguished himself as a top ranked player and was invited to play in the prestigious Hula Bowl game for all four years. This was considered the premier venue to launch a professional career. After a successful semi-professional football career, he was drafted by the Washington Redskins, in 1944. Unfortunately, his NFL career was never realized as America became swept up in World War II later that year. With his football days behind him, my Dad focused on his career in the trucking business, while simultaneously training and competing as a ranked amateur sumo wrestler, bouncing at a local bar and spending his free time with his many friends.

It was during this time that my Dad met my Mom through mutual friends. As my Mom likes to tell the story, even though he carried himself confidently given his status as a football star in Hawaii, my Dad was somewhat shy at first and would initially call on her in a car full of guy friends. Being the good sport that she is, she didn't question going on group outings at first, but was eventually relieved when my Dad finally started showing up alone to take her out on dates. And as they say, the rest is history. My parents married in 1951 and settled down in Honolulu where my Dad sold athletic supplies and my Mom worked in the administrative office at the local high school. Then on one infamous day in 1952, while they commuted to work together, my Mom read in the newspaper that Bob Shibuya, the famous football star, would be making his professional wrestling debut that evening! As my Dad had not given my Mom any advance notice of his decision to become a wrestler, you can only imagine what the conversation was like the rest of the ride! From that moment on, the simple life of my parents would never be the same again.

After my Dad's successful wrestling debut, and with the support of their minister who encouraged my Mom to let my Dad pursue his dream of becoming a big time wrestler, he arrived in Seattle, Washington in 1952 to kick off his

North American professional career. When it became clear that his new profession would last, Mom left her beloved Hawaii to travel by his side. The stories and photos of their travels over the next several years are rich with tales of criss-crossing post World War II-era America as a young Japanese-American couple fearlessly making friends with people of all walks of life. It was during this time that my Dad came up with the idea of playing a villain in the wrestling ring by announcing he was a Japanese land baron that had come to America to regain his country's honor by defeating the US wrestlers and taking all his prize money back to Japan to buy rice fields. His strategy paid off as he drew big crowds and became a featured main event performer early in his career.

With his career established, he and my Mom took a break from their busy travel schedule in 1957 to visit with family in Los Angeles and to begin the process of fulfilling their lifelong dream of having a family. They were blessed with the arrival of my sister Michele in 1958. One of my Dad's favorite stories is to tell of the joyous road trip he made from Calgary, Canada to Minneapolis, Minnesota in a car with two miniature Dachshunds sitting on his lap and their four puppies sitting in the back seat in route to meet my Mom and his newborn daughter at the Minneapolis airport. Although I'm sure the drive home must have been a little crowded, it certainly left an indelible impression on my sister as she is now often spotted driving the streets of the Bay Area with her own two mini Dachshunds sitting proudly on her lap just like my Dad had shown her years before!

Two years after my sister arrived, as my Dad was on a wrestling road trip in Tennessee, my Mom fell ill and went to the doctor for what she thought was a bad case of the cold or flu. When the doctor told her she could be pregnant, she laughingly shrugged off his diagnosis. Seven months later I arrived and fulfilled my Dad's dream of having a family of four.

Most touring wrestlers at this point would drop the kids and dogs off with their wives and hit the road on their own, but not my Dad. He loved having his family close to him and took us all along with him. The Shibuya Family traveling circus even got to be one larger when my Dad invited my Grandma Watanabe, who he loved like his own Mother to join us from Hawaii. She helped with the kids and explored the mainland with us. My Dad would tell me funny stories of how he would check us in to a local motel, which usually had a no dogs allowed policy, by parking the car out of sight from the registration office, then later sneaking in the extended family and dogs through the back door. This scheme would usually work out until dogs started barking causing the neighboring motel guests to call the front desk and report us.

By the late 60's my Dad had shown us most of North America. He decided it was time to settle down, so my sister and I could stay at the same schools and he could begin the process of transitioning from wrestling to a new career. He and my mom settled in Hayward, California, which has been our family home town for the last 40 years.

My Dad's post road warrior wrestling years allowed him the opportunity to transition from professional wrestler to "Renaissance Man." One of his first new career opportunities came when he was introduced to a talent agent who quickly realized that my Dad's imposing looks and interviewing talents were perfectly suited for villain roles, not in the ring but in the movies and TV. It was just a matter of time before he was cast in a series of acting and special appearances roles on both the large and small screens. For the next several years we enjoyed watching him perform with such notable stars as Yul Brenner, Dean Martin, Jack Warden, David Carradine and Pat Morita in TV shows like *Kung Fu* and *Anna and the King* as well as several major motion pictures. My Dad's Hayward renaissance years were also filled with passion for collecting Koi and competing in various Koi shows around the western US where he often would win grand champion awards. This also gave him a reason to travel to Japan for Koi buying trips where he made many new friendships. He also found time to take a Shiatsu massage class and became the center of attention at Shibuya family gatherings as he applied his expert reflexology skills on his brothers, especially younger brother Danny who would always grimace in pain and pleasure as my Dad used his gigantic hands to apply pressure to his sore muscles.

Perhaps the biggest highlight of my Dad's Hayward years had to do with the quality time he spent with his family and friends. My Dad was happy to trade his earlier life on the road, sometimes away from his loved ones for weeks on end, for a family life which included attending his kids sporting events, being present at all of our special occasions and standing my Mother's side as they coped with the joys and occasional challenges that life had to offer.

His free-time allowed him to ensure the familial connection between the Shibuya and Watanabe cousins through frequent trips to Southern California and Hawaii to visit his brothers and brothers-in-laws. During his time in Hayward he also made many lifelong friends and would hang out with the guys at Walt's gym or meet for steaks and cocktails at the Ranch Restaurant.

We were fortunate to have our Dad with us long enough to share some of the most special times for the Shibuya family. He was present at my wedding to Michele in 1994 and for the births of his two grandsons, Robert Kinji in 1995 and Richard Noboru in 1997. He enjoyed his extended family at the Shibuya reunion that took place in Honolulu in 2001 and he was also able to celebrate his lifelong love affair with my Mom when they commemorated

their 50 years of marriage that same year. Although his later years were challenged by the onset of dementia, he never forgot to tell my Mom that she looked pretty and he loved her as she fed him lunch every day and he always saved a big smile for my Sister as she helped him with dinner every night.

The legacy of my Dad, the great family man, will now live on through my mom, my sister Michele and his two grandsons and I. His achievements as a world champion wrestler will be documented through the many websites featuring his career accomplishments, his wrestling videos and the recent Kinji Shibuya tributes appearing in the newspapers and on the TV since his passing. So today, we have much to celebrate as my Dad's life was fulfilling and productive by every measure.

Ten Words

Insightful E-Mail from Mrs. Noreen Sakamoto

Avoid the most selfish one-letter word:	"I"
Use the most satisfying two-letter word:	"We"
Overcome the most poisonous three-letter word:	"Ego"
Value the most used four-letter word:	"Love"
Keep the most pleasing five-letter word:	"Smile"
Ignore the fastest spreading six-letter word:	"Rumour" (British spell!)
Achieve the hardest working seven-letter word:	"Success"
Distance yourself from the most enviable eight-letter word:	"Jealousy"
Acquire the most powerful nine-letter word:	"Knowledge"
Maintain the most valued ten-letter word:	"Friendship"

