

National Geographic Explores Kyudo

Karme Chöling, Vermont has long been a favorite spot of Shibata Sensei's. When the National Geographic Company approached him in early 1986 with the hope of filming his execution of the *Shihobarai* ceremony, their idea was for Sensei to do it in a Washington, D.C. television studio. Sensei, however, hoped the film would portray Kyudo as a part of Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche's vision. Karme Chöling, therefore, was Sensei's suggestion for the site of the filming.

After several months of discussions, the filming began. It was decided that in order to show Sensei in his element, a week-long Kyudo program would be the main vehicle for the film. Approximately twenty students from around the country participated. Five Karme Chöling residents, beginners in kyudo, also took part.

For all who were involved this was seen, not so much as an opportunity for fame, but as a rare opportunity to spend a week with yumi and ya in their hands and Shibata Sensei in their hearts. The level of instruction and nurturing proffered by Sensei and The Sawang, Ösel Mukpo was truly inspiring. The environment and beauty of Karme Chöling completed the picture.

Such a beautiful picture, however, is not easy to capture on film. Under the direction of Kevin



Sensei instructs Scott Amsden as Nat'l Geographic looks on Photo by Barry Gilbert

Peer, National Geographic's seven person crew set out to capture the essence of kyudo and of Shibata Sensei.

Mr. Peer's hope was to be an impartial observer during a week of classes. This was indeed a great challenge. The presence of a film crew made it a slightly unusual experience for all involved. The feeling of being watched and of having one's every movement captured on film was occasionally unnerving and strenuous. Mr. Peer's creative vision for the film, however, helped the students experience kyudo in new ways. For example, the site chosen for the exterior shooting was a beautiful rolling meadow, a setting that might not have been selected under usual circumstances. In addition, being viewed by outsiders helped some of the experienced practitioners to see their kyudo from a more outside and fresh perspective.

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A Talk With Nobuhiro-san

by Barry Gilbert

In September, 1986 Shibata Nobuhiro-san visited Boulder. Nobuhiro-san is Sensei's son by adoption and the heir to the Shibata family. He is currently running the family business from his house in Kyoto. I had the privilege of driving Nobuhiro-san and his assistant on a tour of the southwest. This interview was done during that drive.

Hogen: Do you remember when you first met Sensei?

Nobuhiro-san: Yes. One of my good friends, an old friend, introduced me to Sensei's daughter, Hiromi. I started dating her and then I met Sensei. That was 17 or 18 years ago.

H: Then you married her?

N: Yes, but there is a long story before we got married. We were sweethearts for about seven years. We didn't talk about marriage because we didn't want to.

H: You didn't want to get married?

N: No. We just didn't want to talk about it. Both of us thought that it would be impossible to get married. I am the first son of my natural father and I liked his work very much. I was studying a lot to learn his work.

H: What kind of work was that?

N: Making machinery. I was studying very hard and I liked it very much. I thought I would be his heir. Shibata Sensei wanted Hiromi to be his heir. Do you understand?

H: If you married Hiromi you would have to become the Shibata family heir?

N: Yes. Or my wife would have to come into my family, which was impossible for her. One day, maybe two or three years before I got married, my natural father called me and talked to me about Hiromi. He asked me what our plans were. I explained to him that it would be impossible for me to marry her. He told me to marry her and, if possible, to become the heir of the Shibata family. That would be much better than being the heir of our family. Then we got married. But previously neither of us said anything to our families.

H: How did Sensei receive you as his son?

N: Both of them, Shibata Sensei and Mrs. Shibata were very happy because they knew me. There was no problem.

H: Is that when you started to learn to make yumi?

N: Yes, but earlier that year my real father died of a heart attack. I had to find someone to take care of my father's factory. By that time we had made plans to get married but when he died I had to wait another two years so I could take care of his business. Now one of my friends runs the company. He is renting the factory and the name of the company and is paying money to my mother.

H: I'm curious about what it was like when you became Nobuhiro Shibata and had to start learning about becoming *Onyumishi*.

N: I think my real father thought that I was very skillful. As a machinist he thought I was a bad businessman. You have to be a very good businessman to take care of a factory. My real father allowed me to enter the Shibata family, which I appreciated very much. Usually a family will not allow their son to leave the family to get married. I became the Shibata family heir.

H: What was it like in the beginning to be in the Shibata household and learning to make yumi?

N: In the beginning he didn't teach me anything. I just watched. Whenever my father was working I was watching. But I have my own way. My father has his own way and his father had his own way. The basic idea of making a yumi is the same but each generation has its own style.

H: A completely different style?

N: It's the same style but with a different way of working. For example, I have a different way of holding my knife and a different way of cutting the bamboo. The difference is small, though.

H: When you started making yumi had you already been practicing kyudo?

N: All the time.

H: Before you met Sensei?

N: Before I met my father I was playing with archery. When I met him I started practicing kyudo.

H: How did kyudo change for you when you started to make yumi?

N: There was a big change. Before I started making yumi I learned for myself; for my kyudo. After making yumi my mind changed completely.

I started practicing kyudo for my yumi, not for my kyudo. I must break-in all new yumi. That is very important for the making of a good yumi. Also, it is very important for a practitioner to take care of a new yumi.

H: It seems to me from being around Shibata Sensei that the things he teaches us are almost endless. We can ask him any question about kyudo or yumi making or the history of the Shibata family or of Japan and he will always know the answer. I wonder how much of that it was possible for him to pass on to you in the relatively short time you've had together.

N: Ah, you are so smart! (laughter) At this time I don't need my father to be able to make a yumi but sometimes I need my father for studying kyudo, Japanese history, etc.

H: Why don't you need your father's help with yumi? Is it because he taught you very quickly or because he taught you the basic skills and you do the rest intuitively?

N: That's it exactly. I have a very strong idea about making yumi. I would rather be a bowmaker than a kyudo instructor or teacher. I don't like it when people refer to me as a teacher. I would rather be known as a bowmaker, *Onyumishi*. It is not necessary to be a very good teacher. My father is still practicing kyudo just like you or me or anyone else. When I think "Who is a teacher and who is not a teacher and who is a student", we cannot talk like that. I would like to tell all kyudo students to practice with your mind. It is not necessary to be very beautiful or very fancy in kyudo. Everybody has his own style but you should not change the seven coordinations. The seven coordinations are very important. Kyudo should be more tasty. Are you a flexible person or a stubborn person?

H: I like to think I'm flexible.

N: I think for kyudo you should be stubborn. Usually people who say they are very flexible are actually very stubborn.

H: I don't understand.

N: You don't understand? This is very difficult

for very stubborn people to understand. (laughter)

H: What was it like for you when Sensei moved to America?

N: I felt the same as when my real father died. "What should I do now?" Except this time was much easier than before because last time I was very young; too young to be a boss for my employees.

H: Is it true that Sensei didn't tell you he was moving here when he came here last year?

N: He didn't. I think he thought he would scare me. I didn't know that he wouldn't return until just last week. I always thought he would come back.

H: Now you have a son. Will he be your heir?

N: I don't know. I have no idea. Do you think I have to push him? I don't want to. Nobody pushed me to be the Shibata family heir.

H: How soon before your son starts to learn kyudo or yumi making?

N: Maybe he will start in two or three years. Now he is two-and-a-half years old.

H: Do you think that things are different now for you as *Onyumishi* than they were for Sensei when he was your age? Sensei always tells us that in Japan many people practice sports kyudo and maybe it wasn't the same thirty years ago.

N: Sports kyudo is o.k. for people. It is much better than gambling or alcohol or drugs. But sometimes a person would like to practice kyudo so they can become a teacher and support their pride. In Japan there are very many teachers.

There are kyudo meetings all the time. Every Sunday or holiday. Sometimes when I go to these meetings somebody will introduce me to someone who is maybe forty five years old or more. When I know the person's name I will refer to him in the future as Sensei. In that way there are many, many sensei's.

H: Do people call you Sensei?

N: Not too much because I don't like it. I am a yumi-maker. Sometimes people who know a lot about my father or my family will call me *Shibata Waka-sensei*. *Waka-sensei* means young teacher.

H: When Shibata Sensei dies will you become Shibata Kanjuro Sensei? Will it be o.k. to call

you Sensei then?

N: Then I must surrender.

H: Do you remember what it was like to first teach kyudo to Americans?

N: Yes. I told everyone to practice as much as they can and to practice for a long time. My father sometimes talks about the drool of a cow.

It is very thin and long and there is no break. That is the way you should practice. The first time I came to Boulder I had many students who were very high people in the sangha; very close to Rinpoche. The second time I came to Boulder they were not participating because when my father left they stopped. When he and I returned they were very embarrassed because they didn't practice a lot. I didn't like that kind of feeling.

If you don't want to practice, it is not necessary.

H: What did you think of American people?

Was our kyudo style any different from that of Japanese people?

N: It is very different. For you it is a very simple thing. American people have very big bodies with long arms. It's very good for kyudo. I think American minds are also very different. Almost every American's kyudo is very strong and sharp. It is more dignified and more tasty. My father's kyudo has a lot of dignity and taste even though he is getting older.

H: What do you mean when you say taste?

N: That is very difficult to explain in English. In Japanese we say *Aji-Wai*. You must discover taste for yourself.

Explorer (continued from page 1)

Part of the film crew's challenge was to enter and film an environment that is at once very delicate and very powerful. Their success is evident in the final product, a twelve minute film that gives a sensitive and well researched introduction to a normally esoteric meditation form and to an inscrutable and enigmatic master.

The film opens with a close-up of The Sawang, Ösel Mukpo shooting. After a brief description of Karne Chöling the action moves to the main shrine room, where Sensei is leading the beginners through the early stages of the Seven Coordinations. Some of the segments include Sensei showing beginners how to shoot for the

first time, interviews with two advanced students, and a very dramatic final sequence in which Sensei shoots one ya in slow-motion. One of the most interesting segments is footage of Shibata Sensei working in his Kyoto workshop. This piece of film was originally shot by NHK, the Japanese public television network.

Throughout the film a narrator gives clear descriptions of the action and the feelings behind what we are seeing. In the sections in which Sensei speaks, a Japanese narrator translates his words.

The film was included in National Geographic Explorer, a program broadcast nationally in January.

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Ryuko Kyudojo is an international group dedicated to the practice of kyudo.

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Seishin-An and Plans for a New Dojo

by Don Symanski

In July, 1986 Vidya school, Boulder's buddhist elementary school, was reduced in size to its original school house and land. Vidya made attempts for several months to rent out the unused larger school house and one and a quarter acres of land on 19th street. Possibilities of renting it out fell through.

Behind the 19th street school house is the Vidya School's assembly hall which is also used as the dojo by the Boulder kyudo group. We have shared the building for the past four years and have felt established there with hopes of expanding the facility. When rental possibilities fell through for Vidya they had thoughts of selling the house, assembly hall and land. If this happened, we would most likely lose the dojo.

We were presented with the possibility of renting the whole property ourselves. In considering the situation, we thought of renovating the school house back into its original form, a residential house, and offering it to Sensei and his wife, Marcia. A permanent residence had been needed for them, larger than the small apartment they'd been living in a few miles away. We realized that with Sensei living next to the dojo we could easily be inspired to enrich his household and the dojo.

When investigating, we saw that the school building was large enough to be renovated, not only as a home for the Shibatas, but also to include two adjoining apartments where two students could live and share the rent.

In discussing the house and land with the Shibatas we saw that it was suitable beyond basic living quarters. In back of the house is a large yard, parking areas, the dojo hall and, beyond that, land on which deer, raccoons, and other animals roamed freely. This North Boulder area is semi-rural and still quite spacious. Sensei saw possibilities for a vegetable garden, cherry trees,

a tea house and, most importantly, the construction of a new dojo off of the existing one; a dojo which could properly convey the spirit and atmosphere of a practice hall.

With arrangements through Vidya, Ashoka Credit Union, and the generosity of Mr. Alex Halpern, an agreement was reached. The kyudo group began renovation work in August, 1986.

The Ryuko Kyudojo administration took out a \$3,000 construction loan to finance the work. Two Boulder kyudo students, Barry Gilbert and Skip Archer, who were to be residents with the Shibatas, moved into the house first and helped extensively with overseeing and working on the project. The mostly volunteer crew began by taking down existing walls in order to create two bedrooms, a small shrine room, a living room, and two bathrooms. In one bathroom we installed a Japanese-style deep soaking tub for Sensei and Marcia.

Our construction work was going slowly and the Shibatas needed to move in before we were finished. With Sensei living in the house we were prompted to work more quickly.

In January, 1987, after six months of carpentry, plumbing, tile work and painting, we were near to finishing our initial house plans. As of this writing, some shelving, painting, and detail work is still needed. Since moving in Sensei has done some additions of his own: a stone walkway from the house to the dojo and to the parking area and Japanese stone lanterns in

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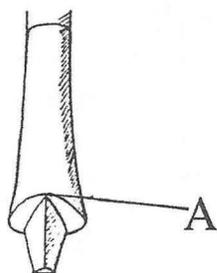


Sensei and Marcia at Seishin-an Photo by Barry Gilbert

Tsuru Tying and Care

To measure the length of a new tsuru, first put the bottom of the tsuru (white or purple) on the top of the yumi. Running the tsuru down the inside face of yumi, measure three fingers up from point "A" in the diagram. This is where the end of the loop will be. Tie the loop (red) according to the diagram. Reverse the tsuru, putting the red at the top. The red loop should always be on the top of the yumi.

A tsuru that is too long or short may damage



the yumi. When lengthening or shortening a tsuru, only the red loop should be adjusted. To check the size, you should have approximately six inches between the tsuru and yumi at the grip.

The top loop should fit the yumi like a necktie: snug, but not tight, and down the middle. A loosely tied red knot will slip when shot and possibly cause the yumi's top to twist.

The top and bottom loops fit on to the yumi oppositely. On the top loop, the tsuru should loop around itself to the right (see diagram) and the bottom loop to the left.



Seishin-an (continued from page 5)
the backyard. He has also given the house a name: *Seishin-an*, or "mind-awakening house."

What we estimated as a \$3,000 project has grown in size to \$7,500. Fundraising has brought in an additional \$2,500 from students and friends. We're planning further fundraising and possibly obtaining another loan for the remaining \$2,000 debt.

What we've begun with in wanting to provide a residence for Sensei is a large step forward in establishing a proper seat for him in America. From here he can teach in Boulder and at RMDC as well as go out to teach in other cities and in Europe. Our wish is that Sensei can feel settled here and that we can express our sincerity and interest to go further.

For years we have experienced Sensei's unassuming manner and his style of teaching kyudo and warriorship. He has often taught in improvised environments. In the past year, having seen our sincerity, he has particularly expressed a wish to create a dojo shrine hall; a place of practice in which the atmosphere of kyudo mind can be propagated. As we have

experienced with Trungpa, Rinpoche, the more Sensei offers his teachings, the more we sense what is needed in our physical environment in terms of precision, care, and the accomodation of others.

Out of a desire to move in this direction we would like to construct a new dojo. Practically speaking, we need a dojo with an entry room, a wooden floor, an outside shooting platform, and yumi stands. In establishing an environment with these elements, kyudo mind can be sparked and other students can be invited in.

In teaching kyudo, Sensei has many times suggested what our manners could be towards each other as well as towards our environment. At a recent kyudo instructors meeting he said, "This dojo is not a dojo. First, a good mind makes a good dojo and to have a proper atmosphere for practice, we need a proper dojo." In other words, a good body and mind are made together. Further, he said, "My hope is that with a new dojo, our minds will change. We can't seperate the physical from the mind." When asked how we could make a better mind he said that it's up to us individually as we see fit.