

Five years ago, for the first time in Seido history, [Kaicho T. Nakamura](#) and [Nidaime A. Nakamura](#) promoted five senior women karateka to the rank of Sei Shihan (6th Dan).



Sei Shihan Sandi



Sei Shihan Michelle



Sei Shihan Judy



Sei Shihan Maureen



Sei Shihan Nancy

In honor of Women's History Month, we are putting a spotlight on those incredible women who helped paved the way for future Seido female karatekas.

Each week in March you can read about one of these females, where they began, and their incredible karate journey thus far.

Meet Sei Shihan Judy Curiale.

When and why did you join Seido?

This is an easy one: A friend at work was thinking about taking martial arts in the city and asked me to go along to view a karate class near our office. The friend didn't sign up, but I did. My first class was on July 14, 1976 at the Vanderbilt Y with (at that time) Sensei Ken Glickman. I was fortunate to begin my Seido training with senior students Seishi Lee Zimmer, Sei Shihans Gisela & Jim Baum, Kyoshi David Schneck, and Kyoshi Eugene Loughlin.

Funniest memory?

One December as a yellow belt, I was one of the students helping to clean Honbu in preparation for the coming New Year. As I was sweeping the floor, I watched as Kaicho and his most senior student climbed the ladders to clean the Shinzen located high above the dojo floor. They took great care as they cleaned the two vases flanking the Shinzen entry and replaced the greenery. With a soft rag Kaicho would wipe down the outside of the Shinzen; it was a slow and meticulous process. And then I saw it: from the little entry to the Shinzen, Kaicho pulled out a small, white piece of paper and held it carefully as he cleaned in and around that area. And then, ever so gently, he would return that piece of paper back to its original place. The cleaning was done.

What had I just seen? That little piece of paper had to be important; otherwise, why else would it be kept up there and treated with such care?

On each following end-of-year cleaning day, I would position myself closer and closer to the Shinzen to get a better view of what was going on. And every year it was the same--the little paper would be taken out of the Shinzen and at the end of cleaning, Kaicho would carefully put it back in its resting place. As I inched closer with my cleaning, I saw that the paper was folded and had Japanese writing on it, yet more evidence that it held important, maybe even...secret, information. I finally decided that little piece of paper must contain the Secret to Life. Okay, admittedly that's a stretch so...if not that, then at least it held very valuable words of wisdom. But what?

Eventually I made it to be one of the senior students who got to hold the ladder as Kaicho climbed to clean the Shinzen. Sure enough, towards the end of cleaning, out came the little, white, folded paper with Japanese writing on it. But then disaster struck: the paper slipped from Kaicho's hand and began tumbling downward. In retrospect, it was entirely fitting that somehow--some way--I was able to grab that piece of paper. Using both hands I cradled the little paper, and with my head bowed low I respectfully presented it back to Kaicho. As he took the paper, he looked at me and said, "Thank you. You know this is a very important piece of paper". Inside I screamed, "I knew it! I knew it!", but I only said, "Osu". With a grin on his face, Kaicho continued, "We must never lose this important paper... it tells you how to put together and take apart the Shinzen!" And with that, he placed the paper back in the Shinzen and declared the end-of-year cleaning to be finished.

How has your training changed since you began and what are you up to now?

Over the years I've needed to adapt my training to accommodate life changes that included a family, having a career, and the realities of aging. Seido is important to me, so it's never been an either/or in the decisions I've made--it's much more an issue of "How do we make this work?". If I had to be scarce from the dojo to take care of other responsibilities, Kaicho was very understanding. All he asked was that I stay in good communication--the door would always be open. Abiding by that request has allowed my connection to Seido to remain intact and strong throughout the years. As time frees up, my ability to train increases as well. For the past few years, my husband and I are grateful to be regularly training at Honzan with Kaicho and Nidaime.

Advice for any new female karatekas?

Actually my advice would be the same for any new karateka that enters through our doors. First: Welcome to the Seido organization! I want you to know your opportunities for growth here are abundant. As students, when we step onto the floor in our gi, our training is not based on what we do for a living, or whether we're young or old, female or male, strong or weak, insecure or confident. Instead, progress made through our training is connected to the sincere effort we put forth in our determination to be stronger, more agile, and skilled in technique.

When you train at the dojo I encourage you to just do the best you can, on that day, in that class. And cultivate that simple mindset so it becomes a habit. You'll be surprised at how much you can accomplish and how far you can go.

