



Frank Woon-A-Tai during a demonstration

Legendary Karate Master Frank Woon-A-Tai, M.S., F.G.M.S.

Legendary Guyanese karate master Frank Woon-A-Tai, M.S., F.G.M.S., ninth-degree black belt is a quiet unassuming man of impeccable credentials coupled with a wealth of experience and knowledge of Martial Arts. He began his lifelong karate journey 50 years ago in Georgetown, Guyana where he was born in 1950. 2013 marks the 45th anniversary of his first karate dojo in the garage of his student's home in Fifth Street, Albertyon. From those humble beginnings, Master Woon-A-Tai is today, Kancho (founder) and Shuseki Shihan (Master of Masters) of his world karate university, the International Karate Daigaku, which, in only two short years, boasts an astounding membership of 46 regional karate organizations in 26 countries throughout the world. Moreover, his organization is rapidly growing every few months. This is testimony to his international popularity as a strong and respected leader who possesses not only power of technique, but strength of character as well.

His karate odyssey began after he viewed the movie *"Karate the Hand of Death"* that starred Joel Holt at the Rio cinema in Albouystown in 1963. At a 2008 black belt class in Toronto where he resides since 1980, and where his world Headquarters is located, he discussed how his interest in karate began. He told his students about the movie and his only recollection was the star dented a steel coffee pot with a knife hand blow. A few days later, a student handed him a DVD of the movie. He was blown away; not by the movie, but by scenes of legendary Japan Karate Association (JKA) Instructors demonstrating karate techniques led by tenth-degree masters Hidetaka Nishiyama and Hirokazu Kanazawa, and ninth-degree, Hiroshi Shoji and Takayuki Mikami. These famous masters were buried deep in his subconscious mind and he went through 45 years of his karate career not remembering he had seen them as a boy of thirteen, and they, never mentioned the movie to him. Ironically, these masters turned out to be some of his teachers and mentors.



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In 1970, 20 year old Frank journeyed to England to train under ninth-degree Keinosuke Enoda. This was his first formal and practical introduction to JKA karate. The following year, he travelled to Tokyo, Japan to train under legendary Masters: Nakayama, Ito, Shoji, Kanazawa, Asai, Takahashi, Ueki, Oishi, Mabuchi, Yano, Tabata, Isaka, Takashina, Osaka, Yahara, and many others. He was in karate Heaven! At the end of his stay he earned his first-degree black belt. He clutched his precious degree diploma tightly in his hand during the three day trip back to Guyana; no other degree diploma meant as much to him as his Japanese earned first-degree rank.

Frank followed by bringing to Guyana in 1972, Masters Okazaki, tenth-degree, who became his teacher, mentor and karate father for over 40 years, Yaguchi, ninth-degree, Takashina, eighth-degree, and the man responsible for spreading karate globally, Master Masatoshi Nakayama, tenth-degree. He was accompanied by Master Tabata who stood well over six feet tall!

In 1976, Frank moved to Jamaica with his wife Maureen who was the first female international black belt (1974) in Guyana and who presently, is the first female eighth-degree black belt in the IKD and a deputy chief master. Frank served as chief instructor of JKA Jamaica for five years. Every year since 1976, Frank has returned to Guyana once initially and now three times yearly

to impart his expertise and administer exams to his Guyanese students.

Master Frank, as he is addressed in Guyana, also founded the Toronto JKA in 1981, and the Ontario JKA WF in 1995. He is president of the Caribbean Karate College, former chairman of JKA WF Canada, and Canada Nihon Karate Kyokai, a national organization of all JKA groups he unified in Canada. Moreover, he was a former vice chairman of the ISKF Technical Committee. In 2006, he founded the Guyana Karate College, a non-profit organization and in 2010, former President of Guyana Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo granted the GKC an acre of land at Liliendaal to build a state of the art karate training facility that would serve as IKD South American HQ.

Master Woon-A-Tai was a 1978 Pan American kata champion and the first Canadian Guyanese graduate of the prestigious JKA and ISKF Instructor Training Institute. He is a graduate of the University of Toronto and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Japanese Studies (language, culture, judo, history, religion, philosophy, literature) with a minor in East Asian, British and Canadian History. What is remarkable about his university degree is he returned to pursue his education at the age of 50 as a full time student! As a youth he left school early to help support his impoverished family. During his university days, he continued his daily schedule of teaching, managing all his offices, and traveling for seminars and exams.

In recognition of his 21 years contribution to karate, he was awarded the French Guiana Medal of Service in 1996. In 2005, he was inducted in the JKA WF Canada Hall of Honour and in 2009, he received the Mayor of Georgetown's Award for his lifetime of service to the youth of Guyana. In 2013, after conducting seminars and testing, he and his wife received Lifetime Achievement Awards from India. He produced two DVDs: Eclipse of Life (1997), and Soul of Kata (2000). He is the author of the IKD Kyu and Dan Examination Syllabus, the IKD Passport and editor of several other Canadian karate publications. He is currently writing his Memoirs Shu-ha-ri: My life in Karate-do.

Master Woon-A-Tai was the first ISKF Instructor to be awarded the coveted JKA seventh-degree in 2001, and in 2008, he received his eighth-degree black belt from Masters Okazaki and Yaguchi. At that time, he also received his A-class instructor's licence, examiner's license, and judge's license. A talented and dedicated teacher, Master Woon-A-Tai produced thousands of black-belt students ranging from first to eighth-degree, as well as international instructors, examiners and judges. He has also produced several regional, national,

Pan American and world champions.

In 2008, Master Woon-A-Tai hosted the prestigious ISKF World Shoto Cup in Toronto and in 2010, the 11th ISKF Pan Ams in Guyana. This event was attended by His Excellency President Bharrat Jagdeo and was co-sponsored by the Guyana Government. On that occasion, His Honour, the Mayor of Georgetown, Hamilton Green presented Master Okazaki with the 'Key to the City'. In 2012, he hosted the First IKD World Cup in Toronto; his team won the Cup.

Frank Woon-A-Tai's greatest achievement was bestowed upon him in 2011, when he was appointed a Member of the Order of Service of Guyana, and awarded the Medal of Service in recognition of his long and outstanding service as an exponent and trainer in martial arts by His Excellency, President Jagdeo. He attributes this as his greatest achievement, because it was from the people who are close to his heart through the government of Guyana and moreover, bestowed upon him by the Guyanese President.

Master Woon-A-Tai's main goal continues to be of helping young people everywhere in the world find purpose and direction in life by keeping them off drugs, and to break the cycle of crime and violence through the discipline of karate training. He has travelled extensively



Woon-A-Tai at Kaieteur Falls

all over the world to compete, coach and teach karate. Concurrent with his trip to India, he visited China, the land of his grandfather to trace his roots and to explore the possibility of an IKD China organization. To summarize, Master Frank Woon-A-Tai is world famous for his pleasant approachable personality, the power of his breaking techniques, his ability to spot and coach talented young karate-ka, and his pioneering efforts in kata bunkai. In October 2011, the IKD was recognized by the Guyana Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. 🇬🇪

