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The Yoshukai Karate International organization would like to wish you and your family

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS**

&

**PEACE AND PROSPERITY FOR THE NEW YEAR**

This month’s newsletter features the first in what will be a series of interviews with various members of the Board of Directors of our association, as well as others, who have helped Yoshukai Karate International become what it is today. I hope you will find these interviews informative, inspirational and a vital link in understanding who we are as an association, how we got here and where we are going.

I’d like to give a big thank you to Mike McClernan and his wife, Chris, for taking time to do this interview. Also, I would like to thank Mike and Donna Mendelson for opening their home to us, and to thank Ricky Copeland, Lee Farrell, and my son, Jared Cleveland, for sharing in the fellowship.

Sincerely,
Ben Cleveland, 4th Dan
Yoshukai Karate International

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**Upcoming Events**

**January 14, 2012**
Winter Testing
10:00 AM
Bamboo Dojo
Vero Beach, FL
For more information:
mike.mcclernan@yoshukai.org

**February 11, 2012**
Cross Training Seminar
1:00 – 4:00 PM
Titusville Dojo
Titusville, FL
(321) 794-2789
For more information: www.tyki.org

**March 31, 2012**
Suncoast Yoshukai Tournament
10:00 AM – 4:00 PM
James P. Gills YMCA
8411 Photonics Drive
New Port Richey, FL
(727) 375-9622
For more information: info@suncoastyki.org

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Annual Membership Dues
Please renew by January 31st, 2012
The Sylacauga Karate School participated in the annual Sylacauga Christmas Parade on December 6, 2011. Although it was a cold, rainy night (the high school bands did not even unload from the buses) the dojo had 17 who participated.

Later this month, the Sylacauga Karate School is hosting their annual Christmas party where they will be celebrating the 40th Anniversary of a Yoshukai school in Sylacauga and Mr. Eddie Machen’s 20th Anniversary running the school! They are also planning to put together a demo at half time for the local high-school basket ball game.

WAY TO GO SYLACAUGA!!!

**Suncoast Yoshukai Pre-test Training**

Thanks to everyone who attended the pre-test training hosted by the Suncoast Yoshukai Dojo in New Port Richey, Florida. The training featured a nice warm-up led by Mr. Mike McClernan and a very informative session taught by Mr. Ben Cleveland which covered the mechanics of developing power through forward weight transfer utilizing the H-form kata. Mr. Cleveland and his son Jarred traveled all the way from Sylacauga, Alabama. Mr. John Alford from the West Palm Beach Dojo taught a sabaki (body movement) session which featured transitional movements off the sidekick.

**Sylacauga Christmas Parade**

Save the date! Alabama Spring Test/Training
Sylacauga Karate School
March 10th, 2012
WE ARE YOSHUKAI

An interview with Mike McClernan, Kyoshi, 7th Dan, Yoshukai Karate International

By Ben Cleveland

On November 13, 2011, I sat down with Mike McClernan, Kyoshi, 7th Dan and President of the Yoshukai Karate International Board of Directors, to ask him about his 44 years in karate. We talked about how he became interested in karate, his early training, what changes he’s seen over the years and his vision for the future of our association.

Mr. McClernan is a residential contractor who lives in Gainesville, Florida with his wife Christina McClernan. Both had driven down for the Pre-Test and General Workout on Saturday, November 12th at James P. Gills Family YMCA, sponsored by the Sun Coast Yoshukai dojo in Trinity, Florida.

Interview:

(BC – Ben Cleveland) When and why did you begin karate?

(MM – Mike McClernan) I started karate in 1967, when I was 18 years old, because I wanted to be able to fight. A lot of people decide they want to do karate for philosophical reasons, but I think the vast majority of people start karate for similar reasons that I started (self-defense).

(BC) Didn’t you start training in Shotokan karate?

(MM) Yes, I started in Shotokan under Don McNatt.

(BC) When did you start training in Yoshukai, and why?

(MM) Mr. McNatt ran the Lakeland Karate Club back in the day, and I started in 1967. I trained under him for less than a year when his job required him to move out of state. Mike Foster was developing his own association in the area at that time, and Don knew him, so Don turned the class over to him. I’d say this was late in 1968.

(BC) Who were your instructors at the time, and who were your peers?

(MM) My instructor in Shotokan was Don McNatt, and I don’t believe there’s anybody from that original Shotokan class that’s still training with us.

When I started training in Yoshukai (at the time it was “Chito Ryu”), my first instructor was a guy named Eddie Schwartz. Eddie was a very tough man.

After that, a guy named John Treloar took over the class. John was from Canada, also a Chito Ryu guy, and he taught the class for a while. Lee Norris would also teach the class sometimes. McNatt came back, and McNatt joined the Yoshukan association and taught there as well. That went on for a while, and then Bob Bunning started teaching.

The first summer I was with Yoshukai karate, I moved to Orlando to live with Jimmy Sullivan, and we started training with Lee Norris. That’s when I developed a friendship with Lee Norris that has endured to this day.

Bob Santilli was around in those days as well. Tiger Moore, who was about 12 or 13 at the time, was also training with Mr. Norris.
(BC) What was your day-to-day training like, what kind of things did you study?

(MM) We trained on Monday and Wednesday nights in Lakeland. As I progressed I started going to Orlando on Friday nights. As I moved into the higher brown belt ranks and moved into black belt I started going to Tampa on Saturday mornings. If I went to Orlando on Friday night I normally didn’t go to Tampa on Saturday, but I’d go to one or the other. I had to drive about 40 miles one way to Lakeland or Orlando, and probably 60 miles to Tampa. There was no karate where I lived. If I could get a friend to do it with me, they’d ride to classes with me, but they usually didn’t last.

So class training was pretty much three days a week, but I trained on my own every day, either weight lifting or karate.

What we did was kata, taiho jutsu and fighting, and a lot of work up and down the floor. Usually one night was kata, one night was fighting, and taiho jutsu could be any night.

(BC) When did you receive your black belt?

(MM) I received my black belt in 1969.

(BC) Did you ever train with Dr. Chitose?

(MM) Nope, I never met Dr. Chitose. I don’t believe he came to the United States while we were still associated with Chito Ryu. He did go to Canada, but that was very early on.

(BC) Did you ever train with Yamamoto?

(MM) Yes, quite a bit. He’d come to Daytona and Orlando, and I’d train with him in both places.

(BC) What was Yamamoto Sensei like as an instructor?

(MM) Very good, and he was very encouraging. Yamamoto would tell you when you did something well, and I liked training under him. He was hard, but he was a good instructor.

(BC) What was it like to train with Foster Sensei?

(MM) Mr. Foster had more effect on my karate than anyone else I trained with. He was a dynamic and innovative teacher. His fighting technique, as he performed it, was next to none. When I first met him he was one of the best fighters in the Southeastern United States, if not the country as a whole. His charismatic and powerful personality was a positive influence on my karate, and I know a lot of other people would say the same.

(BC) When did the split happen with Yamamoto and Chitose, when Yamamoto formed Yoshukai as a separate organization from Chito Ryu?

(MM) That happened early on, probably the late 60s, early 70s. I was living in Boca Raton at the time and had a dojo in Boca.

(BC) With all the people you trained with early on, what did you take away from them? What were some of the big influences on you?

(MM) Don McNatt was one of my big influences as far as the way I fight. A lot of grabbing and moving hands out of the way, a lot of sweep work to do takedowns. That impressed me quite a bit. He’s a straightforward kind of fighter, and he usually delivered more than he got.

Of course, Mike Foster’s methods, his weapon alignment and being on point were very, very important as well. Foster did a lot of the same things that I learned from McNatt, the grabbing, the sweeps, and that was what I gravitated towards because I was big and strong and I could make those techniques work.

Lee Norris was a good instructor and a good trainer. He had a good back kick, and Lee taught me how to back kick. I was never much of a back kicker, though I could do it in a pinch.
Bob Bunning was a good instructor, too.

(BC) What was the fighting like when you started karate? Was there much contact?

(MM) There was pretty heavy contact to the body, and somewhat lighter contact to the head, some contact to the face. We weren’t supposed to make contact to the face, but we did it anyway. As long as you didn’t draw blood or make the head snap back too much, it was pretty much OK.

Body contact was whatever you could put out there. If you folded somebody up you might get charged with excessive contact, but it was pretty rough and tumble at the time.

Looking at what’s going on now (in karate), people are probably technically superior, but I think people were tougher back then.

(BC) Did you go to tournaments? What were those like?

(MM) Early on, but Mike Foster pulled us out of the tournament circuit probably in the mid 70s I would say. I participated in tournaments prior to that, just not very often. In 1971 my team won the Southeastern Yoshukan College Karate Championship. At that time there were Yoshukai dojos in at least five or six Florida universities. I placed in a couple of other tournaments, but I was never much of a tournament competitor.

(BC) When “safety gear” was introduced, did that change how karateka fought and trained for tournaments?

(MM) It changed the entire complexion of the martial arts scene as far as karate is concerned, for the worst.

(BC) In what way?

(MM) Well, it started by taking away the grabbing stuff that a lot of us did, with the holding and punching. Eventually, it led to full contact karate. Now let me explain, the rules of full contact took away sweeps because they wanted to see more kicks. And sweeps, of course, are a great way to defend against high kicks. Takedowns were taken away. Those were some of the detriments.

The padding certainly protected your hands, and my hands used to hurt all the time before we started using gloves, so I guess that was a positive.

Mr. (Tiger) Moore never brought the “safety gear” into his school, which I think was to his students’ benefit.

At the school where Jimmy Sullivan and I were teaching, we did bring it in, and we wound up with several full contact fighters in our school. We were in Boca Raton, and Professional Karate was out of West Palm Beach, and they were hawking that stuff out of a van at that point. They’d drive around from dojo to dojo to sell it, and we bought it as soon as it came out. We didn’t have much money, because it was a small school, but we bought a couple of pair of hand pads, a couple of pair of foot pads, and started using it right away. As soon as we did that, it started turning into more of a boxing thing than traditional karate, and I think it did that with everybody’s school, regardless of style. In retrospect, I think it was a mistake.

(BC) Didn’t you tell me that at one time, prior to this, y’all would train grappling in class sometimes?

(MM) Right. All along, with Foster as well, we’d do ground stuff. We’d do arm bars and takedowns, and ground work once you were on the ground. I remember working on “juji gatami” (cross body arm bar) outside in the grass at the Tampa dojo. We always did a lot of sweeps. There were dropping sweeps, which I used to do. Some people said they didn’t work, but dropping sweeps work quite well if somebody is standing on one leg trying to do a high kick, because you wind up turning them upside down.

We did some submission holds, but not a lot of chokes as I recall. Chokes are OK, but not a real good self-defense strategy unless you can do them quickly and move on, especially if you’re talking about multiple opponents. But all of this went away when full contact came along.

(BC) Do you have a favorite Kata?

(MM) I have been spending quite a bit of my time on Tensho recently. I use to do a pretty good Seisan, when my knees worked right, and I really enjoy Bassai.
(BC) Do you have a favorite weapon?

(MM) Well, a firearm (laughs), but if you're talking kobudo, then Tonfa.

(BC) Having trained for so many years, what keeps you inspired?

(MM) Just watching our people grow in karate, and watching them search and experiment, to see them reinterpret the ideas that we have. I don't want people to just repeat what their instructor said. I want to see people take what Mike Foster said, or their instructor said, and expand on it. It's that idea of standing on the shoulders of giants.

I want to see students putting more of their own thought processes into what they're doing. What happens as I see it in our association, as well as other associations, is that people have an instructor, and the student thinks their instructor's word is law, and that their own personal opinion is not very good.

What I want to see happening, and what I see happening now in this association is our “younger” guys, guys in their 40s and 50s who've been training for years and are coming into their own, and they're saying “Hey, look at what I can do with this movement here.” That kind of stuff impresses me. Seeing the bunkai being extracted from the kata, and the movements being “backward engineered” with stuff that works. That's what's really cool. That's what keeps me inspired.

(BC) Who do you now look to for guidance on technical issues, and why them?

(MM) The people on our staff, my peers and seniors. I don't think my opinion is any better than anybody else's . . . well, let me clarify that. I have a lot of experience, and if, for example someone tells me that the hand positions at the end of Bassai are “blocking the reflection of the sun”. . . well, I've always thought that explanation never made sense, and I don't care who says it, I'm going to say that doesn't make sense.

But, there are a lot of people, my peers and seniors, whose opinions I respect.

(BC) Did you ever study another form of Budo besides Karate?

(MM) Yes I have, I've studied Ryukyu Kobudo Hozon Shinkokai under Devorah Dometrich. Also, I've studied Naginata with Leslee Williams.

(BC) Would you recommend cross-training in another form of Budo?

(MM) Absolutely, absolutely. Mike Foster was never real open to going out and talking to anybody else. However, he did bring (Bill) Wallace in, Tony Graziano came in and did sword, Devorah Domethrich was brought in to do weapons, and there have been a few others over the years. I'd like to see more of that kind of stuff offered for a couple of reasons. We may have students who come to us and train, and aren't great at karate, but you expose them to weapons and a light bulb goes off.

I remember a student who trained in karate, who had his moments, but really struggled with it. Then one day this guy was around when we worked out with tonfa, and he fell in love with it, he suddenly can't get enough of it. That wouldn't have happened if we weren't training in kobudo. You can do the same thing with the sword, you can do the same thing with many forms of budo.

We're trying to develop the character of our membership. We certainly want to keep our members, and if you expose them to more and more aspects of budo you keep peoples' interest. But also, all of the budo will help to develop character, if you have a decent instructor. We're trying to develop manners, maybe reign in that ego, along with the ability to defend yourself.

This is a martial arts organization where we do karate and kobudo. If we can get people to do kobudo while they're training in karate, so much the better. If they happen to gravitate toward Naginata, or sword, that's great. It can only help to expose them to these things.
(BC) In your 44 years involvement with karate you must have seen a lot of changes in the way it’s taught and practiced. In your opinion what are the most significant changes, and have they all had a positive effect on karate?

(MM) I’ll go back to the full contact thing again, like the hand gear, I think that’s had a negative effect on karate for reasons I’ve already stated. Now, I don’t take anything away from those guys (full contact fighters), they’re tough as they can be. I think you could add to that, though, with the grabbing and sweeps that used to be more prominent in the martial arts, and I believe those elements are on the way back again. I believe that self defense, after all, is what karate is all about for most people.

I look at mixed martial arts two ways. When it first came out and I started watching it, the competitors relied on wrestling a lot and taking people to the floor. Wrestling is not a good idea for self-defense techniques if you’ve got more than two people fighting, particularly in a bar room or somewhere like that. In my experience, if someone is getting their butt beat in a bar room, his friends usually step in to put a stop to it. That usually involves the antagonist getting HIS butt kicked by three or four people instead of one. So, going to the floor is not my idea of a good way to fight. If you go down you need to get right back up again.

Now, though, there are stand up fighters who’ve learned to adapt to the takedowns. They can deal with the grappling. So, it’s a two edged sword – on one hand MMA encourages you to go to the ground, which is not necessarily a good self-defense tactic. On the other hand, it teaches the stand up guys how not to go to the floor.

In regard to karate tournaments, I think there’s an awful lot of stuff that doesn’t need to be there, like musical kata and people making up their own kata.

I think what we call traditional karate, what you see in tournaments now, is not really traditional. I mean, traditional as compared to what? But now I think we’re moving toward [reverse] engineering the kata to figure out the bunkai. I think karate is moving away from “tournament karate” back towards self-defense.

(BC) Many people criticize karate as a whole for being unrealistic for street situations. Did you ever have to employ your karate skills in a street fight?

(MM) I can tell you for fact that karate works quite well in the street. And I can tell you that I’ve experienced this on multiple occasions. I’m not a street fighter by any stretch of the imagination if you’re talking about a guy who goes out all the time and gets into fights, but I’ve had a few outings and karate has served me very well.

It depends on what you’re doing, and a lot of it depends on intent. If you’re a dojo ballerina and you’re trying to do “touch karate”, then I don’t think your karate is going to do you much good on the street. If you have intent, and you’re trying to stick your fist through someone when you hit them, then I think your karate will do you a lot of good on the street. I think karate is a very effective form of street self-defense.

(BC) How old are you now and how often do you train for yourself?

(MM) I just turned 62, and Christina and I train in karate at least twice a week, sometimes three times a week. We also do stretching and resistance training. Sometimes we do more, sometimes we do less, depends on what’s going on.

(BC) How important is it for students to work on impact training, whether it’s bags, makiwaras, and those kinds of things?

(MM) It’s essential. You’re wasting your time if you don’t do it. The generation of power is one of the most important aspects of karate. Even if you have the technical stuff right, if you can’t deliver sufficient power to the target, then you haven’t accomplished anything except to get a “point”. Karate is about self-defense, and in order to defend myself I have to be able to generate enough power to stop whatever the problem is.

So, yes, impact training is essential. Learning how to use your hips, hitting the makiwara and/or bags, strength training, all of it.

(BC) Is there any one you would have liked to train with?

(MM) Okazawa, a Shotokan man out of south Florida, would be one. I would like to have trained more with Bill Wallace when he came around. There’s a guy that Devorah Dometrich trains with in Okinawa, named Yoshimitsu Onaga, I believe. He’s her “Te” instructor, and I would have liked to train with him. She also has a friend, Sachi Yoshi Takara, he does, well we call it karate, he calls it Te, and I’d like to train with him. He’s one of the most knowledgeable people I’ve ever talked with about karate. He’s very humble, and he’s my idea of a true martial artist.
(BC) Where do you want to see our organization in the coming years?

(MM) I’d like to see us back into the karate “scene”, not so much for making ourselves look great, but I’d like people to see us in tournaments and doing demos so they’d get to know us, and want to come into our association. I think we have something great to offer people. At the same time, the more people you can get into your association, the more human resources you have, people whose experience and talents even outside of karate can benefit the organization. They might have insights and see things we don’t, which will help our association.

I think the organization needs to move more and more towards a self-defense program that uses the bunkai of the kata that can be applied to self-defense situations on the street, thereby justifying why you do the kata, and have two man drills set up from that so we can make the bunkai very applicable. Just like punches and kicks, you drill the bunkai using two man drills until it becomes muscle memory.

So, I’d like to see us use more bunkai with our kata, and I’d like to see us interact more with the “karate world”. We’re also working to bring our syllabus back to what Chito Ryu was using when it came to the United States.

And, I’d like to see more people in the organization get involved. In the prior organization, there were a few people who taught and everybody else stood in line. I think we need to use everybody as potential teachers, and the only way you can develop that is to have them get out there and teach. So I’d like to see our 4th and 5th degrees doing more of the teaching at events, and we’re working to set the structure up to encourage that. And, we have many of our black belts that are not yet part of the Shihan class that have skills and talents we need to utilize. We need to look at them as future teachers in this organization, and start treating them as such.

(BC) What message would you like to pass on to all the readers of this interview?

(MM) For everyone who is a part of this association now, and for those who will come into this association, we want you to grow to love karate the way all of us do. As you grow to love it, I hope you’ll want to promote this association, and see it continue to grow as well.

Our association is not about an individual’s ego, it’s not about “self”, it’s not about the individual – it’s about the group.

As we work together to make this association better, the more we’ll have to teach. The more we have to teach, the more you’re going to learn. The more you learn, the better you’re going to be.

That’s what Yoshukai means – “Yo” means “ongoing” or “continuous; “shu” means “improvement” or “development”, and “kai” means a “union” or “organization” or a “group of people working toward a common goal.” We are a group of people working together through karate to continuously improve and develop – we are Yoshukai.

(BC) Thank you so much for your time and your patience in sitting down and doing this interview. We really appreciate it!

(MM) You’re very welcome!

All photos courtesy of Mike and Christina McClernan
Focus more to ease stress

Traffic jams. Job woes. Visits from the in-laws. Life is full of stress, and more often than not, people feel it physically as well as mentally.

Although the stress response begins in the brain, it is a full-body phenomenon. When someone encounters a threat — real or imagined — the brain triggers a cascade of stress hormones. The heart pounds, muscles tense, and breathing quickens.

One of the best ways to counter stress is to pay attention to what is going on. That may sound counterintuitive, but paying attention is the first step toward cultivating mindfulness — a therapeutic technique for a range of mental health problems (and physical ones).

The opposite of multitasking

Multitasking has become a way of life. People talk on a cell phone while commuting to work, or scan the news while returning emails. But in the rush to accomplish necessary tasks, people often lose connection with the present moment. They stop being truly attentive to what they are doing or feeling.

Mindfulness is the opposite of multitasking. The practice of mindfulness, which has its roots in Buddhism, teaches people to live each moment as it unfolds. The idea is to focus attention on what is happening in the present and accept it without judgment.

Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, professor of medicine emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, developed a mindfulness-based stress reduction program for people with major depression (since adapted for other disorders). Another adaptation of mindfulness to clinical practice is mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, which combines mindfulness techniques with cognitive behavioral therapy.

However it is practiced, mindfulness is a powerful therapeutic tool. Studies have found, for example, that mindfulness techniques can help prevent relapse in people who have had several past episodes of major depression. Other research suggests that mindfulness techniques can help alleviate anxiety and reduce physical symptoms such as pain or hot flashes.

Do-it-yourself methods

One of the best things about mindfulness is that it is something people can try on their own. Here’s how to get started:

Center down. Sit on a straight-backed chair or cross-legged on the floor. Focus on an aspect of your breathing, such as the sensations of air flowing into your nostrils and out of your mouth, or your belly rising and falling as you inhale and exhale.

Open up. Once you’ve narrowed your concentration, begin to widen your focus. Become aware of sounds, sensations, and ideas. Embrace and consider each without judgment. If your mind starts to race, return your focus to your breathing.

Observe. You may notice external sensations such as sounds and sights that make up your moment-to-moment experience. The challenge is not to latch onto a particular idea, emotion, or sensation, or to get caught up in thinking about the past or the future. Instead you watch what comes and goes in your mind, and discover which mental habits produce a feeling of suffering or well-being.

Stay with it. At times, this process may not seem relaxing at all, but over time it provides a key to greater happiness and self-awareness as you become comfortable with a wider and wider range of your experiences.

You can also try less formal approaches to mindfulness by trying to become more aware while you are doing activities that you enjoy. Playing the piano, juggling, walking — all can become part of your mindfulness practice as long as you pay attention to what is happening in the moment. Listen to the sounds of the music, feel the weight of the balls as they fall into your hand, or really look at what you are walking past.

Practice makes perfect

Mindfulness is something to cultivate and practice, on a regular basis.

Make a commitment. Aim for doing 20 to 45 minutes of mindfulness practice, most days of the week. (If that sounds like a lot, remember that a key part of mindfulness means letting go of expectations. Just commit to trying to become more mindful, and do the best you can.)

Make small changes. It’s hard to make big changes. It’s better to start slow and build gradually. The famous Alcoholics Anonymous motto is “one day at a time.” Mindfulness involves taking it less than one day at a time — aim for one moment at a time.

Mindfulness really does not have to be more complicated than learning to pay attention to what is going on around you. But this “simple” advice is often hard to sustain in a busy world. Try making the effort to become more mindful — and you may find the results make it worth it.
Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.
~Author unknown, attributed to a 7-year-old named Bobby

EXERCISE OF THE MONTH

Plank Lateral Leg Raise

Primary focus is on the abdominal and core muscles with secondary focus on shoulders, glutes, and hamstring

Start in a plank position. Leading from the hip, lift left leg up and drive it out to the side keeping hips square to the ground. Bring your leg back and repeat on the other side. It’s important to think about stabilizing the core and keeping the hips square throughout the movement. Only 5-6 reps are needed.