

Cuong Nhu Nidan Rank Paper
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As I look forward to my Nidan test this May, I feel privileged to have trained under Masters John and Ricki Kay since I first joined Cuong Nhu. Both of them spent significant time with O'Sensei Dong during Cuong Nhu's early years, and have shared countless stories of his wit, insight, depth, skill, and love. In addition to my regular training at Komokuten, I've made a conscious effort over the past few years to travel and visit other dojos across our style, where I could train with others who knew O'Sensei well.

In 2009, I spent a week in the Bay Area and was able to work out with Masters John Burns at Rohai, Didi Goodman at Redwood, and Allyson Appen at Tuyê't Tan. In 2010, I made my first visit to World Headquarters in Jacksonville, FL and spent my Spring Break training with Masters Ahn, Thu, and Grand Master Quynh. In 2011, I travelled to Phoenixville, PA to train with Senseis Joe and Kathy Varady of Satori Dojo. Last year, in 2012, I visited Florida in April and worked out with Master Kirk Farber at Beaches Dojo, and then visited again in November for the Yudansha seminar, where I worked out with Sensei Donald Williams, the Ngos, and all the other "usual suspects" at World Headquarters. And tomorrow morning, I'm flying from Seattle to Raleigh, NC to spend a weekend working out with Masters Robert First and Elizabeth Roman at Shiwa Dojo.

In addition to crashing dojos, I've also sought opportunities at regional and national events to visit with, train with, and learn from many early Cuong Nhu members such as Master Mary Davis, Professor Ernie Cates, Master Lap Hoang, Master Frank Van Essen, Master Mike Ponzio, Master Allen Hoss, Master Terri Giamartino, and many, many others.

So, what do all the people I've mentioned above have in common? They all knew O'Sensei personally. Each of them has unique and personal memories of their interactions with him, which blesses them with unique and personal stories they can share about his life. It's a common occurrence at Cuong Nhu training camps, seminars, and get-togethers to hear these personal stories about O'Sensei. And with the advent of social media, I'm able to read those stories when those who knew him post their memories on Facebook, or watch videos of O'Sensei performing a kata, or singing, or teaching. I can even watch interviews with those who took part in Cuong Nhu's early years as they tell stories of O'Sensei on YouTube.

There's an understandable sense of reverent pride for all those in Cuong Nhu who were fortunate enough to participate in our style when it was led by our Founder. You can hear it in their voices as they share their stories. You can see it in their eyes. You can feel it in their heart. They have every right to be proud.

But I'm proud for a different reason. I'm proud... that I never knew O'Sensei. And I think he'd be proud that he never knew me. Hear me out.

I joined Cuong Nhu in 2001, the year just after O'Sensei passed away. That makes me part of the first generation of black belts who *never* got to sit in a black belt meeting with him, who *never* got to hear him play his guitar or sing, who *never* got a chance to talk philosophy with him... and I think he'd be thrilled to know that my generation exists: *the Senseis who never knew O'Sensei*.

Why do I think he'd be thrilled? Because the fact that, even 13 years after the passing of its Founder, Cuong Nhu is still vibrant, and strong, and growing, and still promoting new black belts, and still holding black belt meetings, and still opening new dojos, and setting a record for testing 53 black belt candidates at IATC 2010, and still beating IATC attendance records year after year... *that* is the "dream" that O'Sensei was talking about when he said "Vision without action is a dream soon forgotten."

O'Sensei knew that no man lives forever, but he surely hoped that his dream would live on for generations. O'Sensei's dream was that the *principles* upon which he founded Cuong Nhu, the same principles he instilled in his family and friends while he was with them in person, could endure long after his mortal existence had come to a close. So every time that any one of us bows, stands at attention, touches our fingertips together, and silently prepares to train, we're actually preparing to participate in the "action" that drives O'Sensei's dream. It is up to each of us to supply the "action" that ensures his dream will never be forgotten.

Yes, of course there are days where I envy those who knew O'Sensei personally. But I still feel a sense of honor to be part of the first generation of the second chapter of his dream. The fact that a second chapter exists brings hope of a third, and fourth, and hundredth. With each passing year, more and more members join the Cuong Nhu family without a chance to meet its Father. But just as any of us can look into the eyes of a newborn baby and "see" the grandparent that child will never meet, so too can others look in our eyes and recognize O'Sensei's vision.

O'Sensei would be proud to know that his dream lives on through those who knew him best. But I believe he'd be even more proud to know that it lives on through those, like me, who never knew him at all.