

Kaifukan End-of-the-Year Party 2009

By Ralph Koga



Kaifukan held its End-of-the-Year Party on December 19th at the home of Maeda Sensei and his gracious wife Jeanne. The End-of-the-Year Party and the Anniversary of Kaifukan are two parties that we, Kaifukan students, organize and invite Maeda Sensei and his wife. This time honored guests included Maeda Sensei, Jeanne, Nekomoto Sensei, Carole McLean - the executive director of the Friends of Heeia, and Dr. Alex, Maeda Sensei's chiropractor, and the families of the students.



Several senpai and kohai were responsible for flower lei for our guests. I chose a maile lei from Hawai'i island for Jeanne because its subtle fragrance complemented Jeanne's quiet but steadfast support of Maeda Sensei and Kaifukan. After our guests were bedecked with their leis, a cornucopia of delicious delicacies awaited them, including the chocolate fountain borrowed from Randy's wife, Julie. I found it very difficult to wait until all our guests had filled their plates before I started to eat, an important aspect of "REI," a social behavior and "etiquette" that Maeda Sensei strongly enforces as something more important for the kendoists to learn than the sword technique itself.

Although there was no live musical entertainment this year, the background music, courtesy of Dr. Dan Fischberg, offered a pleasant counterpoint to the staccato laughter and conversation. Last year I performed a





short piece on my violoncello for the party but I was unable to perform this year because of a nagging shoulder injury.

After dessert, Maeda Sensei presented certificates to Dan, Joette, and Eric who passed their *shodan* and *ikkyu* examinations in November. This was followed by the cake presentation, this year's cake decorated with a portrait of Maeda Sensei when he was 28 years old.

Then we gave Maeda Sensei and Jeanne some presents – a bottle of Cognac and “iaido fund,” a roll of scotch tape and a bottle of Elmer’s glue for Maeda Sensei to “fix” his broken iai-toh. He liked the joke and laughed heartily. We moved on to a fun and sometimes-raucous variation of grab bag presentation that allowed a recipient to pick or trade their gift for someone else’s. Grab bag gifts included candies, snacks, books, and Joette’s handmade pillows. Carol skillfully used an “oji” waza to obtain one of these pillows from Nekomoto Sensei.



The subdued sunlight in the Koolaus marked the close of Kaifukan’s 2009 End-of-the-Year Party and the end of a challenging year for Kaifukan. In the next weeks I would



bid farewell to Jake Davis, a senpai who has helped me in kendo and iaido since I first joined Kaifukan in 2004 and Eric Sofge, a kohai who is like a younger brother to me. As 2009 draws to a close, we at Kaifukan take stock of our triumphs as well as setbacks and look forward to the year 2010 with a renewed commitment to striving to improve our kihonkeiko and **rebuilding Kaifukan**.

Sensei's comment:

It was truly a wonderful and different party from all other parties we have had before. It was because I could feel that all students were positively and responsibly involved and no one was taking a spectator's seat. Everyone made certain to make it as enjoyable and memorable as the hosts and hostesses. We have student-sponsored parties twice



a year. Which means we have had many parties. However, I never felt as strong a unity as at this party as I did in others including 7th Anniversary at the Bellow's Air Force beach and



the 8th Anniversary at the Chinese restaurant. The carport at Maeda's residence is the same old place, but it felt special decorated with the Kaifukan flag and banners. The floor, of course, had previously been nicely painted by Randy.

Partaking of food started with "*Itadakimasu,*" yet we waited for our guests to first fill their plate with food. This is, indeed, the common sense of hospitality, and moreover, taking second place after the guests is "Rei."

I also personally thank you all for your gifts of Cognac, 'scotch tape & glue' and the "Iaido Fund." You shouldn't have done that. Jeanne said I should thank you for the Cognac since I am most certainly the beneficiary of the gift. The 'scotch tape & glue' joke for my broken *iaitoh* was hilarious and a good one. I am, indeed, very appreciative of your thoughtfulness, yet



at the same time, I sincerely hope that no one felt compelled to join the fund. If anyone did I will repay you by redoubling my efforts to be a good sensei for your iaido practice. I had ordered an iai sword right after I broke the old one. But the fund has allowed me to upgrade it to a sword more befitting your Sensei. Two fifths of the sword belongs to those who contributed to the fund, not that I will let you use my sword. I thank you all very much.