

“I wanted to experience the best Okinawan Goju-Ryu Karate, so I went to California”

The Uchi Deshi experience



In March 2022 I had the immense pleasure to stay at my senseis' house embracing their Uchi Deshi, live-in, student programme.

This was a very personal karate goal of mine that I have had for some time and I was ready to fly back in May 2020, however, unfortunately, the world came to an abrupt stop just a couple of months before with an unprecedented pandemic of global proportions delaying my plans almost two years.

Over the seven days I was in Carlsbad (California) living with the senseis, Michelle and Paul, I decided to journal my experience on a daily basis. My idea was to capture and document every little detail of my training, as well as my conversations with both, however despite the fact that I have my daily notes (and videos) well-kept with me, it is only now, months later, that my experience truly makes sense. Time

certainly helps you to digest the vast amount of information you are exposed to over an intense week cohabitating with two truly extraordinary budokas.

But let me go back a few years. For the sake of context, I'd like to share my background because it will help to clarify to the reader what is this I was looking for and, more importantly, will enhance the value of what I found instead.

I have been training karate for over 30 years (10 years shito-ryu and 21 years goju-ryu), I have flirted with Aikido and Ju-Jutsu for over 10 years and for the last 6 years, I have formally been studying and training Hanshi Patrick McCarthy's Koryu Uchinadi.

Since 2009 or so I have been obsessed [for a better expression] with body mechanics, in general, and impact technology, in particular. Indeed, the late Leo Lipinsky shihan had a punching power like no other and I have been researching, studying and training rigorously the fundamental principles of short-range high-impact (**SR-HI**), as I coined it, ever since I started training directly with him.

By biomechanics I specifically mean 1) the skeleto-structure, 2) the micro-explosions of the body through contracting and relaxing the muscles, 3) the grounding on a solid stance, and 4) the required relaxation to accelerate and brake sharply, all of it contributing towards an optimum transfer of force. In all that, I have become reasonably competent, however I wanted more. A lot more. And there was no better place than spending time with Michelle and Paul sensei.

When I first met sensei Michelle and sensei Paul in person back in 2018, I had an amazing opportunity to experience their biomechanics in my own flesh. I was partnered as an uke, which I love, for the most part of the seminar and I cannot explain what it felt like. I was totally in awe as I have never been manual-handled with such ease and power. It was there and then that I realised I needed to take my

studies and training further in order to understand what secret lied behind this level of karate excellence. A great demonstration video is available in GKC Global YouTube Channel.¹

Before entering into the review of the GKC Global uchi deshi programme, the reader needs to understand that Paul and Michelle are **professional hosts**; meaning that when you come to their house you become a housemate more than a guest. It took me over a day to understand that role of becoming a housemate in their house and, whilst they totally welcome you to their everyday life, they also expect total cohabitational respect. And quite rightly so!

It is very difficult to explain the value of uchi deshi experience. In simple terms, I would define it as the **ultimate personal karate experience** and every karateka will get very different things out of the programme. What that looks like and how much you get is entirely up to the uchi deshi.

In plain academic terms, uchi deshi is a Japanese term that refers to a live-in student or apprentice at a traditional martial arts dojo or school. The uchi deshi is typically a highly committed and dedicated student who lives and trains at the dojo full-time, under the guidance of a sensei or master instructor.

For some people, the opportunity to live and train full-time at a dojo can be a valuable learning experience that allows them to fully immerse themselves in the martial art and make rapid progress in their training. For others, the experience of being an uchi deshi may be more challenging, as it often involves long hours of training and a strict adherence to the rules and expectations of the dojo. In some cases, the demands of being an uchi deshi may be too demanding or not a good fit for an individual, and they may decide to pursue their martial arts training in a different way.

The value of my uchi deshi training experience lied in the intense and **immersive nature of the programme**. By living full-time and training with your senseis, uchi deshi are able to focus solely on their martial arts training and make rapid progress. You also have the opportunity to learn from and train with some of the most experienced and skilled practitioners in their art. In addition, the uchi deshi programme involved a strong emphasis on traditional values such as discipline, respect, and self-improvement, which can be beneficial for personal development. Even when you have these strong values present in your life, experiencing them through your senseis adds roundness to your own ones.

Overall, the value of being an uchi deshi depends on the individual's goals, motivations, and commitment to their martial arts training. Some people may find that the experience of living and training at a dojo full-time is an invaluable opportunity to fully immerse themselves in their martial art, while others may prefer a more flexible or less intense approach to their training. The GKC Uchi Deshi offers exactly what you want, whatever that is.

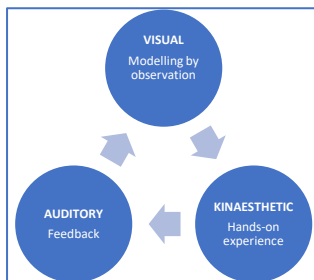
It is worth noting that uchi deshi training is not for everyone, and it can be physically and mentally demanding. It may not be feasible for those with responsibilities or obligations outside of training, such as work or family commitments. However, for those who are able to make the commitment, uchi deshi training can be not only a rewarding experience, but also transformational, like mine was.

As a student, as an instructor and as a dojo owner, modelling is a critical aspect of my learning and teaching methodology; and one of my big drivers within the uchi deshi training is that it allowed me to **learn by modelling**, and not just the specifics of karate, but life itself.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mA7Lde1WGo>

Learning by modelling refers to an approach to learning that involves observing and imitating the behaviour or actions of others in order to acquire new skills or knowledge. This approach is often used in educational settings, where students may be asked to observe and imitate the actions of a teacher or mentor in order to learn a particular task or subject. It can also be used in professional development or training programmes, where employees may be asked to observe and mimic the actions of experienced professionals in order to learn new skills or best practices.

One key aspect of learning by modelling is the importance of active observation and engagement. In order to effectively learn by modelling, it is important for the learner to pay attention to the details of the behaviour actions being demonstrated, and to actively practice and mimic those actions in order to internalise them. This approach to learning can be particularly effective when paired with other learning strategies, such as hands-on practice or feedback from a mentor or instructor. The GKC Uchi Deshi programme was pedagogically multi-layered:



This [oversimplistic] pedagogic triangle is, in my experience, the best way to learn and teach karate: In first instance observation is the starting point to learning and to develop pattern recognition. Secondly, one must immerse in the exercise and try for himself or herself, triggering the kinaesthetic experience that starts the creation of new neuro-pathways and synopsis in the brain. Lastly, if you cannot measure the output, it's impossible to make progress so one must listen carefully to the feedback given and start the process all over again.

So, what did I found? Whilst in the programme I had the opportunity to train at the GKC famous dojo alongside the rest of the class.





I was introduced to the bo staff which has now become a permanent art included in my karate practice.

I trained daily at the senseis' home dojo, I had exclusive time with Paul sensei, exclusive time with Michelle sensei and exclusive time with both at the same time, on top of daily cohabitation time.



I also had the incredible privilege to witness and be part of their everyday life: how they train alone, how they together, how they prepare the dojo classes, the online classes, how many hours they spend with actual training from 5am to bed time.

Sensei Michelle trains harder than anyone I have ever met, on top of daily university studies, personal fitness sessions and running a household, being a super engaged mother to her daughter, run a dojo, prepare the classes and being a committed wife and life partner to sensei Paul. Just inspirational.

Sensei Paul's devotion to the students, to his family and friends, to the quality of the material produced, and to his beloved wife and life partner, sensei Michelle, is nothing short of admiration. They are a superb team and witnessing their respective professional admiration alongside the love they have and show to each other is a lesson itself.

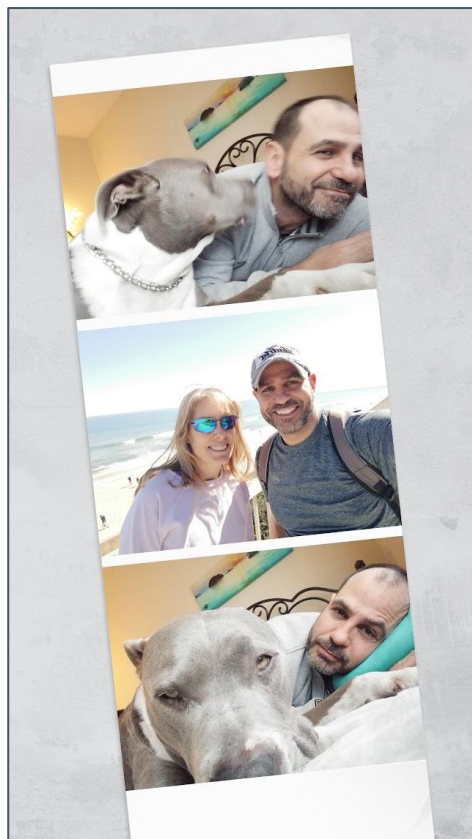


To the incredible karate and kobudo experience, you then you have to add all other personal touches. I was introduced to a lot of friends in private gatherings, as well as intimate dining time, just the three of us, exchanging personal and professional knowledge and life experience.



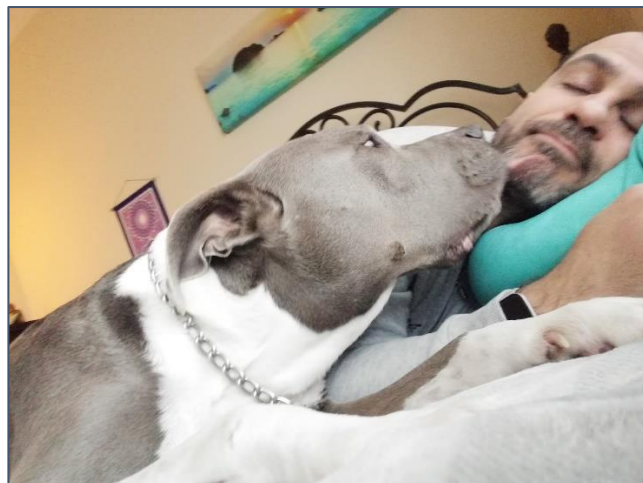
So, all in, how valuable is the Uchi Deshi Programme? Well, I came to the conclusion that the programme can only be measured from a qualitative standpoint, and hardly ever quantitatively.

You see, how do I measure spending hours with sensei Paul talking about (but not limited to) karate whilst walking Rolland every single morning?



How do I measure going for a long walk with Sensei Michelle along the beach of Carlsbad discussing human behaviour, fear, the ego, childhood trauma and how it manifest in adulthood?

How do I measure the hugs and kisses of Rolland in bed?



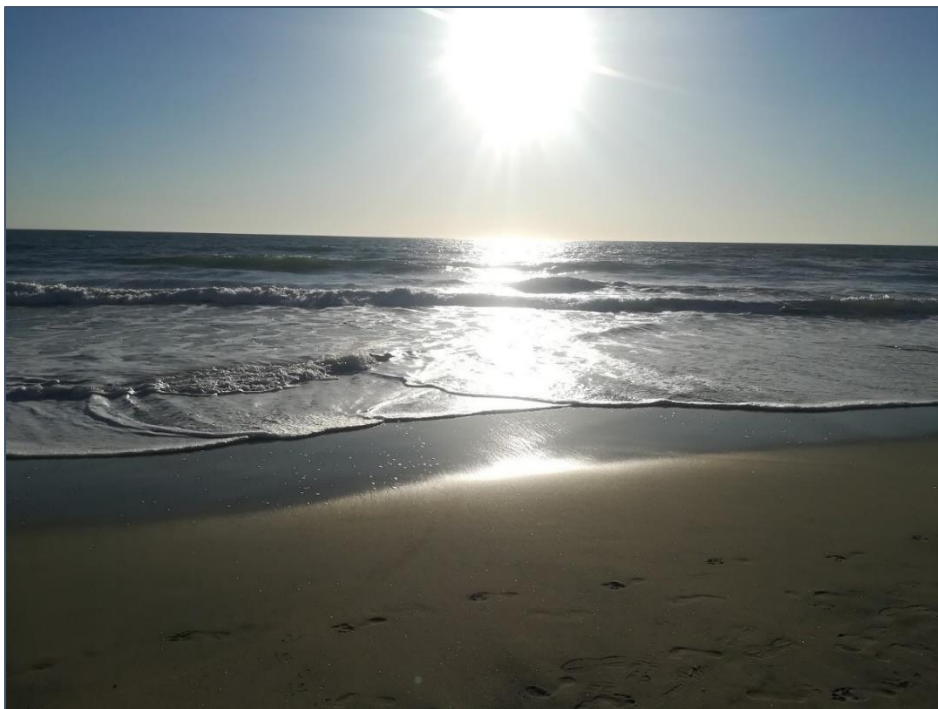
How do I measure sitting with sensei Paul at the Meditation Gardens with the most breath-taking views of the Pacific Ocean?



I could carry on with endless examples, photos and videos of everything I did whilst in California with my senseis, but I hoped I have provided the reader with a clear picture the incredible value I gained as an Uchi Deshi.

When I came back to the UK I was very quickly asked by my students: *“so, what did you learn?? Come on, tell us, share it”* and the reality of the matter is that this was an impossible question to answer, because it’s not so much about what you learn, but more about who you become in the process.

So I did answer and I am still answering, but very slowly, on a weekly basis, in and out the dojo, by sharing who I became after a transformational week with my friends and my senseis, Michelle and Paul.



I went to California in search of biomechanics, and I came back with a new version of myself.