

# Karate Essay by Becci Johnson

## Home of Karate

To study karate you need to know the home and where the art originated. Its “home” is a small island, which forms part of the “Ryukyu” chain of islands. This small island with a population of 1.22 million is called “Okinawa”. The ryukyu chain contains around 140 island but some do not support settlements of life. 40 of these will contain settlements like Okinawa. The largest island out of the 140 is Okinawa with an area of 65 miles in length and 3-14 miles in width. The word “Okinawa” means, “Rope in the making”.

## The Beginning of Okinawa.

### 1st Legend

There are two legends of the same kind telling us about the start of Okinawa. The first legend is that a man called Shineri-kyo and a woman called Amami-kyo gave birth to a boy who became the first king of Okinawa. They gave birth to a second child, which became the priestess of Okinawa. Their third child became a rice farmer. Apparently they sat around a fire in the Dragon Palace at the bottom of the Ocean.

### 2nd Legend

The second legend says that the villagers of Okinawa lived in caves until the same man, Shineri-kyo and woman, Amami-kyo came along. They planted trees and rice. The woman then gave birth to a boy and named him Tenteishi. He grew and had 5 children. His eldest son grew and became the next ruler of Okinawa. The second son became a forerunner and the other became a rice farmer. Although his daughters became priestesses. Today, people believe that this story came from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

## Karate

Karate is a very well known art. This wouldn't be true if we went back to early 60's. People in the western part of the world are only starting to learn about karate and its meaning. Karate was kept a secret for hundreds of years! This was because of Okinawa's historical conflicts. Not so long ago, the Okinawans and Japanese started sharing their secrets about their arts. Most of the teachings about the history have been passed down from mouth (e.g. telling stories) so as you can imagine, they will have changed a bit. We have learnt most of our knowledge about the history of karate by one of the countries who comes across the strongest, China. So without China, we wouldn't know the things we do today e.g. empty hand. We do believe that the Okinawan karate system was developed by a poor peasant class, having to defend themselves from their rulers. Although this is unlikely as they wouldn't have time to develop a martial art system. Also they wouldn't have time to practice as well.

## A Story We Know Today

There are quite a few stories of how the style of karate became popular. I'm going to tell you one, which we hear today:

Hundreds of years ago a monk travelled to China. He came to a Shoalin Temple in the Songsham Mountains. He stayed there for a while creating many moves to defend himself from any kind of danger.

About 1500 years ago the emperor gave permission for the monastery of monks to train up an army of them, teaching them different moves and techniques. This was because the emperor wanted them to help defend the empire. The army of monks were successful in doing this, but instead of being rewarded, the emperor choose that they were all to be killed and for the monastery to be burnt down as he felt threatened! Some of the monks survived and carried on the secret style. And a lot of men went to China to study Chaun fa.

This legend explains a lot and it's up to people which one they believe. Whilst reading this for the first time, I felt inspired by what they would do to carry on the style and how brave and full of knowledge they were. In my opinion, that's what makes a good martial artist. You don't just have to be powerful and hard, there's much more! You need to know the history, the arts culture, and the techniques properly. To be a great martial artist, you need to have as much in your body as in you're head. If you do that, then you can strive to be the best. I found this by reading “A History of Karate” by Sensei Fred Bateman.

### *Karate in Japan*

Karate was introduced into Japan by Gichin Funakoshi who taught, “do” – the way of life. He liked to teach his karate as a way of life rather than a sport or hobby. This makes them a better martial artist and brings them closer into a “family” showing respect, faith and courage. I believe that’s why we get told this a lot in lessons.

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