



Stevie Roquelaure

AH... HUM... KENDO FOR LIFE



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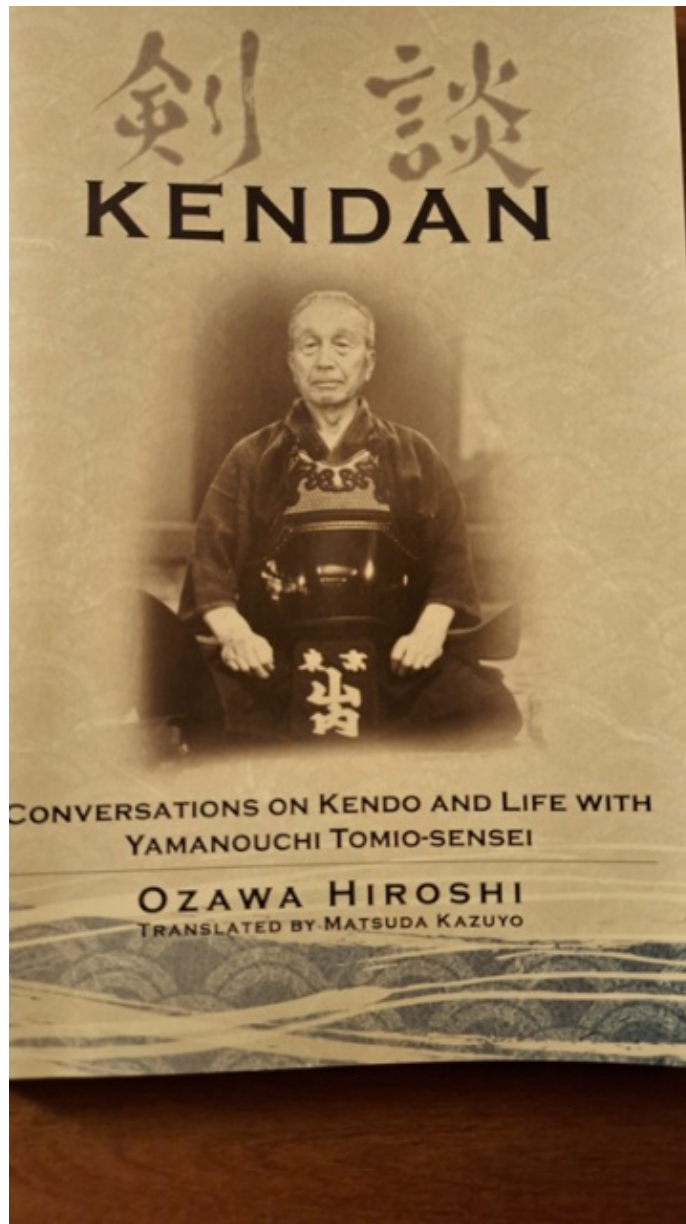
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To my sensei, Shibuya Norio,



Kofu, Japan, visiting Shibuya sensei in December 2024

Preface



In November 2023, I ordered Ozawa Hiroshi (Kyoshi¹ 8-dan) sensei's book: ***KENDAN***² - ***Conversations on Kendo and Life with Yamanouchi Tomio-sensei***³, which collects Hanshi⁴ 8-dan Yamanouchi Tomio sensei views about kendo and Life (1913-2005, a life's journey with kendo at its heart). KENDAN's translation is by Matsuda Kasuyo sensei, whom I met in Watford in spring 2023, alongside Paul Budden sensei (both Kyoshi 7-dan). After meeting them for *keiko*⁵, followed by the

priceless *biiru geiko*⁶ with its exchanges, then, reading the book's summary online, I couldn't wait to order it. I was eager to start reading/studying, instinctively feeling that its content would be appealing to me. I wasn't neither wrong nor disappointed; KENDAN met, and even exceeded, all my expectations. As I was about to leave for Japan (kendo-trip-2024), the book set the stage for the trip ambiance and whetted my appetite. I read it 3 times between November and December, that how much a connection I felt with its content. Sentences spontaneously brought back some experiences, I felt them again, I got goose bumps as emotional memories were flowing back in my mind and heart, Ah... Hum..., Kendo, Life; triggering my desire to write. Some of Yamanouchi sensei's words could have been mine, as I feel close to his kendo sensitivity, as what kendo has taught him through his journey is appealing to me: dedication, persistence, hard work, benevolence, humanism, sharing.

Therefore, I view this present book as a free testimony on Kendo with no real chapters, but two parts:

- **“Mirrors: Living Kendo”**
- **“Open tribune: The Kendo-for-Life mindset”**

Kendo, the way of the sword, is a personal/individual (but in no way solitary) journey. Yet I've always felt its universality while practicing alone, in my dojo in Guadeloupe or travelling around to learn and share it. I never met Yamanouchi sensei, nevertheless, reading his life through Kendo, I managed to recognize myself through his words. Somehow, despites our contrasting backgrounds we were similar; it felt like looking at a reflection of myself in a mirror. While reading, I was inexorably immersed in my memories of practicing kendo. Some of KENDAN sentences instantly brought back all those buried sensations and thoughts, I could not resist the impulse to sit down at my computer and share some of them in a spontaneous writing process. Just as I would have done with flowers while strolling through the countryside, following my impulses to compose a bouquet; I combined these KENDAN specific sentences to my stories to bring the first part of the book to life.

The first draft of this book was written in July 2024 (only composed of Part I, Mirrors), but as I was working on it, proofreading, correcting it,

somehow it felt incomplete. The more I was revising it, the clearer its theme became: the Kendo-for-Life mindset, Lifelong Kendo or *Shougai* Kendo (in Japanese); but still, something was missing. So, I decided not to rush in any way, sleep on it for a while and come back to think things through after my 2025-kendo-trip (April-May), which ended up being a small world kendo tour without being aware of it (The Netherlands, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Australia, Canada). In The Netherlands, my friends asked me about my travel plan, so I explained it to them and it struck me when they said: “Ah... you are doing a world kendo tour”. Indeed, it was; I got the same comment every step of the way.

Jumping from country to country, discussing kendo and life after practices, I then realized what was the missing piece from the book; to complete the puzzle, I needed a second Part that would collect the opinions and experiences of some of the *kenshis* I had met during my kendo journey. That’s how “Ah..., Hum..., Kendo-for-Life” has found its natural balance and harmony by combining two distinct parts: first, in the mirroring game between Yamanouchi sensei's teaching and kendo anecdotes from my experience, and second, in a broader vision of the Kendo-for-Life mindset brought by worldwide experienced *kenshis* (all senseis or kendo instructors/pillars in their respective dojos, ranging from 5th to 8th dan), thus allowing for more perspectives of the same art flourishing on different backgrounds and continents. As you read, please focus on the guiding and connecting thread, Kendo, on the energy it has brought to all of us, not so much on the personal side. Feel the Life flow within each shared story, each experience. I trust that you will find in this book a sincere, forceful and joyful testimony on the Art of Kendo, more generally, on the impact of Martial Arts through an individual’s life.

Part I

Mirrors: Living Kendo

Living Kendo can have two meanings; firstly, one can live Kendo (as a vessel of the art's transmission), secondly Kendo itself is a living being in perpetual evolution (with whom you create and develop a special bond). Personally, I think both interpretations are true and intertwined, inseparable: kendo is alive, and when you let it into your life, it changes you for the better, becoming a vehicle for the Art and its virtues. Thus, all the stories in the first part of this book are not so much about me, Stevie, but about one experience among others (only one reflection of kendo). They all originate from how one experience can echo in someone else's soul, just how Yamanouchi sensei's words did to me. Page after Page, I picked up sentences from KENDAN, accessing my memories, trying to transmit their truth and emotions the best I could, as they connect to the sensei's wisdom. There is no real Introduction or Conclusion in the first part, its first section may serve as an introduction, presenting my companions along the journey with so many memories, in so many places, in so many countries; Shibuya sensei, Sid, Minh, Mieko, Hachimoto, Rudy.... While sharing kendo, we became a family beyond the dojo. Moving on with my recollections, I found myself naturally exhuming my kendo archives, no, I better say my life archives, because kendo has played and plays a central role in my Life. Indeed, the more I practice, the more I realize that kendo and Life are indissociable; Kendo is Life, Life is Kendo, leading to the Kendo-for-Live mindset, *shougai kendo*.



Top picture, 2007 Bilbao seminar (Spain), from left to right; Minh, Sid, me, Amélie, Mieko sensei.
 Bottom, sayonara party at Musashi dojo, Colomiers (France), as I was about to leave for Japan in 2008; from left to right; Hachimoto, me, Minh and Sid.

Timeline	Place and dojo	Sensei
2001-2004	Montreal/Canada Université de Montréal kendo club	Richard Goulet 5-dan
2005-2008	Toulouse/France Musashi kendo Colomiers <i>Meeting Shibuya sensei (2006) and Sid (2007)</i>	Laurent Chaudron Renshi 6-dan
2009-2010	Sendai/Japan Tohoku University kendo club	Endo Katsuo Hanshi 8-dan

2011	Toulouse/France Musashi kendo Colomiers	
2012 Nagoya-2018 Nagoya/Kyoto-Takai- 2019 Coronavirus period Brussels- Netherlands-2022 Montreal- summer2022 Watford-London- 2023 Nagoya-Kyoto- Osaka-2024 Writing of this book Kendo-Tour-2025 (Netherlands-Japan- Korea-Singapore- Australia-Canada)	Guadeloupe Keiko	

Timeline of my kendo clubs since my debut in 2001 and kendo trips since 2018
(in red)