



REMEMBERING CIKGU SITI KALSOM

I first started training in Gayong in 2001 with Cikgu Sheikh Shamsuddin (Cikgu Sam). I trained with a group of my friends, all guys, that I have known since high school. I was the only girl in the group. The group started to expand with new members and most of my initial batch stopped training as things came up and interfered with Gayong.

I always seemed to find the time to train, Gayong had gotten under my skin and was something constant, something I looked forward to, something to rearrange schedules to go to.

As a female instructor in Gayong, I have a responsibility to help guide students along their training path. When I started training, I was the only woman. As I kept training, I had to figure out what worked for me as a female and adjust my techniques accordingly. Gayong is a terrific medium for adjusting the fight for the situation. This means that since I am a 5'4" woman, I can adjust techniques that fit my body type, height, ground type, etc. to fit my opponent. When I train with Tim or Joel in class, they are both over 6 feet tall. I have to adjust what I have learned to fit the situation. If they are tall, I kick out their knees and make them "short." This ability to "adjust" is

what Gayong teaches.

When I first started training, I asked Cikgu Sam if any women trained in Malaysia. He said lots of women trained Gayong in Malaysia, his first Gayong teacher, Cikgu Saphia, was a woman, and in fact the head of Gayong was a woman; Cikgu Siti Kalsom.

I had the opportunity to meet Cikgu Siti Kalsom in 2005 in Taiping in Malaysia.

We all first went to Malaysia in 2005. We took a drive from KL to Taiping stopping along the way

near a town near Sungai Perak to buy keris. We were excited and nervous to meet her! We had all heard stories about her and wanted to make a good impression. Meeting her was at the top of our list of things to do while in Malaysia. We were all nervous to go into her house and actually meet her and Cikgu Mat, we kind of hung back by the van and finally we went inside.

We were greeted very warmly and immediately felt like we were somewhere where we were accepted and that someone was



Cikgu Mat and Kak Nor standing, Cikgu Siti Kalsom with Cikgu Jazwan.

happy to see us. She and Cikgu Mat welcomed us. Cikgu Jazwan and Kak Nor came with us to Taiping to see her. It made me smile to see her and Kak Nor together, they were good friends and were very happy to see each other again. Since none of us spoke Malay we were mostly kept out of the conversations that happened between Cikgu Kalsom, Cikgu Mat, Cikgu Sam, Jazwan and Kak Nor. We did get to talk with her for a bit when we first arrived but I think even if we spoke Malay, we wouldn't have been invited into the conversation, those conversations weren't for our ears at the time, and that was fine.

She wasn't in the best of health when we were there; but to see her move when she played a little Gayong with Cikgu Sam and Joel you'd never know the woman had any ache at all in her! Her movements were clean, quick and precise. She could see how Cikgu Sam moved when they played Keris, she could tell what needed to be tweaked with a Kayu technique of mine, and Joel had finger marks on his arm for days from where she demonstrated a technique on him. She was Gayong!

When I think of her it makes me smile. I don't think it's ever easy to be in a leadership role. There are very many things that happen that the rest of us never see. Decisions have to be made and people's lives are affected by those decisions. Some people disagree and that is all part of leading an organization. She allowed me to conduct an interview with her over mail that was published in Seni Beladiri Magazine in 2006. I read her words all the time and it makes me smile.

Her words still lead, and I look

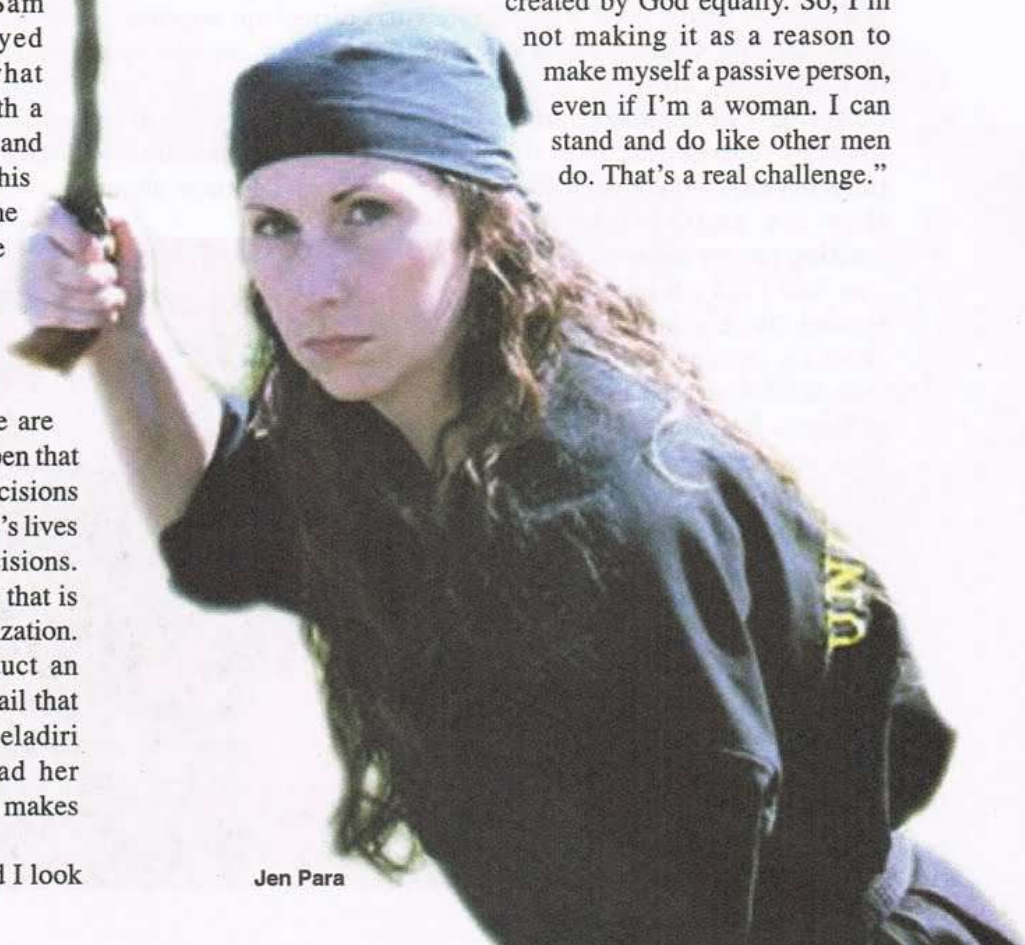
to them when I have decisions that need to be made in terms of our United States Gayong Federation Organization. Those of us in leadership roles in our organization face some of the same issues that exist in Malaysia. Having a strong female role model to look up to, even though she isn't physically with us anymore, is what helps to keep my personal focus on what is best for Gayong and for our organization. Cikgu Siti Kalsom is truly missed by many people. She touched many lives and continues to be a leadership inspiration for many people in an around Gayong. I am a better person for having met her.

The concept of "ibu Gayong" or "mother of Gayong" remains a central concept in Gayong. Women lead several ceremonies; the closing of keris (khatam keris) and the closing of lembing (khatam lembing) are a couple. Women are referred to as the

"head of the dragon" in Gayong. This respect for women in Gayong is one of the reasons I kept training. I look forward to meeting other strong women leaders in Gayong.

As an American, woman, non-Muslim, white, Gayong black belt in a leadership role in the United States Gayong Federation organization, I know that I am something of an anomaly in Silat Seni Gayong. There are people who disagree with the fact that I train. There are people who don't agree with my rank. There are people who don't agree when we trained with Cikgu Kahar and others at Taman Nirwana. There are people who don't like that my teacher, Cikgu Sam, teaches Gayong to Americans. Even with all this, I am Gayong.

I think of Cikgu Siti Kalsom's interview answer to the question, "How do you deal with the stigma or bias of being a woman warrior?" She responded, "We are created by God equally. So, I'm not making it as a reason to make myself a passive person, even if I'm a woman. I can stand and do like other men do. That's a real challenge."



Jen Para