

Fight Like a Girl!

October 9, 2010 Komen Race for the Cure Birmingham, Alabama

By Stephanie Atwood

When I was a child and someone said, “You fight like a girl,” it was definitely not a compliment. Boys would come to blows at this taunt. So you may wonder why we would ask Oyama Karate warriors to done shirts with 女性らしく闘う (*josei rashiku tatakau* - which means, “fight like a woman”) in pink across their chests. When you read the back of the t-shirt you might get the picture by reading “Oyama Karate for Sensei Joan.”



Many of us know of Sensei Joan Caramalis of the World Oyama Karate, Lakeland Dojo. Sensei Joan is an impressive athlete, teacher and fighter. At the tender age of 50 she traveled to Japan and won the women’s championship. Anyone who has seen Sensei Joan training and fighting believes it is a compliment to be told you fight like she does.

This past year Sensei Joan found herself in a different kind of battle – she was diagnosed with breast cancer! Sensei Joan does not back down from a fight and all of her dojo supported her wearing t-shirts

with slogans “fight like a girl” and “we fight for Sensei Joan.” Sensei Joan is in treatment and also back to karate training. She even attended summer camp this past summer. I want to fight like she does because she displays a true warrior spirit.

Most of us have friends and family affected by this dread disease. A good friend of mine is Kathy Stein and she is a survivor and chair of the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure. I was inspired by Sensei Joan’s and Kathy’s examples to join the fight against breast cancer. Saiko Shihan allowed us to form the Race for the Cure team “Oyama Karate for Sensei Joan.” Members of the team included Stephanie Atwood (team captain) and her husband Denver Atwood, Alex Atwood, Sempai Stephen Atwood, Turner Atwood, Cindy Ferlitto, Sempai Robin Griffin and husband Mike Griffin,



Sempai Alicia Johnson, Kanako Taki, Bree Tinch and Sensei Tetsuya Yanagisawa. Mark Masoner was also a racer and an unofficial member of our team.



It was a beautiful day on October 9, 2010 when over 16,000 people came together in Linn Park for the annual Race for the Cure. The fountain was spraying pink water in the air. Pink sponsor's tents and volunteer's tents were spread out on the lawn. There were products given away or sold everywhere. Stacks of water bottles and tables of fruits were laid out for the racers. The children's area with inflated bouncy houses and a Velcro wall, clowns, balloons, games, cotton candy and so much more offered a wonderful distraction for Bree's twin 6 year old boys.

When the race started the participants lined up – runners Sensei Tetsu, Sempai Robin and Cindy near the starting line. The walkers Stephanie, Turner, Kanako, Mark and Bree with her boys near the back. Sempai Alicia and Mike in the middle since they alternate running and walking. It was so crowded that the walkers had yet to reach the starting line when we saw runners passing the one-mile mark. It was a festival atmosphere with people in costume and volunteers cheering us all on.



I was pleased we all finished the 5k race. I was impressed at Bree's young sons, Ryan and Hunter, doing such good job and keeping such a good pace. I have participated in this race for many years but was especially pleased to join with my Oyama Karate family and finish so well. I look forward to doing this again and doing even better next time!

Our team raised \$1,349 to battle breast cancer. Funds were donated online, by check, and cash donated in the collection jars in the Homewood and Chelsea dojos. We raised awareness for this disease and the honor of Oyama Karate.

More details about breast cancer and the Komen Race for the cure can be found online at 2010komenalabamaraceforthe cure.kintera.org. Photos can also be seen on al.com.

