

# Oral History Interview: Master Jeff Perkins

## April 9, 2022

Interviewer: Rachel Manela  
Interviewee: Master Jeff Perkins  
Location: Livonia, Michigan

**Rachel Manela:** This is Rachel Manela sitting with Master Jeff Perkins on Saturday April 9, 2022 at his dojo in Livonia Michigan, We're going to discuss Master Perkins' accomplishments in Isshinryu Karate and his work as a Martial Arts Instructor. Can you please state and spell your name for me.

**Master Jeff Perkins:** Jeff Perkins.

**Rachel:** Where were you born?

**Master Perkins:** I was born in Detroit, Michigan.

**Rachel:** What year?

**Master Perkins:** 1956

**Rachel:** And, what was your childhood like?

**Master Perkins:** You know, I don't remember being bad, but my mom was a single mom. My dad died when he was about 34-35 years old. I was about 4 or 5. And uh, I don't remember him much, Just from the pictures. I remember the day he died, I was there. I was a kid watching mom freak out so I just kind of freaked out with her. I didn't understand what was going on. And uh, she never remarried, she raised 3 kids, I was the youngest of three.

**Rachel:** Brothers, sisters?

**Master Perkins:** 2 Older sisters.

**Rachel:** So, when did you first get involved with Martial arts, or Isshinryu?

**Master Perkins:** Um, it actually began somewhere about 1971-72. My brother in law was a Brown belt in Isshinryu and I was always an athlete in High School. I've been in athletics since I was 6 years old. And uh, it kind of developed when we had him do a self defense class for a bunch of A-Type football guys. So they showed us how to do a couple blocks and a few punches, they let us beat each other up. So we had a 10 week self defense class and then we

did it in uh, the dojo my brother in law was training in. It was in Inkster Michigan. And it was one of the first Isshinryu dojos. There were two, one on 7 Mile that was run by Ken Pittaway and this one was run by Doug Noxon. Um, Sensei Noxon passed away before I started. So I started officially at the dojo in 1972, the inkster. And uh, Norbert Donnalley was the head instructor at the time. We had other instructors because Sensei Donnelly also ran a Keego Harbor Dojo, he was mainly out there. It was 1972 and I only know that because another Isshinryu guy, by the name of Carl Prather, I don't have no, It amazes me how these guys have exact dates of when they started. I have no clue. I mean, my mom paid for the lessons, I was sixteen years old and we went in there and uh, I don't remember the exact date on that. Actually I was just going by trophies I have. I started competing early on, as a White Belt. So, I was seeing '73 and then we have christmas parties here, and a guy named Carl Prather who was my senpai at that school was here and he said 'no you didn't, you started in '72'. And I said 'How do you know that, I go by my trophies and what they say.' He said, 'What was John Nichols, an old Isshinryu guy. What his rank when you were there?' And i said, 'Brown Belt.' He goes, 'Well his date of Sho-dan was blah, blah, blah '72.' And I said, "Oh, must have been I guess. That's why I put it at '72, he told me.

[3:41]

**Rachel: And, what is your Isshinryu Lineage? How do you trace back to Grand Master Shimabuku?**

**Master Perkins:** Well, I guess I started at the Inkster school. We had a hodge-podge of instructors there. The head instructor was Norbert Donnelly. I was there for about a year and a half before it changed hands to a man named Lloyd Russett. And, uh, I really didn't, for some reason I didn't want to stick around anymore. I'd been a white belt for a year and a half. I went to Orange Belt, that was it. That's how long it took back then. And uh, so John Nichols who kind of lived in my neighborhood, not too far, being 16-17, I'd be driving. So I could drive quickly to his house. He had a garage dojo. So I went there and trained with John Nichols a little bit. I did a little bit of training with Ed Babbits but he stopped training after a while. And then, in 1977 I went through brown belt ranks with Nichols. And then in 1978 Ed Babbits promoted me to Sho-Dan, first degree black belt. Then I left Nichols. I started training on my own, some friends of mine. Um, somewhere in the early '80s. Being a Livonia Police officer, I was always around Sensei White, Babbits, they all hung out together and train together. So, I'd be at Sensei White's school a lot with Babbits and uh... So, Sam Santilli was there also. And I went on a radio run, a domestic crime at a house and Sam's there. It's his parents' fight with the neighbors and it was like a little reunion. And he says 'Hey, come on down to the dojo.' And I say, 'I don't know.' And he says, 'You know your weapons?' And I said, 'No, I didn't know any weapons at that time. He says; 'Come on down, I'll teach you weapons.' I said, 'Ok.' So I went there for uh, god, from the early '80s maybe, 1984ish to uh, 1989. I trained under Sam, went through the ranks. I was part of the AOKA, American Okinawan Karate Association. And I'd also go and train at Dexter-Davidson, the old dojo of Willie Adams, Sensei Adams. I'd go there in the mornings because I worked late nights, so I would go train with Sensei Adams. My teacher over there was Eugene Woods, Sensei Woods. He was my main teacher. I had to straighten out my katas,

things like that. So, in 1990, I got kind of disenchanted with all the tournament stuff. I was over all that I went to some seminars in the early, in the mid '80s that were held by a 10th dan from Okinawa. Sayu Oyata And then uh, Roy Osborne was his student. I went to a couple of those seminars, wow, I was a san-dan or ni-dan at the time and I thought, oh my god, what is this? I felt so inadequate, I felt that they were way up there and I was way down here. And I thought, how do you get up there? And I thought, train! So, about the mid- '86 I started training with Sensei Roy Osborne. Because back in the day, we didn't learn any bo Kata. We were just taught kata and sparring. Mostly sparring. My instructors in Inkster did not like kata. So I probably had 2 katas the whole year and half there. Because all we did was fight. And uh, so I started training with Roy Osborne to learn his Shorinjiryu bunkai. And some of his katas because it was the same lineage [as Isshinryu] It was Kyan lineage, Kiyan Chotobu lineage. So, he started showing me these amazing lethal techniques and I was just overwhelmed. I continued, and still continue to train with him, I've been with him for over 40 years. And uh, I hold a 7th dan of Shorinjiryu, his style. Um, in 1990 my Isshinryu, uh, I wanted to know what first generation was. What were the guys training directly with Master Shimabuku, what were they doing? So, I'm reading Black Belt Magazine, and a guy named Arcenio Avincula is in there. And I'm like; wow! And I'm reading his stories and so I started writing him these long, long letters he always complained about. And uh, stayed with him and changed my katas to be more like what he learned from Tatsuo Shimabuku and stayed with him for 18 years. So, I'm actually considered 2nd generation in Isshinryu, through Avincula. And I've had the pleasure of training with guys like Sherman Harrill, Sensei Harrill who is a first generation. I've been a lot with Tom Lewis Sensei, he's one of the last people promoted, and Harold Mitchum Sensei and Tokomura Sensei. He trained for a long time, like 30 years in Isshinryu right from 1958 to '75 when Master Shimabuku died, he was there. And then Kichiro, Then later he changed styles and created. Um yeah, I wanted to get as close as I could to Master Master Shimabuku's katas so I trained with Sensei Avincula for 18 years.

[9:34]

**Rachel:** And you've mentioned some other styles. And you have a high rank in a few. What are they, and how do they relate to Isshinryu? Or How do you feel they relate to Isshinryu?

**Master Perkins:** Um, Shorinjiryu through Roy Osborn is just another name for Shorinryu and he learned his Shorinji through a man named Fusi Kise on Okinawa. And at that time, uh, Sensei Kise was teaching Shorinji, but now he teaches something else, his own style. But the lineage he learned it from was from somebody on Okinawa, I can't remember who it was but they had trained with Tatsuo Master Shimabuku and had the same lineage as katas. They have the same katas we do, they just do them a little different. So, that really related to Isshinryu and then you know, my first trip to Okinawa was in 1994. I was introduced by Sensei Avincula to a man named Iha Kotoro Sensei, learned Ryukonkai and Kenchi Sensei and started training under them. And I'm going back and forth to Okinawa I think maybe 12-14 trips there. And so we started doing that at the dojo. I started teaching it, uh, went up to about 5th dan in Ryukonkai Kobudo which doesn't really relate to Isshinryu too much. Then I stopped going to that teacher

and just stuck with Tokomura Sensei. I mean, when I started with Tokomura sensei it wasn't a ryu-ha. He just called it a tokoshin, so he had made some katas up with the tekko, the pointed horseshoe and the Eku kata. And he, there weren't katas for the tekko, no particular katas and he didn't like how they did the bo kata because they change hands, if you're a fisherman you don't change hands on an Eku, he's from a fishing village on Okinawa. And, so he, he taught me those are the first two katas he ever taught, and he kept adding on these katas of these obscure weapons and that was his fort . Most of the katas are obscure weapons in Okinawa that nobody has official katas for. So, if they did, they were taking an empty hand kata and adding the weapon. So, he thought, I'm going to make some and started creating his system and after a while he had 14 katas and he announced he was going to make it a ryu-ha, an official style, and he did. And now it's Tokushin Ryu. And, I'm the first and only so far 8th dan promoted in Tokushin Ryu and the USA director of Tokushin Ryu.

[12:39]

**Rachel:** You had mentioned earlier being involved in tournaments and going to different seminars and tests. Are there any that stand out or anything you want to share about a tournament?

**Master Perkins:** You know, it was fun at that time in my life. But being a law enforcement officer and being a narc, working narcotics for a long time in my career, 12 years. I was a street narc at that time, long beard and long hair, wear leather and would buy drugs in the metro-Detroit area. And I wanted something more reality based than point karate. And that's when I got disenchanted and really started looking around for other things. So, um, you know, I enjoyed the tournament section, I think I got one grand champ in. I wasn't a person who went every weekend, I stayed in the midwest. I was part of the AOKA so you were expected to come fight with them in Chicago and Connecticut and down in Kentucky and stuff like that. I didn't go a lot. I started to get a little disenchanted with it. Um, the AOKA grand nationals, I can't remember what year it was, maybe '86, something like that, I was heavyweight champion in kumite. And then, when I went for my San-dan, in the AOKA you didn't have to go before the national board until 4th dan. Well Santilli, I had trained all the time, so Santilli said, the national board is in town, I want you to go through promotion to 3rd dan with them. I tested the day before the tournament, they give you the results the next day. Um, and so I was awarded my san-dan at the tournament, it just so happens I took grand champion fighting that day. It was a good day.

[14:44]

**Rachel:** Yeah! When you go to tournaments, or when you did, did you strictly only fight? Or did you compete with weapons and kata?

**Master Perkins:** All of it. I always felt you had to be a well rounded martial artist. I'd seen too many of my senpais, my brother in law included, all they did was fight. So when it came to that time in their career, instead of extending it with kata and teaching and weapons, they just gave it up because all they did was fight. That's all they wanted to. And I didn't want to be that. I knew I

was going to do this all my life. I stopped an early football career, I was hoping to go on to small college football, I loved football. I was a quarterback for many, many years because I got, I'm just like I'm just doing this. I was fascinated with it I was just totally obsessed by it. Constantly doing kata, and yeah, I did all three all the time. And you know, sometimes I on things sometimes I didn't it didn't matter, I competed just for the fun of it.

One thing I did do though, at the end, getting into more reality based fighting, I Was introduced to bo-bo kumite by Roy Osborne with the headcage and the gear, so I started fighting bo, friends of mine, students for about 2 years in my garage and at Santilli's dojo. That culminated in a Bo tournament at Bob White's, one of his tournaments in '86 or '87 somewhere around there. It had a Bo section, a bunch of tough Canadians came, a bunch of guys who were into Bo fighting, and I took first in the heavyweight. And then I retired. I went out on top. I loved the contact, I liked the idea of Bo-bo having a cage, I worked for a living, I didn't want to go to work with a broken nose or black eyes. So the cage protected you from that, but you still got it hit as hard as you want. In bo-bo kumite you get a point by knocking somebody back, knocking them down, or knocking them out. You can't flick a backfist and not have a reaction, I liked that part of it.

**[17:10]**

**Rachel: I don't think I've ever seen that. I don't know that anyone does it anymore.**

**Master Perkins:** No, some people claim to but I've seen them try at tournaments or in promotions. There's a way, a bo style of fighting, the problem with people is, they're tournament fighters and the put on bo gear and go full contact and they look like trash. They throw trash techniques. My main concern with that bo, my main concern was, how did I look when I fought? Did I throw proper techniques? I remember coming out of the box, 'how'd I look, how'd I look,' that's all I wanted to know. And so, I was very set on throwing proper contact techniques. I started doing contact with some friends with 16 oz boxing gloves on, you can't throw proper technique with 16 oz boxing gloves, so I was like, I don't want to do this, I want to do karate techniques. I don't want to do the boxing techniques. So the bogu was perfect, small gloves. In bogu you pad the weapons, or pad the targets not the weapons. So you have a chest protector, a head protector, and small gloves with just padding over the two knuckles, That's it. They made us for insurance purposes wear the footgear, but I kick with the ball of my foot, I never kick with my instep so... It worked for me.

**Rachel: Yeah.**

**Master Perkins:** I enjoyed it a lot.

**Rachel: How do you spell that?**

**Master Perkins:** B-O-G-U

**Rachel: Okay**

**Master Perkins:** I gotta find my trophy. Sensei White made it, a box of wine. He spelled it Boku, so my trophy says boku tournament. I'm like, wow.

**[18:45]**

**Rachel:** I'm glad I asked how to spell it. Um, When did you begin to teach Isshinryu?

**Master Perkins:** I was teaching as kyu in my backyard, some friends. In High school and just out of high school. I was a brown belt at the time, so I was teaching back then just privately. I did that a lot. Um, I opened up a commercial dojo, I started off in our Rec Center which was Valley high school. That would have been 1999, 2000ish. I was there for a couple of terms, and then they built the big rec center, whenever that was. They said, well it's going to be okay. We had 25 students. They said you're just going to walk over to the building, no stoppage of classes. Then they came to me and said, we're not going to do this, we're behind, construction issues, blah blah blah. What do I do with my students? Its probably going to be a year before we're back in service. We gotta do something. So, we found a building, somewhere in Livonia. And in 2001 started officially the Okinawa Budokai School of Karate-Kobudo.

**[20:14]**

**Rachel:** You mentioned some teachers, um, already. But, are there any teachers in Martial arts who particularly stand out for you or who've really inspired you?

**Master Perkins:** Oh yeah, oh yeah. Well, obviously you know, Sensei Adams, Santilli, started me out. They're you know, kinda got my corrections from them, you know, molded a little bit by them and then uh, definitely Sensei Avincula. Finding Tatsuo Shimabuku's way. In fact, I'd been training Roy Osborne, training with Sensei Osborne and I, I told him that if I don't see in Sensei Avincula what I think true Isshinryu is because I've heard so much about it that I'm going to change my bone block and twist punch and call it a day. He never really asked me to step into Shorinjiryu. He showed me bunkai, learned some of his katas but I didn't have to redo a kata to be like his. He had Wansu, he said just keep your Wansu. He just showed me principles of what he did. So he was a major influence in real karate for me. And then later on, you know training with guys like Sensei Sherman Harrill, he taught me a lot about body dynamics as Avincula did. He showed me little things that just escalated my karate, I think to a new level, just by little things he taught me.

**[21:52]**

**Rachel:** So, thinking about yourself, what do you think your teaching philosophy is in relation to karate and Isshinryu?

**Master Perkins:** You know being, going to Okinawa all the time and training in those dojos there's not a lot of formality. It's a very relaxed atmosphere and that's what we do here. In my

mind and the way the Okinawans are, I don't think you can learn anything in a stressful environment. I don't care what it is. So, when you have all this military etiquette people have brought, the Marines have brought to Isshinryu, I don't think that's a good idea. But, having too kind of a militaristic kind of thing, kids are obviously different, you gotta keep them straight. You know, for adults, it's a little rough. I think a lot of times adults don't like that kind of formality. That's not how they teach in Okinawa. So, I brought that into my teaching when I started a storefront dojo and we've always kept it relaxed. Respectful but relaxed. Just like the name that you saw. I mean I have mostly black belts on the floor, everybody's respectful. But, it's a relaxed environment, you know. I've never required anybody to call me anything in this dojo and they call me Sensei. To me that's the greatest honor. In fact, when some people call me master I say well, no just, sensei is good. But, I don't call myself anything and I never tell any student that walks through the door to call me anything, that's up to them. Don't give yourself titles. That's the Okinawan way. It's kind of arrogant if you do that, I don't even sign things 'Sensei Perkins'. It's Jeff Perkins. You know, somebody asked me in the dojo, from another one, what do I call you? Well, I have a name called Jeff, call me Jeff. I'm good with that, you know. I've never required anybody to call me anything. It's a title, in Okinawa and Japan, it's a title that somebody gives you. You don't just say it because I have this rank and I should be called this. So, that's one of the problems I have with a lot of modern karate, everybody wants a title. They seem to get bigger and bigger until somebody's got the Grand Puba.

[24:20]

**Rachel: What do you think specifically about Isshinryu, what do you think one of the most valuable aspects of it is?**

**Master Perkins:** It's a natural style of karate. I always tell people if what you're doing in Isshinryu doesn't feel natural to you, then you're doing it wrong. Because, Isshinryu is a total form of karate. Um, I know there's the basics of how you stand, you know the thing about shoulder width apart, heel toe on the line... Well you know what? Not everybody is the same, not everybody is built the same. So I was always following the rules like that until I got to Okinawa and like, Tokomura sensei was like; 'You big guy, this way, wider get longer none of this small'. And I thought, oh my god, that's right. And when I started doing that and finding my Seisan and my stance to me, everything worked better. Everything worked 100% better. Instead of following the format of, you do this. I don't even teach that anymore. I show people a Seisan stance and I tell them you have to find your Seisan. You have to find your shibo dachi, your seiuchin stance. It's you, we're different. I'm different from you and you and you and you're different from me. You have to find your own stances. As long as the principles of what you're doing are the same, then I'm good. I'm not trying to make robots. I'm trying to make karate students and kobudo students.

[26:01]

**Rachel: So, you've mentioned you're a police officer, a retired police lieutenant. So, have you ever needed or have you used your karate while on the job?**

**Master Perkins:** Just uh, you know minor things. Physically minor things like control holds and things like that, foot sweeps. I never really punched or struck anybody. So, I guess you could say that I did use my karate because I didn't hit anybody. I would see police officers just wail on people you know, for the slightest thing. I remember one time, being the karate guy, my bosses threw me in the cellblock to be a turnkey for a day or two, they wanted to see what I could do. I didn't like that, you know, I'm not going back there and starting fights. I talked to a lot of people into getting arrested without me having to put my hands on them violently. To me that was a good thing. If I have to, I'm capable but I never wanted to do that. So yeah, I kind of used it everyday. Just the mentality of Karate-do.

**Rachel: Right. Did you ever teach, it in the, to your fellow officers or anything like that?**

**Master Perkins:** Yeah, I was part of our training, I was in charge of it towards, when I became a lieutenant, I was in charge of our training unit. But I was always a firearms instructor, defensive tactics instructor. Um... As I am currently, Western Wayne Country Police Academy, I teach defensive tactics there.

[27:44]

**Rachel: What advice would you have for Isshinryu students and instructors? If you could give them any advice.**

**Master Perkins:** Just train. Just train. Don't worry about rank, don't think about your next rank, all that matters is what you do on the dojo floor, that's it. Belt color doesn't matter, if you can't perform at that level, that's your problem. I've never been. I've been in athletics all my life but I've never been a natural at it. There were guys at Sensei Adam's dojo that were just doing amazing things with the fighting I just... I was never a natural but what I had, I trained more than they did and again, I trained for my body, you know a little shorter a little stockier so I trained to hit really hard and kick with the ball of my foot. I asked Gene Woods one day, somebody asked him, 'So what do you remember from Sensei Perkins when he was training with you, fighting tournaments with you. He said; 'Do not get in front of that front kick, it doesn't matter where it hits you, it's going to hurt like hell.' Yeah, that's what I did, you know. I went back to the basics, I got away from flip kicks, all this tournament stuff, right back to my Isshinryu basics and I fought out of them and that worked for me. So, yeah just because you aren't athletic or a natural flexible person, which I'm not, you develop techniques to work for you. And that's just training. There's no secret to karate kobudo, it's just training, it's consistent training. You can't come to the dojo and then leave for four. You're going to have the same mistakes. As a teacher I hate teaching people like that. Because sooner or later I'm going to go, 'Look, I'm just going to put you,.. Do what you're going to do, I'm not going to try to correct you because you're never here. The most important thing is training and consistency. That's all it takes, there's no magic. I mean, its... some people are more flexible than others some people do prettier kata than others, some people have got more power than others, its just a matter of training. And trying to understand your body and how you can do it. You know, we used to always envy our teachers.



But some of my teachers were extremely flexible. I've seen Sensei Adams do a jumping, spinning hook kick with someone swinging a sword at him, and tapped the guy on the back of the head and land like a cat. I was like, 'I could never do that in my life unless you were one the ground.' [laughing]. Yeah its just a matter of training and consistency, that's all it is.

**[30:26]**

**Rachel: How many students have you promoted to blackbelt?**

**Master Perkins:** Oh, I don't know, uh, probably in the area of 25 or thirty over the years. Some of my black belts aren't here anymore. We carry about 17 black belts, anymore. Some of mine just came back. Some of my young students who were with me since they were 12 until they left for college, still find time to come back. And they're in the busy business world now and they maintain it and started back into it. So that's always the joy of seeing them come through the door, you know. So, yeah um, you know, About 30. I've been training, this is my 50th year training in Isshinryu and so I've been teaching since brown belt. Got my black belt in '78 and I didn't really start promoting people until... I was involved in promotions at Santilli's for San Dan and things like that. Um, when we opened up the dojo, I promoted people obviously. And when I was with sensei Avincula I didn't have a dojo obviously, I had some private students that I promoted. So I'd say 30 probably 25-30.

**Rachel: Have any of them gone on to continue, open their own schools? Anything like that, that you know of?**

**Master Perkins:** Uh, no, no. Not really. Um, a lot of them came from other schools, um. I know you know Sensei Dan Holloway. He's my kobudo student. He's one of the senior Kobudo guys. So, he teaches that in his dojo. So, he already had his dojo. Sensei Tom Perry has his dojo and him and his son Adam come train in Kobudo. So, I have black belts that have their own dojo, came here for a reason to take back to their dojo. But none of them started with me.

**Rachel: Okay. In 2010 you were inducted into the Isshinryu Hall of Fame. What did that mean for you?**

**Master Perkins:** Oh that was incredible! You know, I mean just having an honor like that, um, from a group of your peers in Isshinryu is just amazing. You know, I wasn't, I'm the most amiable guy just from being a cop. You know, I never really had a lot of cop friends. It was all karate. So these guys are family to me so, I didn't travel a lot after a while. I hadn't been to the Isshinryu Hall of Fame for a long, long time and so getting back into the mainstream of Isshinryu after a while, later on. And then being nominated by my students and accepted was just unbelievable. I didn't know it was happening until I got this letter. It was, 'Who did this?' [chuckling] It was a great honor, such a great honor.

[33:38]

**Rachel: Any other accomplishments or awards you've received in Isshinryu or any other styles?**

**Master Perkins:** Uh, I mean yeah. We got dojo of the year at the Isshinryu hall of Fame one year. I got the master Harold Mitchum lifetime award from the WIKA. [World Isshinryu Karate Association] Um, yeah, I mean there's been a few. Obviously, I mean getting rank too, my last rank. I tested in front of, before he passed away, Sensei Harold Mitchum, Sensei Tom Lewis, I tested for 8th Dan. Literally got on the floor and ran my katas along with John Ingram, their top student. And uh, got promoted to 8th dan by them. That was huge!

**Rachel: And you're President of Isshinryu Tomonokai.**

**Master Perkins:** Yes.

**Rachel: So, what are the goals of that organization? Tell me about that.**

**Master Perkins:** It's kind of funny, um, when you look online it's got bylaws and all this other stuff we kind of made up. It's very simple. Tomonokai means friendship group, friendship association. Tokomura Sensei, he's the one that made it up and he created the word and he wanted everybody to be Tomonokai. So when he comes here, he always says "I don't teach for money, I teach for friendship. I teach to make friends" ' So he would, we would make Tomonokai shirts and he loved it because he wants everybody to be friends. So basically it's the Isshinryu friendship group. There's no real, we didn't... In the bylaws we had... If you didn't have a sensei and we were having an event and you wanted to come test, tell us, and we'll test you. But, we never had to, I mean it's kind of just, you know, a group of people with a common interest and that's pretty much what it is.

**Rachel: Do you find that people that come and participate, are they affiliated other organizations as well, or nonaffiliated?**

**Master Perkins:** Oh yeah. Some didn't really want to be affiliated because they thought it would be a conflict with their current association. Then when we explain to them it's just a friendship association, nothing else, they go, 'oh, okay.' We weren't trying to make money. There was a one time life-time fee of 60 bucks. You got a certificate and at first Tokomura Sensei wanted everybody to be Tomonokai if they came to Okinawa to train with him. So, I started making these membership cards so if they did go on their own, I'd give them his contact info and show him Tomonokai and he'd go, 'oh yeah, come on in and train.' So he started to, as he got older, didn't want everybody in the world coming down, because he got pretty popular. He's still pretty popular in the US and over in Europe. And uh, he has his own small home dojo in his home. Beautiful though, and he doesn't really teach formal students. He used to have a formal dojo when I first met him, but now he's just got his own training dojo for people to come like me or my

students or whatever, then we train. But he doesn't have actual students other than us over here.

**[37:09]**

**Rachel: Do you get together once a year or...?**

**Master Perkins:** With Tokomura Sensei it was always once a year. I was going to Okinawa and then I would bring him here, back and forth switching years. And then um, we had this group uh, the Isshinryu Tomonokai combine with the UIKA (United Isshinryu Karate Association) under Sensei Mitchu, John Ingram and they, when I brought tokomura over here, one of my students used Master Ingram's dojo in Florida, she hosted him down there. The Ingrams, they just fell in love with Tokomura so then we had our first training Inbukai, nationally. Thought we'd have some fun, make it a central location for people to travel so we had a blast there. We, we, at the time, a bunch of UIKA people, other people, Tomonokai people all got together and did this. And then, John Ingram kept coming to our events and I kept going to their events and he said, 'What about us just getting together and running our own event?' I said; 'That'd be great.' So then we just started doing it and uh, pretty much you know, uh, Sensei Mitchum and Sensei Lewis promoted me to 8th dan, I felt the need to join the WIKA, the UIKA at the time. And then uh, um, John put me on their board as an advisor, Kobudo advisor, on the UIKA now the WIKA. So, it just kind of developed into this friendship and this molding of Tokshinryu and Isshinryu. And these two groups and then I got a hold of my student from Denmark, Lars Anderson and he took all his dojos, he's got about 5-6 or more dojos in Europe, he's got about 6 countries and he's all, he runs Tokshinryu Europe and he put all his students under the UIKA, but that's how it became the WIKA, then we pulled in Chile, we always had Canada, we Have Canada.

**Rachel: Is that Albert Mady in Canada or someone else?**

**Master Perkins:** No, no. There's a uh, uh... God I can't remember their names now. There's one of Ingram's dojos is in Canada. No, we don't have any other than that over there. But, we got a lot in Europe now, Tokshinryu and WIKA Isshinryu and in Chile. And I just saw that in Chile, that team over there is now spreading into Columbia. Tokomura has no idea how many dojos he has worldwide. He doesn't think like that. We got him a map one time, Lars made it, we showed him he went; 'Oh yeah, nice.' That's all he said [chuckling] He doesn't think like that. But he, he's, he's got tons of dojos now all over the world.

**[40:32]**

**Rachel: Do you think that it's important... So you also serve on the, for the World Isshinryu Karate Association (WIKa).**

**Master Perkins:** Yeah, I'm on their board but as an advisor, Kobudo advisor.

**Rachel: Got it.**

**Master Perkins:** Strictly, pretty much strictly Kobudo. I have been involved in some of their karate promotions, mostly kobudo.

**Rachel:** Do you think it's important to serve on these boards?

**Master Perkins:** Yeah, I think so. Um, you know, as Tokomura Sensei's senior student I feel the need to, uh, you know, take what he teaches and spread it as far as I can, as much as I can. And so obviously when you're on somebody's board as an advisor for kobudo, more people get involved, I mean, The Ingram's have some, we call it 'bashukus' down in Florida. We always have a day of Kobudo, a day of karate so we all get together, you know, teach, do our thing. So that's part of it. But you know, Sensei Adams says all the time, you should be part of an association. You know I see a lot of people nowadays who kind of promote themselves and all a sudden they get a higher rank and you're like, where did you get that? Mostly rank is given out by associations. So that kind of legitimizes things if you can say 'I got my rank from this organization or this organization.' And it doesn't necessarily have to be the same rank. I got the, let's see; Avincula calls his group the Isshinryu. Let's see, I got my rank 1st-4th from Sensei Avincula. Well, then at one point Sensei Mitchum promoted me to 7th dan in the WKA so then he recognized my 7th dan. So it kind of went back and forth. You may be a certain dan in this one, and not in this one. So uh, I'm not into being involved in a lot of them. So currently I'm just part of what Tokomura is doing. The only Karate association I'm in is the WKA.

[42:48]

**Rachel:** Any thoughts about the fracturing, so we know there's the World Karate Federation which helped Karate get into the Olympics in Japan. But, Isshinryu is not, some of our katas are considered WKF approved, you know they look different maybe but it's the same kata. But within Isshinryu there's so many different organizations. Any thoughts on that?

**Master Perkins:** It's probably a bad thing. And I've talked with, you know I hang out with first generation guys, you know Sensei Bartusevics and Sesei Lewis, I see them a lot. And we talk about this and you know, they just got promoted to 10th Dan in this last WKA event which was well overdue. I mean, Sesei Lewis started in 1958 and he's 83, 84, something like that. It was way overdue. But, I talked about it with them and they blame it on themselves. They say that the seniors should have taken more control of Isshinryu at the time and they tried, but some personality clashes and some things started to spread out. They had dojos, Harold Long had a dojo with Bartusevics, I don't know if Tom Lewis was there. Avincula was there, they combined their skills and they [said]; "Okay, you're going to be the kata expert, and you're going to do this, and you're going to do that " But then, you know, things happen. "Well I'm not doing it like that, I remember it like this... whatever." It started to splinter like that. Bartusevics, he blames it on them. We should have kept control better, but we didn't. And that's how it fractured and fractured. People started making their own organizations. It just amazes me that people think we can still unite under one flag for Isshinryu. It's never going to happen. I don't care what anybody says, it's been tried and it's never going to happen. You just have to deal with that.

There's branches of Shorin Ryu, there's branches of Gojoryu. Its just what happens, you know, after that head instructor passes away, people start to feel... you know. In Okinawa a lot of times, they won't even hand it to... Like In Isshinryu they won't hand it to the most senior blackbelt, they hand the system to a son, who may not have experience. So, the senior black belt is jsut like; "uh-uh" and they split. Now, Tokumura is a very loyal individual and he stayed with Kichiru even though Kichiru did not have the abilities a lot of the senior Dans. He just wanted to stay with the Master Shimabuku family. The family name. So he is very loyal that way. But, that's what happens. It happened to Gojoryu. Tokomura switched to Gojoryu back in the 80's and when his teacher Miyazato Ichi died, they handed it to his son who wasn't even in Karate, he was a business man. Then he started teaching karate, well all the 9th dans that were under Miyazato Sensei were gone. They left and started their own dojos. It just kind of naturally happens.

**Rachel: Right.**

**Master Perkins:** Um, depending on who gets you know, put in charge. You know. So, same with Isshinryu. People are just spread out, its gonna happen, you just got to deal with it.

**Rachel: Do you think that popular culture such as TV and movies has an effect on established dojos systems? And Karate Systems?**

**Master Perkins:** Yes, I started because of Bruce Lee. I started back in those days when I saw Bruce Lee. Saw the movies, and "Wow, some cool stuff!" So, I started because of that. Um, this new insurge of Cobra Kai and all this stuff, I'm sure that the kids are getting full, your classes are getting full from that. You know, they're watching Cobra Kai and "Wow!" You know Karate Kid did the same thing. Anytime somebody comes on the scene like that, it seems to influence a lot of participation. But, only a few stay. People I started with from my high school, at the Inkster school, none of them are in karate. None of them, none of them stayed long. I'm the only one.

**[47:51]**

**Rachel: Have you heard of "McDojos"?**

**Master Perkins:** Yes! Yes I have.

**Rachel: So, do you have any thoughts or comments on those organizations?**

**Master Perkins:** Yes. Uh, buyer beware. Before you pay money to somebody to uh, to enter their dojo, do some research on them. Talk to Sensei, watch class. There are some schools that will not let you watch a class. If that's the case, walk right out. Our door's open. I've had a lot of people that come in here and just sit and watch.

[Mock conversation with someone who came into his dojo to watch a class]

"Yeah can I help you?" Yea, I want to just watch." "Okay."

I don't care you know? This is what we do. So, yeah, just buyer beware. Just because some idiot's a 10th dan over here doesn't mean he's a better teacher and karate person than the 7th dan over here. You know, he might have gotten rank on his own, made himself. You see all these guys with 15 different ranks from 20 different martial arts. I don't know where they get the time in their lifetime of being only 40, you know? Yeah, buyer beware. Just research what you're doing. We're lucky that a lot of people that are here have done that. We have two traditional Japanese students that are corporate business men for Japanese, Tokyo companies that live here. Tochi San is one. And he has rank and had studied Kendo. And then there's Kasan Mutisei who had to move back down to Kentucky, he still does some Isshinryu and uh, he was, they talk about, they were a little freaked out about trying to find a dojo to train here. When they came here and saw what we did, it was like home. They don't want to leave. I mean, Ka had to move to Kentucky, he was so depressed, because we're his USA family. You know, we're going to visit him, down in Kentucky. I think he's coming back this month some time. He's got a plan to start a Tokshinryu dojo in Japan when he goes back home. So, that's kinda cool. I mean when you have people that were in Japanese Martial arts that want to come to your dojo to train, who are comfortable with what you're doing. That kind of says something I think. We have fun with those guys too, they teach us a lot of Japanese too. We know a little bit but, usually we ask them a lot of questions.

**Rachel:** Sure, that's nice.

**Master Perkins:** Yeah, it is nice.

[50:32]

**Rachel:** So What do you think you see as the Future of Karate and Isshinryu in the United States?

**Master Perkins:** Well, uh, There's a huge resurgence of tournaments. Which I'm surprised at. Because it kind of went down. I've...When I started teaching, formally teaching martial arts, teaching Isshinryu and everything, I didn't encourage anybody to do tournaments. I didn't have trophies in my dojo. The ones you see are students of mine who brought them, can we just throw them over here? But, I never wanted that kind of environment for what I do, and I have a ton of trophies, but they're in my basement. I don't bring them here, I don't care to, and I never put them in the dojo. And uh, it's... I've always wanted to do traditional karate. It's a sad day, a lot of these dojos, especially these ones that might be at community centers, or when I was with Sensei Santilli, we were in the senior center, we only had two days a week to train. One day was a kata day, tournament kata day, and one day was a fighting day. And most dojos are set up like that, nothing else. You know, so when I started learning from people who trained in Okinawa and then went to Okinawa to train, I just wanted the dojo that was more traditional. I don't discourage students who want to compete, um, but one of my students, he's 15 now, but when he was 12, 13 maybe we just threw him in this kids tournament, And he got grand champion from a kata that one of my instructors made up; Seisan Kama. It's online. He did it so well, people came up to me and said 'Is that your student?' And I said; "Yeah." They said, "oh

we thought so, very traditional.” Master Perkins Speaking: “Seisan kama’s traditional? No ,we made that stuff up. [Laughs] Yeah, I never discourage them, and I support them if they want to go, I train them if they want to go because you gotta train differently a little bit. I never try to change my training; focus on one tournament kata. If I had a tournament coming up, I did all my katas, I did all my weapons. So, I would just like people to get more involved in traditional kobudo [weapons] actually. I mean, uh, you know Isshinryu has pretty much a beginner’s syllabus for kobudo, you know; couple sai kata, couple bo katas, some people do this toifa kata, that’s not actually a kata.

**Rachel: Tonfa? [asking for clarification of a term]**

**Master Perkins:** Yeah, Toifa is actually the Okinawan name for it.

**Rachel: Okay, Thank you.**

**Master Perkins:** So, uh so they do this this chifa kata which isn’t really a kata, it was Master Shimabuku forgetting a kata and just going through some movements. And people going, oh this is a kata. No its not. Its part of hamahiga and toifa so... You know, when I started learning traditional kobudo, its just like any other style of karate, you learn basics, you learn how to hold the bo, you learn how to do things that Isshinryu dojos don’t teach. And the reading being is, the last 15 or 20 minutes of class you do kobudo. That’s not how to do it if you want to do it right. So, I was teaching like that at first when I started teaching, and then when I started really getting involved in kobudo on Okinawa, I was thinking, I’m not teaching them, it’s just not right. So I took all the Isshinryu kobudo and we dabble with it in this class sometimes. There are people who want to do the katas and looking at the tokoshin curriculum a little bit. A lot of my black belts were disappointed, and I said, some to kobudo class, its the only way I’m teaching kobudo is ain a separate class. I don’t like this 15-20 minutes class, run thought kata, oh yeah now you have it. I see people in Isshinryu say I’m a 4th dan in kobudo because I have a 4th dan in Isshinryu, no you’re not. There’s a lot to it, its like any other art, there’s a lot to it. So, we teach separate kobudo classes, and that’s why we get people from other styles who just come here to do kobudo or other Isshinryu dojos come here and just do kobudo. So, I would like to see people in Isshinryu people get more into the traditional kobudo, whatever style it is. There’s still a style out there that’s linked to Shinken, which is very good. [Shinken is credited with being the weapons master who taught Master Shimabuku]. And uh, so, if you just want to find a teacher for that and you know would travel, I mean you could go anywhere. My teacher’s are in Okinawa. So, I always traveled, when I was training under Sensei Avincula, I would be going to California, and he would be coming here 3-4 times a year. Don’t worry about finding someone local, just find somebody and start training, bring it to your dojo, have a kobudo class instead of attaching it to your karate class. I’m not a business man, but I think if you had class you could probably add money to the fund. So, that’s what I tell people. Have separate kobudo classes. That’s what guys do here, we have rates, they pay certain rates and when you add classes, it goes up a little bit. And so, there are some people that pay \$120 a month here, some people who pay 75 or 80 dollars a month. We’ve never changed out fees from the time we started because its a club. We just keep the lights on and pay the rent, nobody makes any money. So, that would be my thing,

get involved in some traditional kobudo. I'm pretty much, I tell these guys, who come in here from another dojo; "You're going to become a weapons snob." And it's true, a lot of these people go to Century Martial Arts and Magazine and they buy their bos and their sai. When you start doing kobudo, people start going to Scott Cruz and saying, I want this weapon to fit me perfectly. And I go, see, turn into a kobudo snob.

**Rachel: I have one of his Bos.**

**Master Perkins:** Yeah, there's nothing like having a custom weapon like that. I don't judge tournaments, uh, number 1 I haven't done it in a long time. Personally I think that's unfair to a competitor, I haven't done it for a long time, I just visit people so they don't put me in some kind of position there. The other thing is, especially with kobudo, I'm very strict in kobudo. I see a lot of trash out there, I don't want to judge it. You're not my student, you do what you want to do. Same with online, people put their katas up and want people to take shots at them. You're not my student. If you want me to give you advice, then contact me. If you put something up there, I'm not going to comment on it, I don't care. I'd say, just try to be more traditional in what they're doing.

**Rachel: And finally, what do you do outside of karate?**

**Master Perkins:** Pretty much, this is my life, karate. But I do teach firearms for schoolcraft college. And I teach defense tactics at the police academy. So, retirement went out the window because I pick up a lot of classes, especially for schoolcraft. I have one tomorrow, a CPL class which is a carry license class. So, I have to do that tomorrow. I'm getting a little too old to work all day and come here and train all night, I do that a lot. That's pretty much what I do, I teach. So, in my off time here, I teach there. I still train. I'm 65, 66 this year. I still train in karate and kobudo 5 days a week and I weight lift 2 days a week, still. I still keep going. Just gotta keep moving.

**Rachel: Well, thank you so much for sitting down with me, this was really great, is there anything else you want to add?**

**Master Perkins:** No, no.

**Rachel: Thank you.**

**[59:30]**