



Diary of an Amateur Traditional Blade Smith

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- [Uri Hofi](#)

<http://www.hofi-uri.com/>

<http://www.iceforge.com>

- Fusataro
- [Rob Martin](#)

<http://www.thak.ca>

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Introduction

I should first start off by qualifying myself as a blade smith. I'm by every means amateur and can only loosely associate myself to the term smith. I've been fascinated with metal (more specifically, the manipulation of metal) for the last couple of years. Not mechanical manipulation (although this is sometimes necessary in the interest of saving time), but working with hammer in hand striking a hot piece against an anvil. Truly one of the more physically demanding aspects of the process, but to me the most fulfilling and fascinating; even taking into account the blisters, cuts and burns.

I've had the good fortune of having two very good instructors to date. The first being [Uri Hofi](#), based in Israel. He broke me in at a [Smithy in NY State](#), worked me like a dog and drank tea with me at night. I relished every moment with him and have refrained from getting in touch with him since we last saw each other because I wanted my follow-up communication to demonstrate that I continued my evolution. This article is partially dedicated to Uri.

Taro Asano (Smith name Fusataro) was a great second instructor. Slightly hampered by a language barrier; what he couldn't verbalize in tongue, he made up for in gesture and single minded dedication. Sebastien Cyr, Taro's friend and translator also helped to bridge some gaps. Taro's English will likely improve and I'll improve my Japanese for the next time we meet. That was an actual promise I made to him as we parted ways.

Week One - Fusataro

In a little town called Floradale in Southern Ontario resides a smithy called [THAK](#), owned by a smith named Robb Martin. Robb specializes in armour and creates pieces that don't seem fathomable today. Fascinating as that was, Taro was who I came to see for this week.



Taro is 29 years old, off from my age by only a month. Although you would expect a 25th generation blade smith to be older; you quickly get over that minor detail when he explains that he's dreamt of smithing since childhood and has

dedicated his life as such.

He was appointed a master smith (one of only about 70 in the world) about a year ago after officially apprenticing since the age of 21. If he were any older, he probably wouldn't have had the time to come to Canada and show others how it's done.

The single minded dedication to the blade and the traditional approach to its creation are immediately apparent. Even though in a foreign setting that didn't lend itself well to his craft, his keen sense allowed him to overcome

most obstacles by modifying his technique according to the environment. Beginning with the traditionally smelted iron ore from the sands in Japan, he forged two blades.

The astonishing part, as I would learn, was the perfect symmetry attained from just having shaped the blank with his specialized hammer. He continued through the remaining steps as I had read about them. From iron ore that looked like meteorite, to blades forged in a traditional process synonymous with Japanese culture. If you lack any fulfillment in your work because it lacks tangibility and/or legacy, this experience will show you how the mastery of an art can fill a void in today's world of intangibility.

I won't detail the technical process, as that's been documented in better detail than I could provide here, but seeing the application of this integrated knowledge was beautiful. Art in motion, knowledge so deep it's now instinct.

I look forward to the day he and I can talk about the philosophical aspects of his calling. Whether or not you can attain enlightenment through the mastery of an art is still an answer that remains elusive to me, but something I pursue nonetheless.

Week Two - Muh Tsr Yee

Muh Tsr took over after Taro showed us how it's done. He was tasked with taking us through the reality check portion of the course. I'd already had the good fortune of watching a master work (Uri) and then attempt to replicate his work, so I knew how to manage my expectation a little. But even with that in hand, I hadn't come to terms with the delicacy and accuracy required with every swing of the hammer.

Hammer control is crucial and without it you work 3-4 times harder trying to stay on top of your mistakes. One bad angle on a swing can mean hours of additional refinement. I considered my first blade (one of two Tanto) a lesson book. I didn't concern myself too much by trying to exert control and accuracy at every step; but figured I'd learn from my mistakes to potentially make a better second blade. What I didn't necessarily take into account was the sheer number of ways there exist to make those mistakes.

One of the bigger things I took away from the hands-on experience was that each step must be given your complete attention. A sloppy hammer while shaping will mean hours in filing and stoning.

As anyone who's studied the subject in any amount of detail would know, a lot of work goes into a traditionally forged Japanese blade. But simply performing the steps in the proper order is insufficient; it's the ability to sense what the material is telling you as you work with it that allows you to produce something of respectable quality. Consequently, it's this same sense that enables the smith to stamp the work with their characterized style.

Widely considered one of the most refined tools for killing developed by man, today, these weapons are regarded as works of art and rightfully so; but there's no denying their origin and primary purpose.

To see a blade forged by methods established centuries ago by a master who can trace his lineage to that time is riveting.



To try and recreate the work on your own is humbling. I am better for the experience and would to thank all that I've met along the way; as there would be no experience without you.

I will continue working on my own and will look for additional opportunities to expose myself to skilled workers within the trade.

I hope to also cross paths again with everyone I've met on the way to date.

Thank you.

Allen Rozon