

**The Legacy of Grandmaster
Haumea “Tiny” Lefiti:
Contemporary Applications of Monk Fist Boxing,
Mok Ga, Dim Muk, and the Poison Hand**

**By Prof. Carl Totton
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(Note: Most of the information for this article came directly from Haumea Lefiti himself. Tiny frequently shared this information with the author during the course of five years of study. The accuracy has also been checked with all of the few remaining individuals Tiny promoted to the rank of instructor who could be located, and through conversations with most of his remaining students and others who had information to share.)

Grandmaster Haumea Lefiti, also known as **Tiny**, was a giant Samoan martial artist born in Hawaii in 1930. Weighing in at over 325 pounds and well over 6 feet tall, he was a mountain of a man, but with a big heart. His death in February, 1973 from a heart attack at the age of 43, left an even bigger void in the hearts of his students, friends, and family.

Today, over 35 years later, there has been a resurgence of interest in Tiny and the arts he taught. This article is written to provide some information about Tiny, his styles, and his methods of teaching. Tiny had a background in boxing, including Golden Gloves and semi-pro matches, and in Samoan and Hawaiian street and knife fighting (Tiny’s favorite weapon was the straight razor). He had pictures on the wall of his school in Huntington Park (CA) showing him as a young 18 year old fighter in his boxing trunks. He was much thinner then and I didn’t even realize that the pictures were of him until I had been at the school for several years.

Tiny was a drill instructor and Special Forces soldier while in the Marine Corp. He trained in Japanese karate for over 5 years while stationed in Japan, reaching the rank of 2’nd degree black belt. Later, he was stationed in Taiwan for two years. He was part of a special unit chosen to train in a particular type of especially effective kung fu called **Mok Ga**. This style, created by a master from southern China surnamed Mok, was designed for close-in combat. It was descended from a Shaolin Temple art taught only to the special warrior monks and revolutionaries who guarded the Shaolin Temple gates. Thus, it was also called the **Monk’s Style or Monk Fist Boxing (Lohan Chuan)**. Mok had learned the art from one of these Shaolin Temple monks.

When Tiny started learning this style, he was one of a small group of Marines chosen for the class. After a few months, all of the others had dropped out due to the severity of the training. Only Tiny remained and he studied for about two years. The instructor was a tough Nationalist Chinese general. He didn’t teach any forms, just basics, training drills and exercises, and pure fighting and combat methods and techniques. When Tiny left Taiwan and returned to the US, the general gave him a letter of introduction to the only teacher of Mok ga known to be in the United States at the time, the late **Grandmaster Ark Yuey Wong** in Los Angeles, California, one of the first to teach kung fu openly to

non-Chinese.

At this time, in the early 1960's, Tiny enlisted his cousin, Sonny Palabrica, a noted karate man and student of Chito-ryu karate founder Dr. Chitose, to learn directly from Ark Yuey Wong. For two years they kept up a special arrangement with Tiny learning from the late **Master Ralph Shun**, Ark Wong's most senior student and disciple who had his own kung fu school in Huntington Park, and Sonny Palabrica learning directly from Wong.

Every week Tiny and Sonny would get together and compare notes to see what each one was learning. Often it is the case that a senior student like Ralph Shun might be willing to share more information than the master himself, and Tiny made sure he explored that possibility. Of course, he still maintained a close relationship with Master Wong by always visiting with him, talking with him and his students and instructors, and observing his classes. Ark Wong taught on Ord St. in Old Chinatown in Los Angeles.

After two years, Tiny earned a black belt from Ralph Shun and began to take private lessons from Ark Wong directly. Initially, the material Wong taught him was not that substantially different from what he had learned from Ralph, or from what Wong taught other students in his own classes. This traditional or standard kung fu material was not broken down for actual street combat. It consisted primarily of forms. Of course, with his military and street fighting background, not to mention his previous Mok-ga training in Taiwan, the actual combative material was exactly what Tiny mainly wanted to learn.

Unfortunately, even with the letter of introduction, Ark Wong was not willing to share this level of knowledge. In fact, he had never taught this specialized information from Mok ga to any of his students, including those who could be considered to be his senior students, even those promoted to black sash or instructor rank.

Eventually, Tiny became frustrated and told Wong that what he was teaching simply wouldn't work in a real street fight. Wong told him to "be careful" and basically to shut up if he knew what was good for him. Tiny persisted and Wong told him to try and attack him in any way he wanted. Tiny launched a punch and immediately wound up on the ground after being struck by Wong with a move so fast it was nearly invisible. Ark Wong, often affectionately called the Old Man, asked Tiny if he had had enough.

Tiny regained his feet and tried attacking again, this time with a kick. Tiny later explained that as a result of his previous years of karate training, he had a pretty good side kick, but it was useless against the Old Man who deftly blocked it and again sent Tiny sprawling to the ground with a sore liver where Wong had struck him.

Slowly standing up and now in pain, Tiny tried once more to throw a series of strikes at Wong who did a lightning fast series of foot movements (shuffles) to get out of the way and then counter-attacked with a blistering crane kick to Tiny's bladder, one of Wong's specialties ("*the kick without a shadow*"). Tiny collapsed to the ground in agony, and was eventually able to crawl on his hands and knees to a chair where he sat down trying to recover for almost 30 minutes.

Ark Wong merely walked away and went to his desk to read his Chinese newspapers, occasionally tossing a glance in Tiny's direction. Finally, Ark Wong walked over to Tiny to ask if he has had enough. Tiny answered that he meant no disrespect and only wanted to learn the real kung fu. Ark Wong thought this over for a long time before saying to come back in a few days, but not to the school. He agreed to teach Tiny in the back of his gift shop around the corner on Broadway late at night after closing time.

It was here that Tiny would continue his instruction in what was variously called **Mok ga**, part of the Shaolin Five Family style created by Master Mok, (sometimes called the **Monk Fist Style or Monk Fist Boxing**), plus the art of **Combat Tai Chi Chuan**. The deadly tools from both arts included **Dim Muk** (also spelled **Dim Mak**), meaning the Death Touch, **Dim Xue**, or blood gate striking (blood vessels), and **Dim Ching**, the nerve strikes. The art also included iron palm training and the highly secret principles of actual combat: how to break down any move from any art or form into its true fighting components. Tiny called this the "**breakdown formula**". The underlying principles are effective because, as Tiny liked to say: "***There is only one way to fight, and that's the right way!***"

Alice, Tiny's wife, stated that she recalled many times when Tiny was so bruised and battered from these private sessions with Ark Wong that he could not even drive home afterwards. He could barely even stand on his own two feet. Instead, he had to call her to come down and pick him up and drive him back home. These lessons continued twice a week for another year with Tiny eventually promoted to Instructor (Sifu) by Ark Wong.

Tiny learned the major forms from the **Five Family style (Choy, Li, Lao, Mok, and Hung)**: sometimes **Fut ga**, the Buddhist Monk style, was substituted for Lao ga by Ark Wong when he listed the five styles) and **the Five Animals (Tiger, Dragon, Leopard, Snake, and Crane)**. He learned the fighting and combat principles, strategies, and methods, as well as an original form, the Five Animal Form from Mok ga which contained 729 movements.

The form actually had 730 moves, but Ark Wong retained one move just for himself! This form, unique from all of the others, featured the combat-ready moves openly displayed in the form without any interpretation or breakdown really needed. Powerful slap checks, whipping body movements, and lightning fast foot shuffles were present throughout the form. Each animal has its own special characteristics as well: The **Tiger** develops the bones; the **Dragon** the spirit; the **Leopard** the strength; the **Snake** the chi; and the **Crane** the sinews. Tiny explained that the Dragon was the highest of the animals since it existed only in the mind. All utilize a flowing continuity of motion.

Tiny always divided kung fu forms into two categories. One, called the *style*, was the way the forms were taught to regular students in class. The other, called the *original*, was the one taught with all of the combative secrets intact. This included all of the actual street fighting applications, the Dim Muk and Poison Hand strikes, acupressure point knock outs, and the very special way of moving with body whips, slap checks, and foot shuffles.

It was an awesome sight to witness Tiny performing movements from this art with such incredible speed and almost unbelievable power. The entire room would thunder and shake from his powerful punches, slaps, stomps and shuffles. Many spectators, including some highly trained and well known martial artists, not use to a display of such raw speed and power, would often literally gasp in shock and awe when seeing Tiny move for the first time.

Whenever Tiny demonstrated techniques or free form moves on his students, we all prayed that we would survive the encounter with our bodies still intact. Fortunately, Tiny had excellent self-control. Still, he was known for letting his students feel his power. He would lightly place one of his enormous hands on someone's chest and then show his *no inch* punch (all he had to do was squeeze his fist closed while it was in contact with the chest). Invariably they would collapse to the ground as a sharp and searing pain began to penetrate and then spread throughout their entire chest and upper body. It felt as if you had been struck with a spiked metal hammer or chisel and was an unforgettable experience. One well known kung fu instructor claims that his chest was sore for almost five years after feeling Tiny's powerful touch. Cold weather always brought him a painful reminder.

Part of the characteristics of Mok ga was the use of practical concepts from math, especially geometry. Tiny explained that if one truly understood the functional use of the **square, circle, and triangle** in combat, they would become a highly skilled fighter. The combination of the whipping slap-like strikes and shuffles (snake hands and rat steps) was especially effective and rarely seen in most other styles or systems. Tiny often said he would rather be punched than slapped by someone who knew how to slap properly.

Many of these fighting applications Tiny called "*the poison hand*". In the old days, in ancient China, some practitioners would literally apply poisons under their fingernails in order to scratch their opponents and cause either a quick or lingering (delayed) death. Hence, the *delayed death touch*. This was a very dangerous practice and the fighter had to ingest an herbal antidote well in advance to avoid getting sick or dying themselves.

Later, the actual use of poisons was eliminated and instead, special striking and kicking methods were used with torque, gravity, wrist rotation, the iron and vibrating palms, and whipping body motion to produce a devastating art which could maim or kill with one or several strikes, in effect causing the body to respond *as if* it had actually been poisoned. These strikes caused the body to experience a total neurological shut down with the opponent dropping unconscious and going into full body convulsions. Often they stopped breathing and their internal organs were damaged and bleeding. Obviously this kind of strike was usually fatal, either immediately or after a delay (the delayed death touch).

That is why Ark Wong hesitated and tested Tiny's loyalty, will and commitment before teaching him such a deadly art. It is also why Wong was hesitant to teach this part of the art even to his instructors. The smart ones went to Tiny to learn how to actually fight. Others were afraid of him and simply kept their distance.

In late 1968 or early 1969, Tiny took over the school in Huntington Park and Ralph Shun moved to another part of Los Angeles to re-open his own school (first in Eagle Rock, a Los Angeles suburb, later on Pico Blvd. in LA, and still later in Anaheim in Orange County). Before this time however in 1965, Tiny's Samoan "cousin", **Tino Tuiolosega**, created a new hybrid martial art and martial art association. He called it *Limalama*, meaning the "**Hand of Wisdom**". Tino, like Tiny, was also an extraordinary martial artist being extremely tough and fast. He had a background in **Ed Parker's kenpo**, Ark Wong's kung fu, and pro boxing, plus training in judo, jujitsu, aikido, and plain old Samoan street fighting. Many of his fights and fighting skills are still legendary and remembered to this day. Now, almost 80 years old, he has had a series of strokes and is retired.

As a result, Tiny originally called what he was then teaching, limalama. Each of the five original black belts in Tuiolosega's Limalama Association (**Richard Nunez, John Louis, Saul Esquivel, Solomon Kaihewalu, and Haumea Lefiti**) each taught whatever art they were already proficient in, generally some combination of either kenpo, kajukenbo, or karate, plus the special techniques Tino was teaching them in his garage every week. Many of these gentlemen had also previously studied some kung fu with Ark Wong.

However, Tiny was the only one with the highly specialized knowledge from Mok ga. Some of the advanced martial artists studying with or influenced by Ark Wong, especially Tino and Ed Parker (known as the "*Father of American Kenpo*"), were also influenced by Tiny's movements and style of fighting. Ed Parker later would incorporate the slap checks from Mok ga into his still developing art of kenpo. What Parker later called the *master keys* and the *alphabet of motion* were also very similar to Tiny's breakdown formula.

During this period of time, the requirements for rank in limalama were very strict. Green belt required the student to accompany Tiny to a local bar (generally the notorious Samoan and Hawaiian bar down the street called the Leaky Tiki) and fight the toughest guy Tiny could pick out! Black belt test requirements were even more frightening: The hapless student had to fight *every* other chief instructor in the limalama association (including Tino) except their own teacher. Students were judged on their courage and bravery.

In early 1970, Tiny dropped out of the limalama association and began teaching under the name of Haumea Lefiti's kung fu. He included the basic fighting techniques from Mok ga, and a few of the Ark Wong five family and five animal forms. The heart of these techniques Tiny called the "*browns*", which consisted of ten basic techniques and twelve advanced ones. These were capable of being executed in numerous different ways which corresponded to different levels of advancement and skill, and different ways of responding to varying types of attacks. He taught at least ten ways to apply each of the basic browns.

However, almost all of the techniques had a common **core** or **stem** of five basic slap

check-type striking combinations. In class, Tiny would drill students repeatedly on hundreds, if not thousands, of basic strikes, shuffles, kicks, and combinations.

He also taught how to use special speed and power enhancing methods to double, triple, and even quadruple the speed and power of these strikes and kicks. The majority of the beginners class was generally spent drilling on these basics, plus the brown techniques. Tiny stated that he only promised new students three things at his school: ***“You will be punched, slapped, and kicked!”***

Much of the class time was spent with the students performing nearly full contact brown techniques on each other. Students were frequently black and blue over their entire bodies after a lesson. Classes were taught six days per week, Monday through Saturday. The Saturday class was six hours long, from 12 noon until 6 pm. A unique feature was that after three months of training, all regular students were paired up individually with a beginning student to help teach them the basics. In this way, both students learned.

During a brief period of time, Tiny had his students engage in some full contact bare knuckle free sparring, but students were often knocked out or seriously injured and he discontinued this practice because it was just too dangerous. Eventually, he had the students wear full protective gear including helmets, pads, and boxing gloves in order to free spar. Still, Tiny’s preferred training method remained having students perform the techniques on each other with brutally increasing realism as their skills progressed.

The advanced class (Tiny called it the colored belt class) did all of this plus some of the Ark Wong forms, or at least some members of the advanced class did, especially the ones who had previously learned from either Ark Wong or Ralph Shun. Others concentrated on the basics, combinations, and techniques. A select few were taught how to use the Mok ga breakdown formula to break down the forms into actual combat. This part of the art was not taught in class, but behind closed doors in Tiny’s office.

With Tiny, as with most Chinese style teachers, there was sometimes a difference in the level of fighting material he was willing to share. He often told us, in response to some of our persistent questions, that he simply could not reveal certain things, largely due to a vow of secrecy given to Ark Wong. Generally, after six months or so, he would eventually teach at least part of the information with more to come in another few months for those who waited patiently. Additionally, while what he showed in class was very good, what he taught privately in the office was even better and what he displayed during actual fighting situations or when moving on someone freestyle was the best of all.

From the time I started with Tiny in 1968, he had me show him all of the other kung fu forms I was learning from Ark Wong, Ralph Shun, or other instructors, and he would then interpret them for me, move by move, into their Mok ga form and fighting applications by using the breakdown formulas. We mainly concentrated on the five animal forms, including the moves from each of the individual animals, plus the combined five animal forms. He never taught the actual 729 movement Mok Ga Five Animal form he learned from Ark Wong to anyone, because he promised Ark Wong he

would not. But I think I got the next best thing.

Tiny later joined another martial arts organization called the Unified Martial Arts Association. It sponsored the first West Coast full contact karate vs. kung fu tournament in 1970, and Tiny's students won first place trophies in nearly every division they entered. Many very well known karate champions witnessed the amount of contact occurring, and then withdrew themselves and their students from the tournament before their rounds even began. At the preliminary judges meeting, Tiny used me as his lucky demonstration partner while clarifying with the judges just what would be an acceptable amount of physical contact. My body hurt for days afterwards!

For some strange reason, during his early years of teaching, Tiny was constantly being challenged by other martial artists, boxers, and street fighters. They had to be crazy to even think about fighting someone of his size and strength, but still they came. These unfortunate individuals would come into the school, take a look at the apparently "soft" and fluid wrist maneuvers and Tiny's large size, and foolishly conclude he couldn't really fight. Tiny would have them sign an agreement stating that he was not responsible for their injury or death and would then hold up his fists and shout: ***"This is the hospital (his left hand) and this is the morgue (his right hand). Which one do you want? Choose!!"***

Before the shocked opponent could answer, Tiny would proceed to punch, slap, kick and literally stomp them into the ground. Then he would have us drag the unconscious, battered and bleeding body out into the alley behind the school, pour a little whiskey on their clothes, and call for the paramedics, telling them there was a drunk who had passed out in the back! Eventually the word got out to the community about Tiny and the challenges stopped. Tiny would tell potential challengers, ***"I know your art, but you don't know mine!"***

Shortly before he died, Tiny promoted eight of his long time students and assistants to the rank of *instructor* or *sifu* in kung fu. Although he had previously promoted a few others to black belt in limalama, he had never before given kung fu certificates to any of his students.

The eight were:

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| 1. Carl Totton | 5. Jeanne Willis |
| 2. Douglas L. Wong | 6. L.T. Davis |
| 3. Tom Chan (then named Tom Ho) | 7. Jim Rodriguez |
| 4. Ron Willis | 8. Donald George |

Since then, L.T. Davis and Jim Rodriguez have died, and the whereabouts of Donald George is unknown. Ron and Jeanne Willis have retired, although Ron still teaches privately. Sifu Carl Totton (The Taoist Institute), Sifu Douglas Wong (Sil Lum White Lotus), and Sifu Tom Chan are still active and teach either class and/or private lessons in California.

A few of Tiny's other direct students also teach in California. Sifu Antwione Alferos

(The Whipping Willow Association) teaches Mok ga privately in Orange County, and Sifu James McNeil (Little Nine Heaven) teaches what he calls **Splashing Hands** at his school. Sifu Al Garza, a former limalama black belt from both Tiny and Tino, now teaches what he calls the **Matrix System**. The few of us still around who were privileged to learn directly from Tiny are all extremely grateful. Without his instruction and guidance, we all feel we would know very little about actual effective combat.

The art of Mok ga has other branches. Some in Hong Kong and elsewhere teach what is known as Dragon-Mok, a combination of southern dragon kung fu and some Mok ga. The few and extremely rare practitioners who know pure Mok ga typically don't teach it at all, instead choosing to teach some other style while reserving the Mok ga for themselves, or perhaps, just for their family. Many of them even deny knowing any Mok ga at all!

Hopefully, we can continue to develop the art and principles Tiny taught and worked so diligently to convey. He emphasized that he was not going to teach us everything about the art because it was important that we figure out some of it for ourselves. In other words, individual creativity and self discovery was also an important part of the learning process. It has been said that if you give a person a fish, you feed them for a day. But if you teach them how to fish, you feed them for life.

Three days before he died, Tiny gave what would become his final demonstration. I had brought three of my students down to his school so they could meet him. He decided to give them a demonstration of his art. His speed and power were almost unbelievable. He could simply not be stopped. In spite of his enormous size, strength, and power, he was rapidly striking targets all over the body using multiple strikes and kicks with his hands and feet just blurred motions, almost like a fan. My students were totally amazed.

Haumea Tiny Lefiti was a remarkably talented and generous teacher with a big heart. He remained kind, loyal, and considerate at all times. He was willing to do anything for his students and was always smiling, laughing, and joking. He had a great sense of humor and a personality that was larger than life. Tiny had a profound depth of knowledge which few understood. He could speak for hours about complex principles of movement and life, and sophisticated combative concepts and strategies. May we never forget Tiny's constant saying: *"The truth will hurt any man, whereas a lie will not."*