

## Woolworthian Budo

Since Mom didn't drive, we'd take a bus down Route 135 toward the much bigger town of Framingham to see a movie and, occasionally, pick up a few things at a "Five and Dime". If we walked up Concord Street from the Saint George Theatre, there was a Woolworth's a few steps away. If Woolworth's did not have what she wanted, we could return to the bus stop, visiting J. J. Newberry's on the way.

Either store was comprised of counters sectioned off in wood, holding little items, most of which cost either 5 or 10 cents, from buttons and thimbles to pencils and pads of paper, although there were \$1.25 toys and a section in the back where one could purchase underwear, outerwear, and hats at somewhat more substantial prices. Both establishments also offered a refreshment counter where Lime Rickeys and milk shakes were a specialty. If you want to get the feel of an old "Five and Dime" store, listen to Nanci Griffith's spoken introduction to her song [\*Love at the Five and Dime\*](#), or look at [these photos of Woolworth's](#) or these [photos of Newberry's](#).

You went to a Five and Dime not for a good meal or for quality clothes, but just for what you needed. The value of a Woolworth's or Newberry's was its variety and low prices. You could drop in, buy a few small items, get a snack, and be on your way, satisfied and not noticeably less wealthy.

In today's *budo*, studying a martial art in the detail it deserves, one that will really enrich your skills and enhance your life, is like going to an uptown restaurant for a meal or to a haberdasher for some top-quality clothes. Unfortunately, the uptown restaurant seldom provides an inexpensive snack and the haberdasher will not sell you a button, if your shirt is missing one. What fills in the blanks (just for what you need) are martial art seminars.

Some seminars are deep and provide items, in exchange for only one day's admission, that might have taken you several years of paying tuition to "stumble upon". Some seminars give you little bits of information, each worth much less than the seminar fee, but taken together, are valued at much more. Your mom may not take you, and there is probably no movie involved, but the experience can be both invigorating and memorable.

My recent series of articles called *Meeting the Masters*, in which I recall a few impressions of my studying, sometimes for merely an evening, sometimes for several years, under a well-known *budo* instructors, should give you the idea that I was not adverse to buying a button from the karate counter and sewing on my shirt with thread bought at the aiki counter. However, in my articles, I did not and could not detail all the little things I learned from studying with these teachers: a little trick of wrist control from Saito Sensei, a little detail of hip use from Kimura Sensei, a kata detail that Mirakian Sensei was teaching his own students, and a passing comment that Sifu William C. C. Chen offered.

I would suggest avoiding "Five and Dime" seminars if you are seeking items that will sustain you in your martial studies, but I would whole-heartedly recommend attending seminars featuring subjects that interest

you, subjects that your own instructor may not have time or the facility to teach in detail, to fill in your own blanks with a sort of Woolworthian Budo.

Woolworth's and Newberry's should never replace, nor even challenge, your favorite uptown restaurant, but buttons and thimbles can sure come in handy now and again.