

Dai Nippon Butoku Kai: Claire Cucchiari-Loring Memorial Self-Defense Clinic
February 11, 2007 – Norfolk, Virginia
Remarks by Kate Loring, Claire's mother

Thank you for your tributes and for this ceremony. On behalf of our family members here and those who are not here, I want you to know that we are very moved by what you have done today to honor Claire. For a few moments now I want to tell you some things that you may not know about Claire the person. I hope that your knowledge of Claire and your sense of her spirit can inspire you in the future.

A woman who knew Claire when she was a very little girl—until about age 3 or 4—and then saw her only once after that, said to me about Claire, after hearing she had died, “she was so sweet and so stubborn.” I was surprised that that memory was so clear for her, and that it was such an accurate portrayal of the 22-year-old young woman Claire. Likewise, an ODU friend said that even though she only knew Claire for a few months last fall, she had already learned that Claire was “compassionate and fierce and kind and fiery. All her ODU friends knew that.” These are two sides of Claire that stand out for many people: sweetness...and a determined strength. Since her death we have learned how often she combined those qualities to offer help to people in trouble or in pain.

But like all human beings, Claire was complicated. A woman who came to know her quite well in 2005 said that Claire didn't like someone to come at her hard with arguments; she needed a lot of *processing time*, and liked to think things over and come to her *own* conclusions. (At the celebration of her life, her professor John Toomey described Claire as being very similar as a student in class.) Claire understood this about herself: I saved an e-mail that she sent me in 1999—when she was 15 and we disagreed about something—that begins: “Mom, I'm horrible in fights. I get very caught up in my emotions and never make points I mean to make. Now that I am thinking clearly, I would like to make a few points.” And she then went on to make her points very logically, but with touches of typical Claire humor and sarcasm, and after I had time to think about her arguments she did persuade me. In fact, I am often the same way, needing time and space to process things when an argument is verbal. Thus, she and I learned together that when we disagreed it was often better to communicate first by letter. I saved some of those letters, and they are masterpieces of persuasion—logical and relentless, but also usually witty, because Claire was very, very funny.

But I believe part of the reason Claire studied self-defense, and was passionate about it and dedicated to it, was because she was working to balance that careful, *slow-processing* part of herself, by also developing the side of herself that could react quickly, decisively, and effectively when needed. And from what I have learned about her actions in the last few days of her life, she did. When on Wednesday night she was taken captive by her ex-boyfriend, with whom she had been happy in the past and for whom she still had feelings of human compassion, she used her wits to get away and save herself the next morning. When the ex-boyfriend, her attacker, came out of nowhere on Friday night and held a gun against her body, even in that moment of surprise and horror, from what I have been told of her actions, she kept her wits about her and acted on things she had been told, such as that you should never let an attacker get you into a car. I understand that she fiercely fought with her legs and her arms, using against her attacker

several of the self-defense moves she had learned in this program. The friend who was with her that night said, "I have never seen such courage." Of course we know the outcome, because he had the advantage of a gun...and I am so glad that today's program will address that issue further.

On the DNBK web site, I read that the virtues of the warrior include honor, loyalty, courage, duty, filial piety, sacrifice, integrity, discipline, compassion, moral rectitude and incomparable fighting spirit. Knowing her, as the mother who was with her on the day she was born and on the day she died and all the years in between, I am so struck by how that list applies to Claire, and how she embodied every single one of those virtues in specific ways. I'm not saying Claire was perfect, but she was a person with many beauties and strengths, and she was developing and growing in the virtues of a warrior.

After being here today, I wish that when she was young we had introduced Claire to formal martial arts training. I now realize that from the time she was a small child, Claire was interested in self-defense and personal power. One place I see this interest in her passion for color guard in high school. Part of color guard routines involves throwing wooden rifles and sabers high and then catching them; a friend who Claire was teaching remembers Claire shouting "Don't duck!" at her, over and over, until she learned the strength not to duck, the strength that Claire had already developed.

She did have an *incomparable fighting spirit*. Sometimes that came out in a very funny way: as a little child she used to sing, wagging her finger: "You're not the boss, you're not the boss, you're not the boss of me-e-e." She was being funny, but she was being serious: her father and I used to say that 99% of the time Claire was the most easy-going person in the world, but if she made up her mind to oppose you on something, you might as well just give in, because her determination was unstoppable. I want to show you one symbol of that spirit of hers. These were Claire's favorite pajamas when she was about 4. Claire called them her "karate pajamas," and she liked to go around the house singing (yes, all her life Claire was singing) "karate pajamas, karate pajamas." Although she never studied martial arts until taking her ODU self-defense classes, I believe that even as a little child she was interested in her inner warrior.

Claire's best friend from elementary school wrote to me last month: "We always used to play with those little female superhero She-Ra dolls. I hated that game at first because I wasn't really into superheroes, but Claire's wild imagination and energy soon pulled me in." She-Ra was called "The Princess of Power." Some of you may have heard the stories of how when Claire grew up, she moved on from She-Ra to Xena, known as the warrior princess. Even as a 22-year-old, Claire carried around a purple Xena backpack (I'm wearing purple today in her honor), had a matching totebag, and traded on e-Bay for Xena cards. She even looked something like Xena, with her beautiful face, her long dark hair, and her powerful body. What did Xena represent to her? I believe that for Claire, Xena was the female version of the warrior, and that Claire honored that warrior in herself.

Thank you for what you are doing today to honor our beloved warrior princess, Claire, the little girl we loved and the remarkable young woman we loved. May her incomparable fighting spirit live on through each of you.