

Nigiri Garni —Gripping Jars



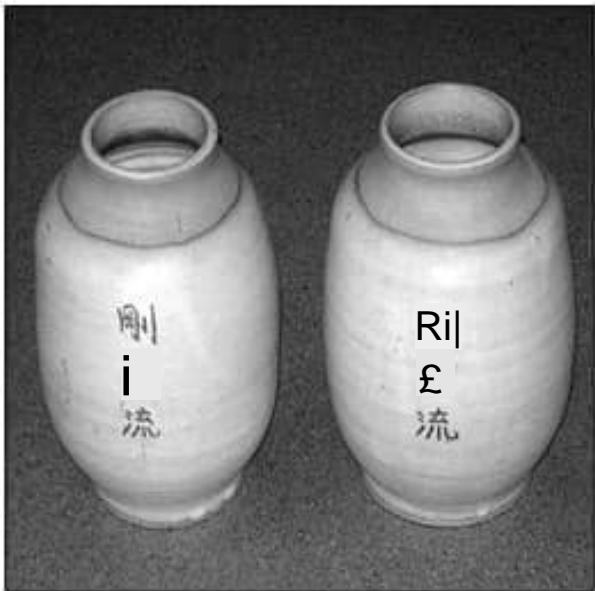
A zoo-year-old jar from China on display at the Okinawa Karate Museum in Nishihara,



Kosuke Yonamine, Hanshi 9th Don Shater *ryu* (*Uedif/yu*) karate, training at the author's Shinseidokan *dojo* in Perth, Western Australia in 1997*



Seiyu Nakasone (1893-1983) of the ftwiffri-te school of iterate, Note how people used to dress for karate training in Okinawa before adopting the now universally worn Japanese karaie-g?.



These jars are the oldest of several sets at the author's Shinseidokan. They were made by hand in 1985.



Ko Uehara, today one of Okinawa's leading teachers of *Goju ryu*, seen here as a student at the Jundokan *dojo*, preparing to lift a set of mg?n game in 1973,



Ko Uehara working with the mg?r?r? garni at the Jundokan *dojo*. Okinawa in 1973,



A set of iron sosfrr and two sets of irigfri *garni* from Richard Barrett's private dojo in Spain. Note the jars have been filled to the top with cement.



Old power line insulators are also used as *nigiri garni* at Tetsuhiro Hokama sensei's *dojo* in Nishihara, Okinawa,



The author training at Morio Higashina's *dojo* in Kiyose, Tokyo in 1986 with a set of *garni* made from steel pipe.



The author during one of his solitary early morning training sessions at his Shinseidokan *dojo*, Tasmania, 2008.



A Jundokan student demonstrates how to use the *nigiri garni* during a demonstration in Tokyo, October 1973.



Eiichi Miyazato overseeing *nigiri garni* training during a summer gatsjuku in Okinawa.



A single-handle lift with a large jar is depicted in this drawing from an old Chinese text.



Anni Moynihan of New Zealand, a student at the Higaonna dojo in Naha, Okinawa, training both her grip and her stances.



lyn Ang, a student of the Shinseido-lean dojo from Singapore, training her sfttrJto *tiachi* stance while strengthening her grip.

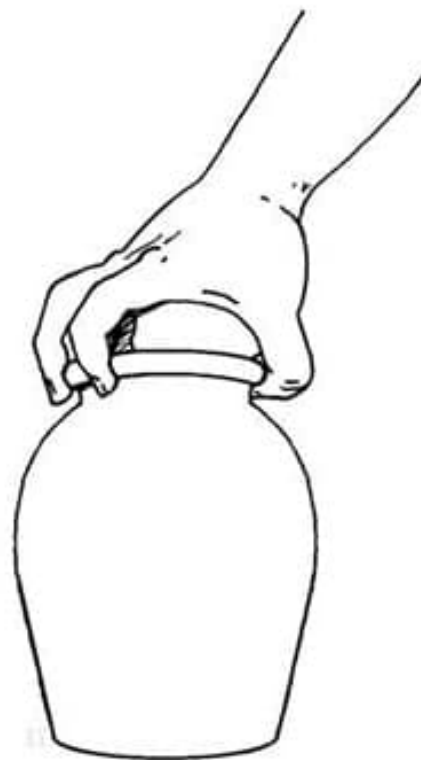


Note the shoulder muscle development on this Okinawan torateitn. His nfgrrr gwmmr resemble Russian kettle bells more than jars. But we must remember to use what we have and make the most of it.

You do not have to look too far to see that this training aid was an object found in almost every household kitchen, shop, or location where things needed to be stored. The history of ceramics on Okinawa is once again linked to China through a long trading history with their giant neighbor. The Tsuboya district of Naha is where many of the Chinese and indigenous artisans set up shop, and even today it remains a cultural oasis amid the hustle and bustle that is modern Naha. Included in the island's tradition for making pots and items of every sort from clay, Okinawan society has a long and illustrious history producing large jars used to house the remains of the dead before being placed in one of the huge turtle-back tombs found dotted on hillsides throughout the island and the rest of the Ryukyu archipelago. Although the gravesites have shrunk in size these days, the ritual of washing the bones of the dead once a year on the day of *Tanabata* (visiting the grave to honor ancestral spirits) for three years following the death is still alive. Thus, the production of large jars can still be found. These days jars are also made specifically for the many *karateka*, indigenous and foreign, who practice with them.

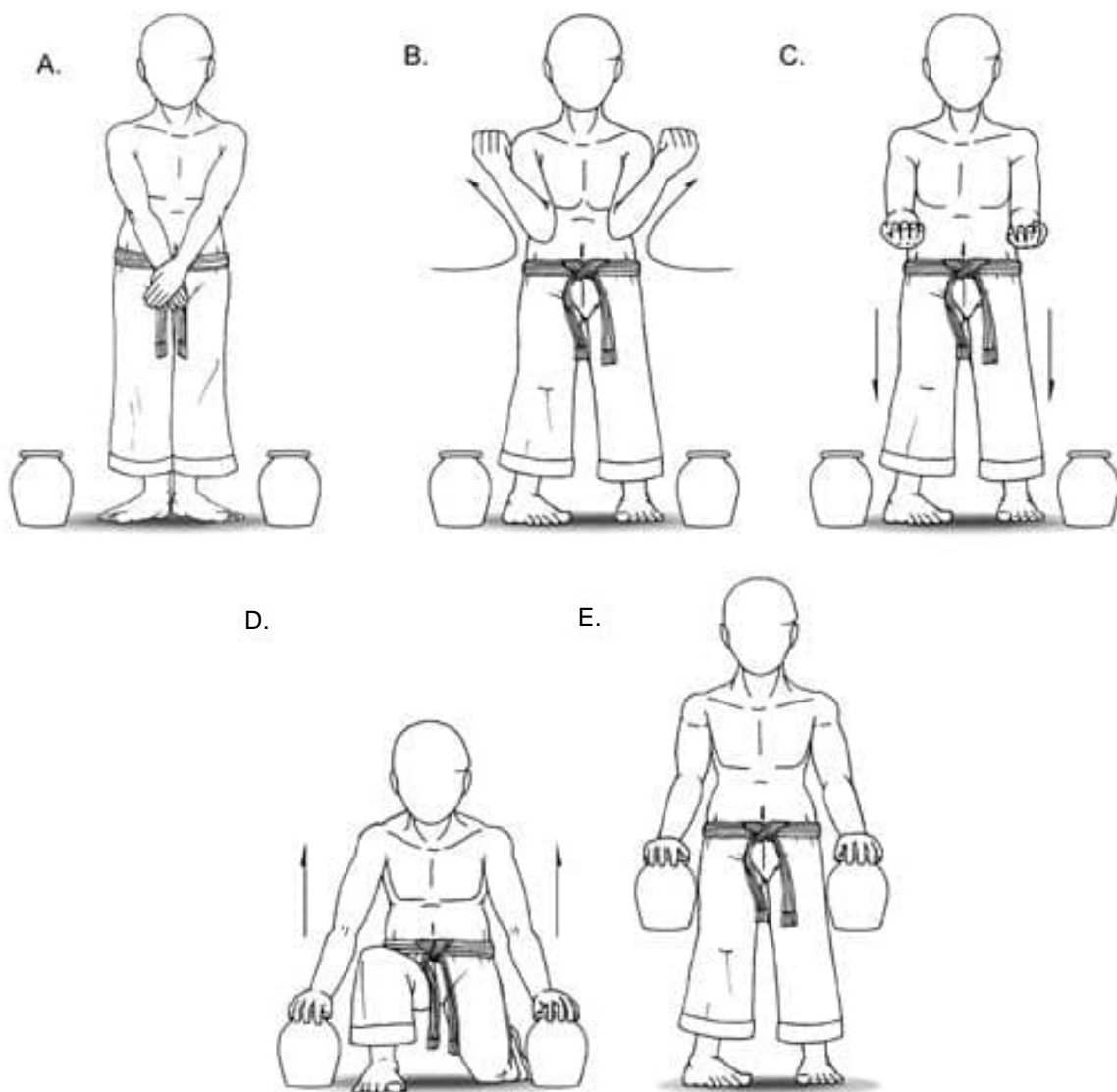
The Nigiri Garni Grip

Used to promote a powerful grip, the jars are held by the fingers in a particular way (as shown) and great care should be taken to master this grip. If the jars are allowed to simply hang by the fingertips, most of the benefits of “gripping” are lost when the resistance transfers to the arm muscles. First of all, it is important to use jars that have the correct size opening for your hands. If the opening is too large, the hands are stretched too far and the proper gripping action cannot be made. Similarly, if the neck of the jar is too small, the hand also fails to hold the tool properly. To hold the jars in the correct manner, the fingertips should be placed evenly around the front of the rim, while the thumb is bent and the edge between the tip and the first joint is pushed hard against the back of the rim. The fingers and the thumb are then squeezed together to hold the jars when lifted from the ground. This method of holding the jars ensures they do not merely hang in the hands. If the jars selected are too heavy, it may prove impossible to lift them using this grip, therefore, jars that are somewhat light are preferable to start with. As the tool becomes easier to use, sand or stones can be added to the jars to increase their weight. On my first visit to Okinawa in January 1984, I tried to lift the *nigiri garni* at the Higayonna *dojo* in Naha and failed. It took many attempts over three days before I was able to do even the most basic of exercises with them. So persevere and be content to make progress at a steady pace.



The Nigiri Garni Lift

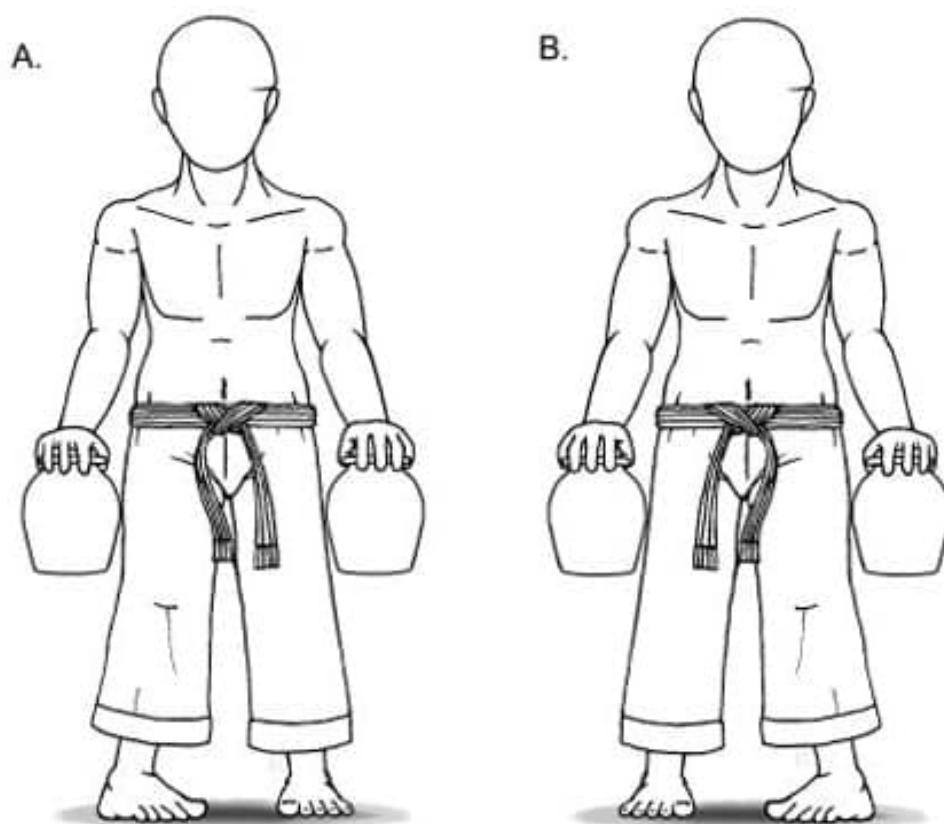
To lift the jars, it is of course possible to just bend the knees and pick them up. However, when practicing *sanchin kata* with the *nigiri garni*, there is a more formal way to take them from the ground.



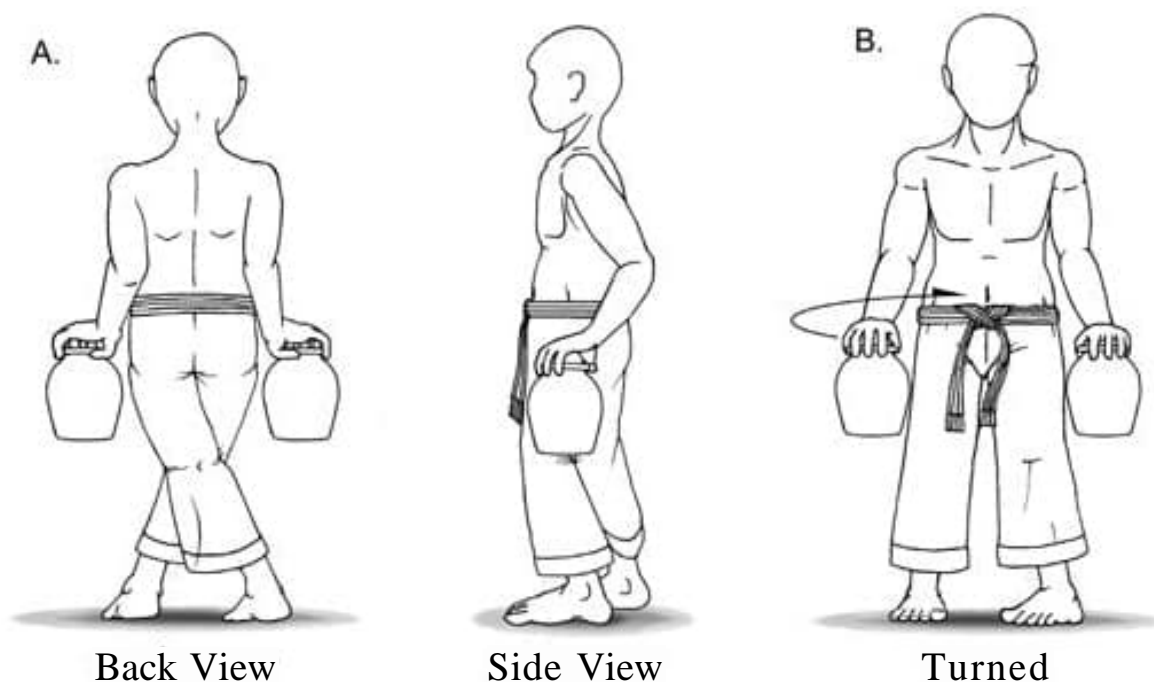
Standing in the *yoi* (get ready) position, fuse to the left and rear of the jars (Figure A), step out with the right leg and adopt the *sanchin dachi* between them (Figure B). Draw the elbows back (Figure C) and with an inhalation rotate the now open hands until the palms are pointing to the floor. From here, the breath becomes an exhalation when the body squats down (Figure D) allowing the hands to grip the jars. Take the time to make a proper grip at this point because it must last for the length of the *kata*. If necessary, breathe normally while the grip is set, but remember, the aim is to produce smooth, flowing movements with the body and breath acting in harmony. Learn to establish a proper grip quickly.

When ready, take a deep breath in and then stand up (Figure E), exhaling while the body rises and settles back into the *sanchin dachi* before taking the first step forward. It should be noted that none of the striking, trapping, or blocking techniques found in the *sanchin kata* are addressed while holding the jars. Rather, attention is focused on correct breathing, body posture, and the synchronization of each with the other.

Basic Nigiri Gami Exercises



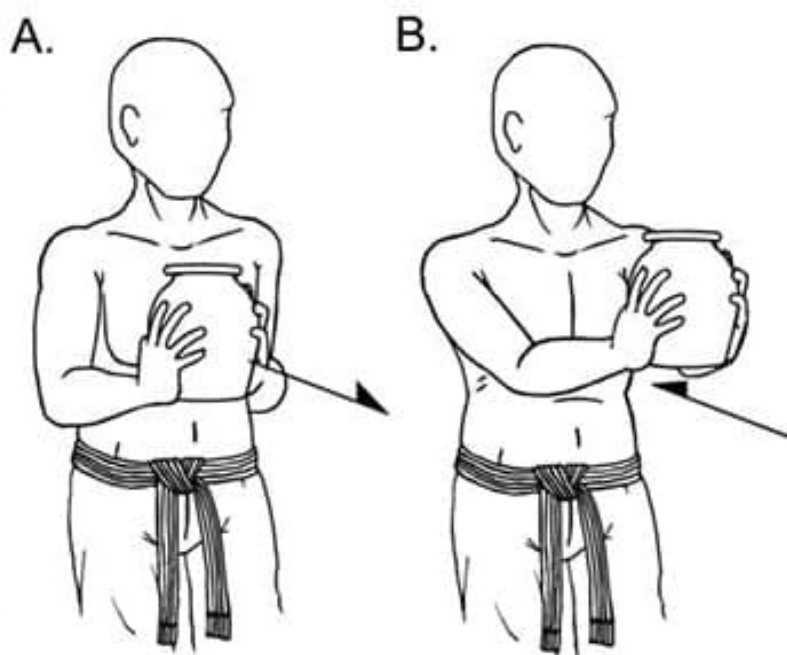
'Die most common way of using the *nigiri gami* is to walk, using *sanchin dacht* (Figures A and B) while holding the jars at the side and slightly to the rear of the body. Though simple looking at first, the posture requires some effort to get right. 'Die fingers should always face forward with the thumb at the back of the jar. The arm is bent a little and the shoulders should be rolled forward, taking care not to lift them. The idea is to adopt a similar position with regard to the shoulders such as that found during *sanchin kata*. The chest is therefore small, and the back of the shoulders broad. From here, you can simply follow' the *embusen* (pattern of steps taken in a *kata*) of *sanchin kata*, or take a less formal approach by moving in a slow' and rhythmical fashion, walking forward. After a number of steps, you can simply reverse the stepping and move backward across the floor.



At some point, you can introduce a 180-degree turn, and for this the same method of turning found in *sanchin kata* is employed. Keeping the back straight and always stepping across with the right leg in front of the left, plant the sole (*teisoku*) of the right foot down on the floor and allow your body weight to shift into the center (Figure A). From here, twist the hips 180 degrees and assume *sanchin dachi* (Figure B). Make sure the hips are the last thing to turn and that the shoulders and hips are kept in line with each other. Do this by keeping the back upright.

The breathing may differ slightly depending on the expertise of the *karateka* or on the focus being brought to bear on the breath itself. Most beginners with this tool take a step first then breathe in and out using their abdomen to breathe in through the nose and then out through the mouth, the next step is then taken, followed by the next complete breath. The more advanced *karateka* is able to inhale while stepping and begins to exhale the instant the next stance has been established. This second method leads to a more rhythmical and, therefore, more harmonious blending of the breath and the movement. This, in turn, results in a deeper sense of using your whole self—mind, body, and breath—to achieve your intention, and this is a fundamental concept found in all traditional martial arts training. Regardless of which breathing method is used, each movement should be performed with a steady, almost heavy feeling. Good contact with the floor and a feeling of *muchimi* should be maintained throughout all the exercises, even when using different stances such as *nekoashi dachi* (cat stance) and *shiko dachi* (low stance).

Another exercise you can do is to stand in *sanchin dacht* (hourglass stance) and hold a single jar in the palms of the hands close to the chest (Figure A). From there, breathe in through the nose before sliding quickly forward using *suri ashi*. Immediately, when the new position is fixed, squeeze the abdominal muscles, bringing your focus on the *hara* and thrusting the arms out straight while you exhale through the mouth (Figure B). Take care to keep the armpits closed, as in *sanchin kata*,

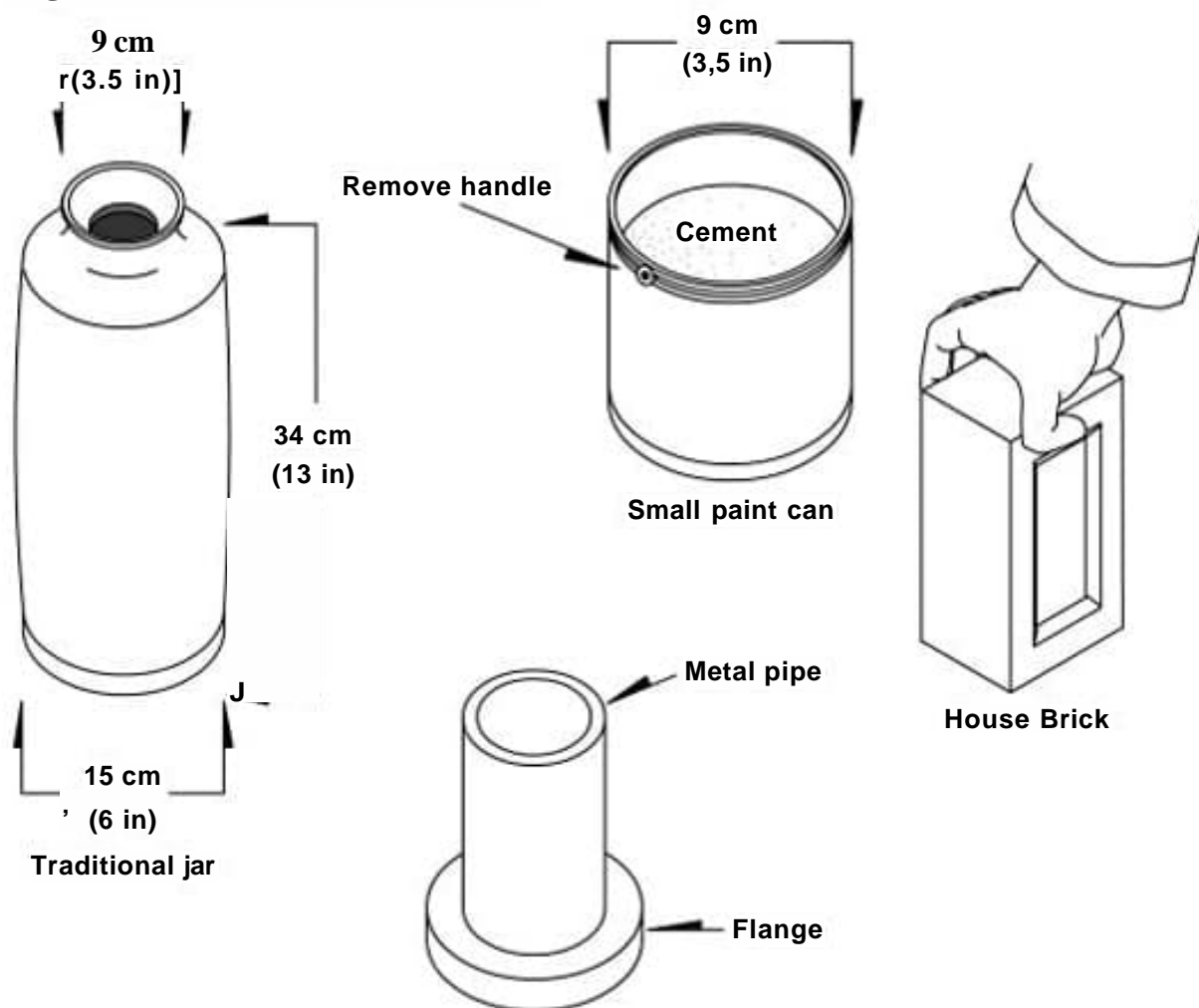


and make sure the outward breath and the thrusting arms are working in harmony. When this move has been completed, reverse it by pushing backward, and on an inward breath, draw the jar back toward the chest. Keep the backward and forward movements in harmony with the inward and outward breaths and do not rush. The idea is to develop a good feeling for your connection to the ground and the synchronization of the breath and the technique, which in this case is the thrust and pull of the arms immediately after a new stance has been made.

Suri ashi is a particular form of *tai sabaki* (body shifting), where a feeling of pushing with one leg and immediately pulling with the other to change your position in relation to an opponent is used. This method of movement is first seen in the *Goju ryu kata*, *gekisai dai ni*, and then used again in *saifa*, *seipai*, *kururunfa*, *seisan*, and *suparinpei*.

The *hara* is a place in the body believed to be its center. By placing two fingers together and laying them at the bottom of your navel, it is possible to find its mystical location. However, you will not find a person's *hara* on any Western medical chart. In Asian martial arts of all kinds, the *hara*, also referred to sometimes as the *tanden* in Japanese or *tan-tien* in Chinese, is the place where *ki* (Japanese) or *chi* (Chinese) is developed. It is the center of your gravity and balance. In *karate* there is a saying: "Develop your *tanden*." On a deeper level, this is pointing to the development of the 'self'.

Nigiti Garni Construction Notes



House bricks, Lengths of pipe, and other items can be used instead of jars.

If it is not possible to find actual jars, you can still train the fingers, wrists, arms, and shoulders in this way, by utilizing other things, such as common house bricks, old cans, or lengths of steel pipe with the appropriate diameter to allow the correct grip. Like many other methods of training in *hojo undo*, our own imagination is often the key to finding ways that augment our martial art and promote a strong mind and healthy body. The jars I use weigh 12 lbs. each (5 kg).