



Trailblazers

By Jerry Figgiani


OIn this addition of Trailblazers, I will introduce Yasuhara Makishi. The only time I had the opportunity to meet Makishi Sensei was in 1991 in Okinawa at the 85th Birthday Celebration for Shoshin Nagamine. Up until that point, I had always heard stories about him from many of that Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu practitioners here in New York. It was common knowledge that he had an dynamic command over his karate skills. Even at that time he was known to be one of the most accomplished practitioners to come out of the Nagamine dojo. His speed, power and performance of kata remains legendary even to this day and even outside the world of Shorin ryu karate. His demonstration video of the kata Kusanku on YouTube always receives accolades across the martial Arts world.

In 1991, I was fortunate to be part of a select group of martial artists from New York State that were invited by my Sensei Joseph Carbonara, then a World Delegate to the World Shorin Ryu Karate-Do Federation, to Shoshin Nagamine's 85th Birthday Celebration. At this event Soke Takayoshi Nagamine, Takeshi Tamaki, Yoshitaka Taira and Yasuhara Makishi were to perform for the Grand Master. I recall being in awe of Makishi Sensei earlier that day when he led our New York group through a training session.

Following Soke Nagamine's performance of the kata Kusanku, Makishi Sensei, along with Senseis Tamaki and Tairi, demonstrated a group bunkai. While most karateka would look at a performance from practitioners at this high level with an eye toward evaluation of perfection, in my opinion, the most impressive lesson was what was about to happen. Before a fully packed house

of accomplished martial artists from all over the world, plus friends and family of the Grand Master Shoshin Nagamine, I watched as these highly skilled technicians, after making a few minor mistakes, repeated their demonstration routine until they were satisfied that the performance was up to their standards. With each redo, the large crowd roared with greater and greater approval.

This performance, in particular, reminded me of the number one Precepts of Mastery from Master Nagamine's book, *The Essence of Okinawan Karate-Do* where he stated..."he is human and so am I". Makishi Sensei demonstrated this lesson in real time by avoiding too much focus on mistakes, but rather integrating them into the performance and simply moving forward without any fanfare or attention. Instead, to the background of loud and energetic cheering he just smiled, without taking either himself or the idea of a performance too seriously, and exited the stage with his group. I am certain that the respect he received that night was more closely related to the way he faced the challenge of adversity in his demonstration rather than the performance itself.

This was the only opportunity that I ever had to be in his presence and I recall being left with the feeling that I had experienced something special by one of the giants in the world of Matsubayashi Karate. This is a feeling that I had then and is one that has stayed with me to this day. In the words of the Grand Master... "Spirit first, technique second". I was one of the fortunate few to see that concept in action by Makishi Sensei and to this day I do my best to pass this valuable lesson on to my students. 

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