



Remembering Soke Takayoshi Nagamine

By Jerry Figgiani

In November of 2006, I was driving in my car with Soke Takayoshi Nagamine and one of my students; we were on our way to dinner after a day of training. In the car, Soke turned to me and said, "Mr. Jerry, I have to ask you a very important question. I want to know what you think of my father and how do I compare to him?" At first, I was taken aback by the question and looked over at my student. I then gave my answer, "Your father has set the tone for Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu. He established the Hombu Dojo in Naha, Okinawa, produced many great karateka who have passed through his dojo, and wrote the book, "The Essence of Okinawan Karate-do". In addition, he brought Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu to the world. You, on the other hand, with your talent, charisma, approachability, and mastering of the English language have enhanced your father's legacy while creating your own...people gravitate toward you."

Not only was Soke Nagamine a great karate master, he also had a special way about him. What struck me was his openness to discuss issues that were very sensitive to him which have shadowed him. Back at my dojo that week, besides teaching private lessons and adult classes, he also agreed to teach a children's class. That particular class had about fifty children in it. He had so much fun bringing his karate to life. The showmanship he demonstrated while teaching this class and getting down to the children's level was not only appreciated by the parents viewing it, but was talked about even after his departure.

On the floor, he was all business...he always took the time to make corrections, regardless if the student was a beginner or advanced student. He did things the way that Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine wanted while still being his own man. He was exposed to many great masters in Okinawa; he sometimes wanted to share variations of techniques that influenced him. It was always fascinating when he shared these lessons and valuable insights.

I was first introduced to Soke Nagamine by my Sensei, the late Joseph Carbonara, in 1988. Carbon-

ara Sensei called my house to tell me he was coming to my dojo later that evening and bringing Takayoshi Nagamine. I didn't know what to expect, and I couldn't help but feel an excitement about meeting him. A nervousness set over me until he made his entrance. After our initial bow, he looked at me and gave me a big smile which eased our way for the rest of the evening. Over the years I, along with my students, have many fond memories of him thanks to a dear friend of mine, Sensei Nick Racanelli who helped form the World Matsubayashi Ryu Karate Association and who was Soke's business manager. It was Sensei Racanelli who kept Soke Nagamine in the New York area and made him accessible to instructors as well as students. In addition, it was Sensei Racanelli who helped provide opportunities to get to know Soke on a more personal level, whether it was a training session or grabbing a bite to eat for lunch.

Another memory which stands out was getting to share the special evening in Okinawa in 1991 when Grand Master Shoshin Nagamine appointed his son Takayoshi Nagamine Soke of Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu. Anyone who is put in a political position experiences controversy and whether some agreed with him or not, we can all agree that he left us too soon.

The last time I was with him was in 2009 when I was visiting Okinawa with my students. Okinawan karate master Kensei Taba was with us at the Hombu Dojo. This was also the last time the two of them were together. Soke had touched so many lives with his dedication to Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu. There are practitioners and senseis all over the world who have had the opportunity to share time with him and who I am sure have their own memories. It is those memories which will continue through their history.

Like his father, Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine, he too will have his name carried on. On April 25th, make it a point to remember Soke Takayoshi Nagamine for his contributions, his effort, and dedication to the martial arts world...and bow deep. 

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