



## TRAILBLAZERS

By Jerry Figgiani

**T**he first time I was introduced to Soke Takayoshi Nagamine was in 1988 when my Sensei, Joseph Carbonara, brought him to my dojo on a night that I was teaching. I remember how nervous I felt as he approached the front of the dojo. I also recall that he had an uncanny ability to make everyone feel comfortable and at ease; including myself. He had such an engaging personality that was evident to all who were at the dojo that evening. I would learn so much more from him through the years, not only lessons from the dojo, but also through the way he shared stories about his personal life.

Born August 12, 1945, Soke Nagamine, left us on April 25, 2012, much too soon. The last time I saw him was in 2009 at the Honbu dojo in Naha, Okinawa. It was to be the last time that both he and Okinawan Karate Master, Kensei Taba Sensei would be together after a 13-year fallout due to the politics of karate. It was a moment that will remain with me forever.

Soke came to the United States for the first time in 1969 to attend the University of Cincinnati and open his first dojo. Growing up the son of Matsubayashi Founder and Grand Master Shoshin Nagamine, young Takayoshi was a dynamic and knowledgeable instructor, having grown up with some of the giants of the modern karate world right in his father's dojo.

His passion for spreading Matsubayashi, earned him the title Soke, inheritor of the system, in 1991. It was at the combined celebration of the Grandmaster's 85th birthday and the 55th anniversary of the Nagamine dojo, in Okinawa, that this title was bestowed upon him by his father.

If there is one thing that really stands out to me about Soke, it is that he had an amazing ability to communicate his lesson to students of all ages and ranks, beginner to advanced and largely due to his command of the English language. He just simply had an uncanny ability to captivate an audience and capture everyone's attention, something that both Ansei Ueshiro and Chotoku Omine both struggled with.



Nick Racanelli, whose father, Nick Racanelli Sr, together with Soke helped to create and establish what is now known as WMKA, the World Matsubayashi Karate Association, recently said "...Soke had a deep understanding of the teachings and techniques of the katas beyond the surface level. In my experience, many Senseis stayed away from this, teaching only basic applications. He was able to do this in a way that did not diminish the value of the basic movements, but enhanced them while teaching the proper form."

In closing, I'd like to share a personal memory that I have of a time with Soke that truly resonates for me. In 2006, I was driving in my car with Soke and one of my students, Rick Kaufman, on our way to dinner after a day of training at the dojo. While 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 with uncertainty. Then it came to me and I said that "...your father set the tone for Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu, established the Honbu dojo and has produced many great karateka that have passed through his dojo. Additionally, he wrote the book, *The Essence of Okinawan Karatedo*. He brought Matsubayashi ryu to the world. You, on the other hand, with your talent, knowledge, charisma and approachability, have enhanced your father's legacy while at the same time creating your own."

Like his father before him, Soke Takayoshi Nagamine's name is carried on for his contributions, his efforts and his dedication to the world of Martial Arts. 

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