



KAZOKU

“Family”

By Jerry Figianni

As I sit down and write the introduction to this new column that will be featured in Masters Magazine Winter Issue, I can't help but feel a deep sense of sadness on the passing of the great Joe Lewis. Not only was Mr. Lewis the first heavyweight kickboxing champion, he was also a martial arts icon. People may not know that Mr. Lewis was a Shorin Ryu stylist who received his black belt from Eizo Shimabukuro while serving in the U.S. Marine Corps in Okinawa.

This year, Shorin Ryu lost a few other heavyweights in the martial arts world: Sokukichi Gibu (10th dan) and Buntoku Ifuku (9th dan). Both Gibu and Ifuki began studying with Grandmaster Shugoro Nakazato. In my particular style of Shorin Ryu, Matsubayashi, we lost Soke Takayoshi Nagamine (10th dan) on April 27th. He was the son of Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine and the head of the World Matsubayashi Karate Association. And, on July 7th, Okinawan legend 10th dan Kensei Taba who at one time was the vice president of the World Shorin Ryu Karatedo Federation under Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine, passed away. Ten years ago, Taba Sensei started his own organization called Shogen Ryu. His story and interview that I did with him appears in the Summer 2011 edition of Masters Magazine.

My quest in writing this column is to explain some of the history and traditions of Shorin Ryu Karate and to help preserve the masters' teachings who have come before and who have brought this art from a tiny island and have spread it throughout the world. Though there are four types of Shorin Ryu practice in Okinawa (Kobayashi, Shobayashi, Matsumura Orthodox, and Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu), it is Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu (Pine Forest style) that I will be covering. Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine (1907-1997) the founder of Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu developed his style of Shorin Ryu in 1947. The name Matsubayashi was created out of respect for two Okinawan legends, Bushi Matsumura and Kosaku Matsumora. Grandmaster Nagamine's three most influential teachers were Chotoku Kyan, Choki Motobu, and Ankichi Arakaki. He was the author of



“Tales of Okinawa's Great Masters” and a martial classic “The Essence of Okinawan Karatedo”, which was first published in 1976. Grandmaster Nagamine's legacy is evident in the fact that Matsubayashi is still a strong system in not only Okinawa but throughout the world. It is a system followed by people who want his legacy to continue.

In the next four issues of Masters Magazine I will cover some of the people who helped Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine spread the art of Shorin Ryu. It is my hope to share with you the history of how the art of Shorin Ryu spread to the East Coast of the United States and the Midwest (specifically New York and Ohio). These are two hotbeds for Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu. In my next segment, I will cover Ansei Ueshiro, the first Okinawan sensei, who landed in the U.S.A. in 1962. Fifty years later, his influence is still felt in the United States.

The heading of the column states, “Kazoku,” meaning “members of a family.” Because of political ramifications, there are many splinter groups of Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu all over the world. Just as members of a family may break off and go in different directions - communication ceases between family members - we cannot forget the foundation that was laid before and to continue the legacy of Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine. It is my hope that this column can get people to tune in to the common bond that is shared between all of us. 

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