



Passing on the Flame

By Jerry Figgiani

I am often asked why I chose to study Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu. It wasn't that I was searching for this particular style, I just happened to join a dojo where Matsubayashi was being taught. Recently a father of one of my students asked me about the style after viewing some Matsubayashi videos on YouTube. He couldn't believe the amount of history it contained and he also expressed that he was happy his son was training in an authentic system of karate.

Founded in 1947 by Shoshin Nagamine, he named his style of Shorin Ryu, Matsubayashi. He named it after two very important teachers of Okinawan Karate, Sokon Matsumura of Shuri-Te and Kosaku Matsumora of Tomari-Te. Shuri-Te and Tomari-Te were classified styles being taught in Okinawa at that time.

Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu contains eighteen Kata and seven Yakusoku Kumites, which were inspired by Choki Motobu. Shoshin Nagamine started his journey in the study of karate as a young boy. By the time he was a senior in high school, he had become the captain of the school's karate club. After entering the police force, he had the opportunity to study with karate masters Chotoku Kyan and Choki Motobu. However, it was Ankichi Arakaki that he previously studied with. These are considered his three main Senseis. In his book *The Essence of Okinawan Karate-Do* he states, "After the war, the young people were driven to despair; their sense of mortality vanished and juvenile delinquency soared. To instill an undying faith in the hearts and minds of promising youth seemed imperative, I felt there was a real need for a karate dojo in which young people could train their bodies and build indomitable spirits."

His dream came to be when he built his dojo in 1953, The Kodokan Karate-Do Dojo. With the help of his students, Ansei Ueshiro, Chotoku Omine, the first American Black Belt James K.

Wax and of course his son Takayoshi Nagamine, Shoshin Nagamine's version of Okinawan Karate is now practiced all over the world. Shorin Ryu is one of the oldest styles of Karate and it's characteristics can be traced back to the Chinese Martial Arts. This was due to many Chinese travelers that visited the island of Okinawa, mostly for trade. The techniques of Shorin Ryu can be characterized by the higher more natural stances, natural breathing and in-close, as well as long range fighting techniques. Of course with any martial art, with the analysis of the movements in the Kata, one can find many applications such as throws, takedowns, grappling and choking techniques making it a complete system. More importantly, Matsubayashi can be practiced by people young and old. When talking about movement in a Kata, Nagamine's words describe it best. "Even after many years, Kata practice is never finished, for there is always something new to be learned about executing a movement." Practitioners of the art have to understand it is human movement after all.

For those of us that practice Matsubayashi, there is an abundance of information that was left for us to explore. Nagamine is also credited in stating, "Karate-Do may be referred to as the conflict within yourself or a life-long marathon, which can be won only through self-discipline, hard training and your own creative efforts."

Though I didn't know where I was going in Karate when I first started, I am glad I stumbled on the path that Shoshin Nagamine created. One of my favorite sayings is, "Tradition is not to preserve the ashes, but to pass on the flame." I use this as my mantra to pass on information to my students. Hopefully, one day one of my students can continue on the path and keep Shoshin Nagamine's vision alive. 