



## The Foundation

By Jerry Figgiani


**A**s I write this column for Masters Magazine at approximately 32,000 feet above sea level heading to Okinawa, I am reflecting back on my 35 years plus of experience in the martial arts. I have had the opportunity to meet and train with some of the greatest martial artists in the world. The purpose of this trip was to provide an opportunity for members within my organization, Shorin Ryu Karatedo International, to experience the training, history, and culture Okinawa has to offer. Students who train in Okinawan karate should try to experience this journey at least once in their lifetime. This study group was not put together to try to find a magic technique--nothing is better than just plain hard work to develop one's technical ability--but to rather experience, understand, and preserve a part of history, that with the popularity of mixed martial arts, is now starting to take a back seat.

Though there are many associations and splinter groups affiliated with Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu, the common goal among the associations, is to have an open communication, not only with practitioners within their own country but with Okinawa as well. Since Grandmaster Nagamine put his system together and created Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu, his name should stand alone on every Matsubayashi lineage chart. Many of the seniors in Okinawa have attracted practitioners throughout the world who stay with them, especially since the passing of Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine. Although I was a member of the World Matsubayashi Karate Association (WMKA) for only one year, I myself had a close relationship with Soke Takayoshi Nagamine which began in 1988 through Sensei Joseph Carbonara's introduction. In 2009, I was invited to Okinawa by Soke but was also invited by Sensei Kensei Taba as well. It was during that visit that I had the opportunity to bring these two Okinawan legends together; they had not been speaking for almost a decade. At least, during my time there, some type of communication between these two men occurred. I don't know what the outcome would have been once the doors for

communication had been established. However, I can only speculate because both of these men have since passed.

My goal now for Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu is to hopefully open up some communication between practitioners of our style. In doing so, we can all benefit and learn from one another. Ideas and insights that we may have received from our seniors would be shared. We all have to understand that there is value to not only see unique characteristics of a kata or any given technique that we all have as individuals, but to learn how to deal with certain strengths, weaknesses, and limitations within our own training.

Today, many of the senior practitioners of the art have passed on and it is up to our generation to continue the legacy they have laid before us. Originally, I had planned to come to Okinawa in 2012, but at that time, Sensei Taba was ill and had passed away. I wanted to make sure that I was here in Okinawa to be present on the anniversary of his passing. Before I touch down in Okinawa, I am setting some short-terms goals for my stay besides training with Sensei Takeshi Tamaki, Sensei Tokashiki Masahiko, and Sensei Sadahiro Makino as well as some of the other seniors in Shorin Ryu. In addition, I am hoping to make contact with Sensei Bunshiro Nagamine at the Honbu Dojo and pay homage to the Grandmaster and Soke's gravesites. I am also hoping to get an opportunity to speak with Sensei Yoshitaka Taira the new President of WMKA. Though these may be the short-term goals for my upcoming stay in Okinawa and I am not sure how successful I will be, I feel it is my obligation as someone who has had a long history in Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu.

If you look into the history of Okinawan Karate, especially Shorin Ryu Karate, it has made a big impact on the world in martial arts. I also believe there was a Shorin Ryu master who helped bring karate to light on the main land of Japan and helped spread throughout the world. Does anyone know the name of Gichen Funakoshi? 

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