

As I remember Jim (Sunny) Zermeno Sensei

Katherine Loukopoulos - February 19th, 2016



Sometimes we know people in our lives, and we sort of take it for granted that they'll always be there. One such person, Jim (Sunny) Zermeno was on my list to see once I returned to the United States, specifically Florida. This was not to be!

Nearing 80 years old, Sunny Sensei as was affectionately called, left his last breath on January 24th 2016.

Ralph Garafalo Sensei happened to be in Florida at the time, and on February 6th he went to Fort Pierce for the Service accompanied by Robert Neirer Sensei who was Sunny Sensei's long time student and step son. "I find it comforting that he found peace in the last few years teaching karate to students in a church. He had about 40-50 kids and many parents that loved him" said Garafalo Sensei.

The message sent a shrill through me. I would not get to share the tatami floor with Sunny Sensei ever again. The last time Sunny Sensei and I sweated together on the training floor was on July 29th, 1994, when I returned for a brief visit from Okinawa to the United States. But I had met Sunny Sensei decades before...

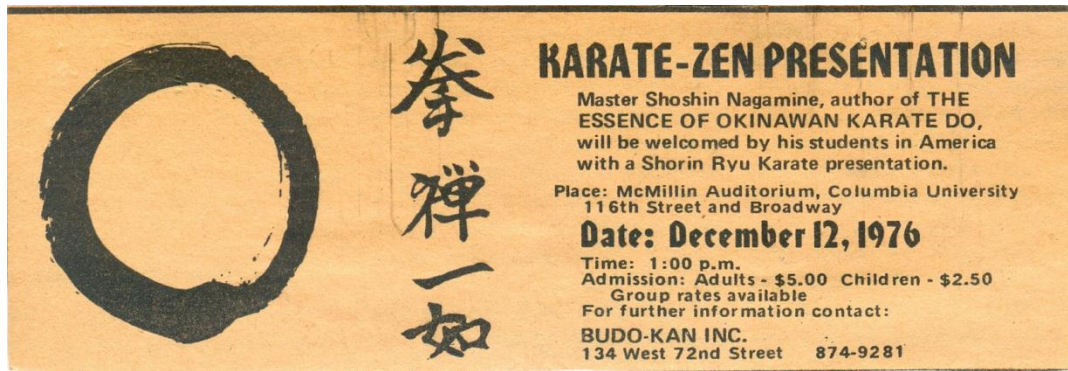
As a member of the 72nd Street Budokan Dojo, I had the opportunity to see many Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu Greats! In the 60's and 70's women were rare in the inner circles of black belt macho martial artists. They represented the unattainable. We

perceived them as the ultimate in strength, knowhow, and bravery. The lineup of senior black belts made us shiver with the exception of one man... because he smiled...

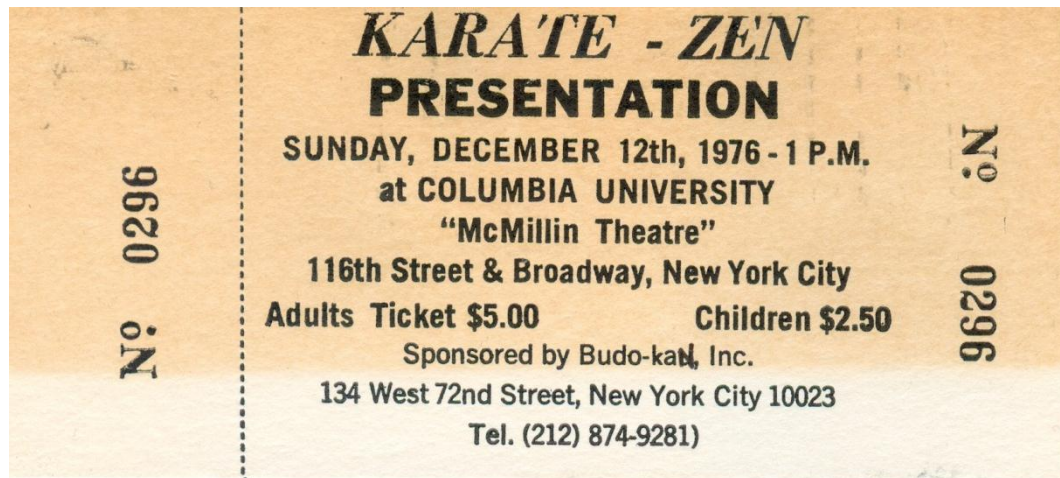


Master Shoshin Nagamine's earlier visit to the United States is documented with this photo. Zerneno Sensei is fifth from left and behind Master Shoshin Nagamine. Left of Master Nagamine is Ansei Ueshiro Sensei, and on his right is Chotoku Omine Sensei, followed by Zenko Heshiki Sensei.

Master Shoshin Nagamine's book THE ESSENCE OF OKINAWAN KARATE DO was translated into English, and Nagamine Sensei was coming to New York City for a Karate-Zen Presentation. The host, Zenko Heshiki Sensei, organized huge preparations and the training hours became countless. Everything to the smallest detail was given our most attention. Each student was assigned with a job, and we trembled with the idea if we could not rise to the occasion of excellence.



The event was advertised in all of New York City newspapers...



We were instructed that all seats in the theatre must be sold out... and that, we did!

It was a formidable program in which everyone participated. All 18 Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu Kata, Bunkai, Kumite and Zazen were presented. In the Grand Finale Master Shoshin Nagamine performed a dance to the music of Karate Do Sanka; words which he had written himself. In this historic demonstration, Jim (Sunny) Zermeno performed a solo of Naihanchi Shodan.





With the passing of Master Shoshin Nagamine, his son Soke Takayoshi Nagamine, Chotoku Omine Sensei, Seigi Nakamura Sensei, Ansei Ueshiro Sensei, Yasuharu Makishi Sensei, Morinobu Kadekaru Sensei, Kensei Taba Sensei, and a string of early American pioneers, Joseph Carbonara Sensei among the greatest, who were responsible for bringing Matsubayashi Ryu Okinawan teachers to the United States, if we did not document, read and remembered their contributions, we would be ungrateful for their service. Regardless of small or large, we would become ignorant of important links of our history that have brought us to this point in time of our Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu. Knowing our history is just as important as understanding the Bunkai of the 18 kata. For this reason I like to document that Jim (Sunny) Zermeno Sensei was part of this historic event.



18 years later Zermeno Zensei and I met again this time in his dojo and for 3 ½ hours trained together. I feel obligated to contribute some photos of our last three and a half hours of training together with Sensei's students. As pictures are worth 1000 words,

one can easily discern that Zermeno Sensei was dedicated, kind, knowledgeable, and passed on his art with sensitivity and passion.



We worked on group kata...



We offered individual attention...



We played games, and had relay races...



The losing team paid the price in 'karate style'...



We sealed our 3 ½ hours of training with a smile... and a group photo! July 29th, 1994.



Zermeno Sensei and I promised to meet again... July 29th, 1994.

I am sure that there are other martial artists who are more familiar and in greater detail of Zermeno Sensei's contributions and that they would take the time to document for posterity.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, on November 4th, 1936; passed away in Florida on January 24th, 2016. Zermeno Sensei is survived by his daughter Kim, and by his sons Richard and Michael. (I do not know if there is one more son.) Sensei is also survived by five grandsons, one granddaughter, and one great grandson.

With our sympathy,

Katherine Loukopoulos

Bubishi Karate Do Org., Director

