

As I remember Ansei Ueshiro Sensei



The Bubishi Karate Do Organization

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Introduction

There is no doubt in my mind that I remember Ansei Ueshiro Sensei. But, how do I remember him? What do I remember about him? How can I describe Ansei Ueshiro to others? What was unique about him and about his methods of teaching? What contributions attributed to standing taller than other karate teachers from Okinawa?

Ansei Ueshiro Sensei is credited for bringing Matsubayshi Shorin Ryu to the United States. This is a bit inaccurate as Mr. James Wax, a US Marine who served on Okinawa, was the man who brought Matsubayshi Shorin Ryu to America. It was James Wax's formal invitation and sponsorship that brought Ansei Ueshiro Sensei to the United States.

Being an immigrant myself, I have first-hand knowledge of what it is to leave your home and your family, and to venture into the unknown without enough money, and without the power of language. Ueshiro Sensei armed with an entrepreneur spirit ventured into the world. But he was not actually alone. Mr. James Wax was his student on Okinawa, and his student brought him to America.

It was difficult without being able to speak English; however, karate training requires no language as the techniques are transmitted and instructed by example. "Feeling" is something that emanates through technique, and it loses value when one attempts to explain it by using words.

Lack of money was definitely a problem. Culture shock may have been the greatest of problems as American students are far more rude and opinionated than students on Okinawa. Ueshiro sensei quickly adopted.

I was put up to the challenge when Mr. Lee Justo asked me to contribute some information regarding the man who was responsible for developing and spreading Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu Karate Do throughout America, and later on, to other parts of the world.

Memories

First I would like to share with you that I don't rely on my memory. I maintain daily journals which time again and again have proven most beneficial in providing me with an accurate account.

I was a student of Zenko Heshiki Sensei at the Satsuma Bushi Karate Dojo located on 134 West 72nd Street, West Side of Manhattan. It was a beautiful dojo on the second floor. We had a wooden handmade floor for karate and a bona fide area covered with tatami mats for the judo students. The Judo and the Karate area were separated by the office and sitting area. The

décor was minimal. One could smell sandal wood burning as they opened the down stairs entrance door to climb the stairs into the dojo. The dojo also had a backroom with a sliding rice door where guests stayed and large parties were held after hard trainings. There was a shower and toilets for the men, and a private toilet for Heshiki sensei. Sensei's toilet became my changing room when I became a student, and the showers were strictly off limits.

Training was a Boot Camp. We did not participate in tournaments, we did not use protective gear for kumite, and only the strong survived. There were no fine teaching methods. Students' self esteem was not taken into consideration when we were beaten, scolded, mocked, punished, and reprimanded beyond imagination. All those who survived were strong.

Heshiki sensei worshipped Nagamine Shoshin Sensei, and wanted him completely for himself. In Heshiki sensei's eyes, no one was a good enough student worthy of Nagamine sensei. Who was Nagamine sensei? What did he look like? Who knows? I had never seen him. When I convinced Heshiki sensei to accept me as a student Nagamine sensei had already returned to Okinawa from his US trip. I heard the name Nagamine Sensei as often as Ueshiro Sensei. Nagamine sensei was the "good", and Ueshiro sensei was the "bad".

I heard that Ueshiro sensei disappointed Nagamine sensei and Nagamine sensei had no other choice but to remove him from the Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu Karate Do world map. None of us low ranking students could imagine what terrible thing Ueshiro did to deserve being ousted.

Besides learning karate it was compulsory that we learn zazen. Since we liked the dojo we endured the zazen. Zen training in the morning, Zen training in the night, monthly three-day Zazen training retreats for the advanced students; all this translated into pain, more pain, severe pain, and much endurance.



We made our own square and round cushions.

Heshiki sensei's wife, Sadako san, was our sewing mentor.

We even had the Zen Priest, whom we addressed as Osho san, for one year as a guest in our dojo in order to teach us correctly. Osho san was also a Goju Ryu Karate Do practitioner and often demonstrated his Sanchin Kata. I was responsible for Osho san's breakfast which meant that I had to be in the dojo 0500 hours daily for the duration of one year.



Heshiki sensei spent countless hours with Osho san studying.

The best lessons often came when we were eating.

As years went by, Heshiki sensei immersed himself more and more into Zazen training. In 1977 he decided to leave from New York City and to enter the Chozen-ji as a Zen monk. Chozen-ji is the International Zen Dojo of Hawaii.

Turmoil broiled and despair spiraled among the Heshiki Sensei dedicated students. Many cried, others sworn to follow him, and some others vowed to stay at the 72nd Street Dojo and to carry on.

This was my dojo and my home. After eight years of training in what I thought the only great dojo on the planet, I stepped outside to look for alternative training solutions.

From my Journals

1977

On January 11th, Heshiki sensei announced that he and his family would be relocating to Hawaii in order to pursue his Zazen training. In fact, his wife already had a job waiting for her in the airline industry. By January 19th, he had given away his personal belongings and furniture, and on January 30th, Heshiki sensei, with his wife Sadako and son, left.

Senior Black Belts and dedicated students of Heshiki sensei assumed responsibilities and continued to teach the classes. Those classes were no longer vibrant, and they did not satisfy me. While the men met after classes and reminisced about Heshiki sensei's greatness, I began to look elsewhere for another dojo.

Up to that time, Ansei Ueshiro was just a name. It was a name that went along with some heavy accusations by Heshiki sensei and by Nagamine Shoshin sensei.

On July 20th, I met Ansei Ueshiro sensei, as well as his Director of the Headquarters, Mr. Bob Scaglione and his wife Judy. I was impressed by Ueshiro sensei's simplicity, and low tone of voice. Without hesitation Ueshiro sensei and the Scagliones welcomed me into their organization in order to continue my training. Mr. Scaglione asked for an annual membership fee of \$300.00. On September 30th I signed up at their dojo and I paid the \$300.00.

I attended classes as of October 5th. By November 2nd I assisted and/or instructed all of the classes which I attended. By December 7th I instructed all the advanced classes as well, and conducted the low grades for testing.

On December 22nd it was our Christmas Party. The Party was preceded by training, and on that night I saw Ansei Ueshiro sensei perform Kata Rohai and Bo*. The training and demonstrations were a success, and on December 23rd Bob and Judy gifted me with an embroidered Karate Gi which I have till this day.

1978

I continued to attend classes and to teach at the Mid Town Manhattan Dojo. I was teaching everything that I knew up to that point; however, my soul was not fed with anything new. I did not meet with challenges, and I perceived myself as "falling behind". There was no contact with Okinawa, and there were no instructors traveling back and forth in order to gain instruction and to bring back fine details on techniques. Ueshiro sensei did not teach classes.

We had to accept everything that Shihan Scaglione presented as the “truth” on Matsubayashi Ryu Shorin Ryu.

The doubts in my heart grew stronger, and on January 6th I returned to the 72nd Street Dojo. Bob and Judy were clearly disappointed with my decision.

Is the grass greener on the other side? I found out that the grass is as green as one perceives it to be. When I returned to the 72nd Street Dojo I learned that the most senior and most dedicated student of Heshiki sensei, Mr. Ernest Fugazy, was no longer there. Mario Medious sensei was the owner of the dojo, and he was glad to see me back. Immediately he gave me a schedule of classes and designated which of the classes I would be teaching.

The months rolled by, and on April 14th Heshiki sensei returned to New York for a visit. He started to teach classes as of the next day. Heshiki sensei was furious that Mario Medious sensei accepted me back from Ueshiro sensei’s organization, and demanded that I be severely punished.

On April 16th Heshiki sensei asked me if I knew that Ueshiro sensei was kicked out by Nagamine sensei from his World Organization. He also told me that he would decide how to deal with me. On April 23rd Heshiki sensei called a meeting and it was attended by senior instructors who unanimously placed me under probation and restriction from visiting other dojo.

On April 30th I called Shihan Scaglione and Judy and asked them if I could return to their dojo. They were jubilated and received me with open arms.

On May 7th Ansei Ueshiro sensei told me that he would help me open my own dojo. On May 8th it was decided that I start teaching a karate group at my Parkchester apartment in the Bronx. It was a large apartment and I already had a huge room fully equipped with mirrors and weight training equipment. Yes, that was a nice beginning for me.

May 31st was my very own first class! By October 29th I was searching for a storefront in order to set up a commercial dojo. I continued to attend and to teach classes at Person-to-Person Karate (PPK), taught my own classes at Parkchester, worked a full time job, and tried to complete my Master of Arts Degree at John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

One major difficulty I faced at the PPK Dojo is that I could not speak directly with Ansei Ueshiro sensei. Perhaps that is how Ansei sensei wanted it. I don’t know. What I do know is that communication suffered.

November 12th was a day that changed the course of events for my entire martial arts career. For this, I am forever grateful to Ansei Ueshiro sensei, Shihan Scaglione, Judy, Terry Maccarrone, and to all the students who were present that day. I was encouraged to attend an

Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Tournament, and to perform my kata. I did not know what and how to do that. The following days were dedicated in preparing me for the tournament event.

On November 19th I attended my first AAU tournament. I placed 1st in Kobudo Kata (at that time men and women competed together), and I placed 2nd in Karate Kata.

On November 30th once the class was over at PPK, Ansei Ueshiro sensei arrived with guests: It was Taba sensei with some other karate men whom I did not recognize. We demonstrated many Karate Kata and the Bo Kata.

On December 23rd, Ueshiro sensei called and asked me to meet him in order to discuss “Dojo Matters” and he offered me a job.

We met on December 27th, and Ueshiro sensei recommended that I do not open a dojo, but a small club. He offered his support.

1979

The prospect of competition provided a new challenge for me. With renewed energy and eagerness, I continued to teach, to practice, and to prepare for my next AAU Tournament Event.

On January 21st, I competed and placed 2nd with the Bo and 1st with empty hand kata. There I met Mr. Chuck Merriman** who invited me to compete the following week in a New Jersey AAU Tournament, and he also gave me an application to fill out in order to compete at the US National Team tryouts. On January 29th, I competed and I finished 1st with Kata and 4th with Bo.

On March 4th, at the Suffolk County AAU Tournament I finished 1st in Kata, 1st in Kumite, and 1st in Weapon’s Kata.

On March 15th Ansei Ueshiro and Shihan Bob Scaglione came to my home in Parkchester and enjoyed some Japanese tea. Afterwards, they visited my dojo. Ueshiro sensei wanted me to find a larger space and to set up a more commercial dojo.

I continued teaching, competing and succeeding on the AAU Tournament circuit. I started to meet many different people from different styles of karate. The veil was lifted and my eyes were opened. I met people who in their turn furthered my tournament career and instilled the goal to become a member of the US National Karate Team.

On April 24th, I was informed that Ansei Ueshiro sensei changed his mind and that he did not want to go into “business” with me. Communication with Ueshiro sensei was never clear as

everything I wanted said was told to Mr. Scaglione, and in turn, Ueshiro sensei told Scaglione to tell me.

On April 27th Ueshiro sensei gave me a huge office desk, an office chair, and a tall bookcase for my new dojo.

On May 1st Ansei Ueshiro sensei once again that he decided to go into a dojo business with me.

On May 12th, I was voted as the Most Outstanding Athlete of the Year, and on May 24th I attended a formal function with Mr. Thomas La Puppet*** in order to receive my award.



1979 Most Outstanding Athlete of the Year.

My karate career took off, and each week I traveled to a different location in order to compete, to teach, to demonstrate, or to raise money for my next competition. Many people took an interest in me, and invited me to train at their dojo. It was like Alice in Karate Land. I no

longer attended PPK due to lack of time. I attended classes at Mr. Alex Sternberg Shotokan Dojo who was an AAU referee. I attended Mr. Toyotaro Miyazaki sensei's Shotokan Dojo who often donated money towards my international travel. Miyazaki sensei spent an amazing amount of time in helping me with tournament kata presentation. Mr. Thomas LaPuppet spent countless hours in kumite training, and took me with him when he taught Kumite at various place in the country.



Left to Right: Chuck Merryman, myself, Joyce Santamaria, and Gina Schiavonne.

1979 AAU National Karate Championships

I did not open a dojo under the auspices of Ansei Ueshiro sensei. Instead, I opened a dojo in a Dance Studio for a few days a week, and later Mr. Thomas Carroll La Puppet helped me with getting a space at Glenwood Racquet Club, Brooklyn, in which I taught until the end of my US tournament career (1979 – 1985).



When sunny, classes were held outdoors at the Glenwood Racquet Club.

Two students from PPK followed me when I started teaching karate at my home in Parkchester. One female, Ms. Faith Barbera who also made the US National Team for Kumite, and Mr. James Thompson who became my backbone. Mr. James Thompson designed and patented our Bubishi Karate Do Logo. The name Bubishi Karate Do Organization which I have until today is a non for profit organization registered with the State of New York.



James Thompson performs Chatan Yara no Kusanku.



Brooklyn students learned etiquette through monthly dojo parties and events.

Our Bubishi Karate Dojo was located on Coney Island Avenue and kept its doors open for more than 25 years. It was not a part of Ueshiro sensei's organization, and it was not a part of the 72nd Street Dojo. It was independent, and when I left for Okinawa, it became directly connected with Okinawa.

It was imperative for me to continue to learn, and to understand Okinawa karate as the Okinawans understood it. It became clear that I could not achieve this by third party explanations. For this reason I decided to go to the source and to learn from there.

Just before leaving for Okinawa I asked Joseph Carbonara sensei to accept James Thompson in his dojo. Carbonara sensei was an excellent source of karate training. He tried to keep all that he learned from all of his teachers, from Okinawa, and from Omine sensei. Besides

helping and guiding James and his students, on January 3rd, 1998, when I visited New York, I tested and he honored me with the rank of Roku Dan.



Photo taken at Carbonara sensei's dojo

None of my world endeavors would have been possible if I did not venture into Ansei Ueshiro sensei's organization in order to continue my studies there. Eventually, I was banned from the 72nd Street for studying at PPK. Later, I was thrown out of Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu because of a Black Belt article published in May of 1983 which described my first trip to Okinawa. The third time I was banned from Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu was when the Okinawa instructors realized that I performed Chatan Yara no Kusanku in the international circuit. In other words, I exposed the Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu Karate Do "secrets" to the world.

When I finished my amateur competitive status, I left Mr. James Thompson in charge of my Brooklyn Dojo, and I departed for Okinawa. Once I arrived there I showed up at Master Nagamine's doorstep and he took me in for training.



Kata Wankan, Okinawa, Japan

Ansei Ueshiro sensei left from Okinawa as a young WWII Survivor, and he had enough body scars to remember. The fact that he survived successfully in the United States is exactly that which we call “The American Dream”. He did it with Karate, and he did it with business. In the process he provided well for himself, for his family, and he also propagated his karate art. And throughout all this, he also helped many people achieve their own quests, ambitions, and financial success.

It was a well traveled trip called LIFE.

* The Bo kata was the same as the one we learned on 72nd Street dojo with quite a few differences. Now we know that the name of the Kata is Haku Sho no Kun. The same kata is also known as Shiro Matsu no Kun. I learned about the names when I lived on Okinawa and trained at Nagamine Shoshin sensei dojo (1986-2000).

** Mr. Chuck Merryman was the Kata Coach for the AAU US National Karate Team at that time.

*** Mr. Thomas Carroll LaPupper was the Chairman of the AAU Metropolitan Association at that time, and a few years later he also served as the AAU US National Team Kumite Coach.