

Interview with Anthony Mirakian Sensei



Karate pioneer Anthony Mirakian introduced Okinawan Goju-ryu karate-do to the United States in 1960. A passionate and energetic exponent of traditional karate, Mirakian has taught what he calls "the true art" at his Okinawan Karate-do Academy in Watertown, Massachusetts for the past thirty years. He offers his students a mirror image of the training he received in Okinawa decades ago.

Mirakian began his karate training when the U.S. Air Force stationed him in Okinawa in the early 1950's. He first studied under Okinawan Goju-ryu karate master, Seikichi Toguchi at the Shoreikan dojo in Nakanomachi, Okinawa. He also trained there with Okinawan karate master, Ryuritsu Arakaki. When Sensei Arakaki noticed Mirakian's passion and commitment to the art, he advised him to train under the foremost Goju-ryu karate master on Okinawa, Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi, the top student and successor of the late founder of Goju-ryu karate, Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi.

Mirakian was the first Westerner taught by Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi and the first to receive a black belt from him. The traditional karate training at Yagi's Meibukan dojo was challenging and arduous, with four hour work outs five nights a week. Mirakian was promoted to 3rd degree Black Belt before returning to the United States in 1960. He is the senior active student of Grandmaster Yagi, who promoted him to 8th degree Black Belt in Okinawa in 1985.

Sensei Mirakian's academy in Watertown, Massachusetts is the North American headquarters of the Meibukan Goju-ryu Karate-do Association based in Kume, Naha City, Okinawa. In 1972, Grandmaster Yagi appointed Mirakian the Overseas General Manager of the Meibukan Association. His dojo offers Okinawan Goju-ryu karate-do training in its purest form. Mirakian is an excellent example of the benefits of life-long karate training. He has beautiful katas, finely-honed techniques, and devastating power. This interview took place in Mirakian's tranquil Watertown dojo after his regular three-hour Saturday evening workout.

Qn: You arrived in Okinawa in the early 1950's. How would you characterize Okinawan karate in that era?

Ans: This was "The Golden Age" of Okinawan karate. It was during this time that karate training first became available to Westerners, which caused a great impetus in the propagation of Okinawan Karate to the western world. During these years, Okinawan karate was taught in a traditional way as an art form of self-defence. The karate masters upheld the old karate values and standards and placed great emphasis on dojo kun (etiquette). They took pride in patiently teaching their national art to Westerners as well as Okinawans. Karate was presented in a dignified, strict manner. To a Westerner it appeared fascinating, challenging, and mysterious.

Qn: Do you think something has been lost as karate has been modernized?

Ans: Yes. Unfortunately much of the essence and spirit of traditional karate has been lost. Since the advent of karate championships, many practitioners are competing to win at any cost. This approach is not the traditional aim of Okinawan Goju-ryu karate-do.

Qn: Why Okinawa? How could an island so small and remote have produced the world's best known martial art.

Ans: That's a very interesting question. Okinawa had the perfect chemistry to develop the art of karate. The Okinawans had the time to devote to the martial arts. Theirs was a quiet and simple agrarian and fishing society, without distractions. Because Okinawa was alternatively dominated by China and Japan, Okinawans were forced to develop unarmed martial-art techniques to defend themselves against larger, stronger, armed foes. Also, they were forced to look inward, and develop an inner strength that characterizes the art. Okinawans are a civilized and peace-loving people, and these traits are reflected in the unique moral foundation of their art.

Qn: How long has karate been practiced in Okinawa?

Ans: For well over a thousand years. Certainly Chinese martial arts were practiced in Okinawa during the Tang Dynasty, from 618 to 906 AD. By the fourteenth century, oral traditions say that a karate-like art was being practiced there.

Qn: When you first arrived in Okinawa, how did you find a karate school?

Ans: Accidentally. A friend and I hired a taxi and asked the driver to take us to a karate school. He took us to a judo dojo. One of the students there directed the taxi driver to take us to the district of Nakanomachi. When we arrived, the school turned out to be the Shoreikan Goju-ryu karate dojo of Grandmaster Seikichi Toguchi.

Qn: What was Grandmaster Toguchi's school like in those days?

Ans: The training at Grandmaster Toguchi's school was intensive. We trained six days a week. The only day off was Monday. The training started at six o'clock in the evening and lasted until ten-thirty at night. The calisthenics alone lasted an hour and a half. Hard demanding calisthenics, performed in 85 to 100 degree heat and extremely high humidity. We would do all sorts of stretching, loosening-up exercises, and strength training. The assistants to Sensei Toguchi were very demanding. They expected 100 per cent effort from us. There were about forty students in the dojo. The school was perhaps twenty-five feet wide and forty-five feet long, and it had a patio where we could work out. The makiwara (striking posts) were all

outside. All the workouts were supervised by Sensei Toguchi. He was the only black belt in the dojo, but he was assisted by some of his advanced brown-belt students. They led the calisthenics and the basic drills.

Qn: I take It that a brown belt in those days was the equivalent of a higher rank today?

Ans: Yes. At that time, in the 1950's, brown belt was a highly respected rank. Some of the Okinawan brown belts were powerful and very skilled. I would Say that many of the brown belts that I saw then would have to be considered the equivalent of fourth or fifth degree black belts today.

Qn: In what physical condition were the Okinawan students?

Ans: Most of the Okinawans, even the beginners, were in excellent physical shape. They didn't begin karate training in order to lose weight or to get in shape; they were physically fit to begin with.

Qn: What was the training for beginners at Grandmaster Toguchi's dojo?

Ans: The beginners were trained at a very slow pace. Black foot prints extending fifteen or twenty feet were painted on the dojo floor There were two sets, one for Okinawans, and one for the larger American servicemen. For three or four months, we trained by walking on the footprints back and forth, trying to learn Sanchin stepping. We also learned basic techniques, like punching, blocking, kicking, and striking. The training was very repetitious. The kata we practiced were basic gekisai ichi and gekisai ni. We practiced these for a long time. The pace was slow, but also physically intense. No idle talk was allowed, no socializing, no taking it easy.

Qn: Did the seniors 'lean' on the junior students and push them around, as one often sees in dojo outside Okinawa today?

Ans: That wasn't allowed. Advanced students weren't allowed to take advantage of a lesser student. They were there to help the junior students in a strict but friendly environment. There was a feeling of mutual respect and brotherhood in the dojo. In later years I noticed that this was part of Okinawan culture. They take great pride in the teaching of karate. Karate is their national art and heritage, their cultural contribution to the world. They take pride in presenting it in a civilized and dignified manner. There was no reason or excuse for needless injuries, brutality, or reckless wild actions.

Qn: What kind of kumite did you practice?

Ans: We practiced prearranged sparring (yakusoku kumite). We practiced one, three, and five-step sparring as well as . kata bunkai (application) kumite. There was no free fighting. When you practiced with the advanced Okinawans, you had to remain alert, because they were fast, strong, and skilled; they also had control. The attitude was very serious. The students practiced kumite as if their lives depended on it, as if a mistake could be fatal.

Qn: Was makiwara training part of the regular workout?

Ans: It was optional, but most students did a lot of it. It was common for Okinawans to have a makiwara in their back yards. The makiwara were very abrasive. The hitting surface was made of rice straw ropes and it frequently would cut the knuckles. One of the most advanced students of Grandmaster Toguchi was an Okinawan named Sakai. He wasn't large, but he

was extremely powerful. He used to work out seven days a week. He would get up at six o'clock every morning and punch the makiwara hundreds of times. One day he cut his knuckles and bled so profusely during practice that he fainted. His wife had to come and throw a bucket of cold water over his head to revive him. He developed thick callouses on his hands, and had devastating punches and strikes.

Qn: Were you given tests for promotions?

Ans: Yes. From time to time we were asked to perform kata and kumite in front of Sensei Toguchi. No compliments were ever given. If we didn't meet his high standards, we would simply fail the test. I remember once a serviceman didn't get promoted, and went to Sensei Toguchi and asked him what part of his kata was wrong. Sensei Toguchi said to him in a very abrupt manner: "Everything was wrong."

Qn: Was there a moral code you were supposed to abide by?

Ans: Yes. Sensei Toguchi was very strict in not allowing his students to misuse the art. There was an American student there who got into a fight with three other servicemen in a bar. He beat them up badly. Later he bragged to one of the Okinawan brown-belt students that the techniques of Goju-ryu karate were very effective in actual combat. When Sensei Toguchi heard of the incident he became very upset. The serviceman was told to never show up in the dojo again. Also there were a couple of skillful Okinawan karate students who fought with some Okinawans in the villages and were expelled by Sensei Toguchi for misusing the art of karate.

Qn: Did Sensei Toguchi ever perform kata for the students?

Ans: Yes. On the eighth day of every month, Sensei Toguchi would have a ritual commemoration in memory of the founder of Goju-ryu karate, Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi, who passed away on October 8, 1953. He would have all of us, from white belt to brown belt get up on the floor one by one and go through one kata. At the end, he would get up and demonstrate an advanced kata. We were amazed at the beauty of his movements, the precision, power, fluidity, and control.

Qn: Are any of your fellow students at Grandmaster Toguchi's dojo still practicing karate?

Ans: Yes. Today several are masters in their own right. Sensei Masanobu Shinjo and Sensei Zenshu Toyama were both green belts at that time. Today both are highly ranked, highly respected masters. And Sensei Katsuyoshi Kanei, president of the Jinbukan Goju-ryu Karate-do Association, was also a student there. He is a very strong Goju-ryu karate and kobudo (traditional weaponry) master and a fine gentleman.

Qn: Who was your second karate master?

Ans: Sensei Ryuritsu Arakaki. We met for the first time in Sensei Toguchi's dojo. He was an architect, a man in his mid forties. He was a seventh degree black belt master who had studied with Chojun Miyagi and Seiko Higa. I was fortunate that he befriended me, and treated me as a protege. I would visit his house on Sundays and eat dinner with his family. It was a great privilege to be invited into an Okinawan home. We would talk about the history of Okinawan karate. Chojun Miyagi and his training in China. and the old masters. He took me around to various dojo and introduced me to many great masters I would never have had the opportunity to meet on my own. One day he took me aside and said: "I can see that you have a great passion and desire to train in Goju-ryu karate. You should train with the foremost

authority on Goju-ryu in Okinawa, Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi, the top, senior student of Chojun Miyagi." I was reluctant to do this as it was at least an hour's bus ride from my base to the Yagi dojo. But Sensei Arakaki was insistent. He said: "You must train under him."

Qn: How were you introduced to Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi?

Ans: Sensei Arakaki approached Grandmaster Yagi and recommended me to him. We visited him on a Sunday afternoon. I remember that day vividly. When we arrived, Grandmaster Yagi was in his dojo drilling holes in the wooden name tags which he hung on the rank-tag rack. His dojo was next to his house, with a small fenced patio for outdoor workouts. He offered us tea. My first impression was that he was a very serene master. I said to myself immediately, "Here is a man of great physical, mental, and spiritual powers." I sensed that I had met a great master. After asking me questions for an hour, with Sensei Arakaki interpreting, Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi asked me to demonstrate a kata. When I finished, Grandmaster Yagi turned to Sensei Arakaki and said that I had a build like the great Chinese Kempo masters, like a spider. At that time I had a very sinewy body and weighed about 150 lbs. My height was 5 ft 11 inches. He said: "I will accept Mr. Mirakian as a student, and all I expect in return is a few words of gratitude." I was immensely happy. It was a great honour to have been accepted by Grandmaster Yagi, because Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi was highly respected among the inner karate circles in Okinawa.

Qn: Did Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi have other Western students at his Meibukan dojo?

Ans: No. I was the only one, the first Western student that he taught. There were about fifteen or twenty Okinawans. As soon as I started training in his dojo, I could sense that the karate techniques and kata were practiced in a very natural way. Each student did kata according to his own physique and abilities. It wasn't as if someone handed you a suit and said "Wear it, even if it doesn't fit you." Although the karate students were not allowed to change the basic techniques, there was more flexibility than in other dojo. A tall student, for instance, wouldn't be required to go so deep into kiba dachi (horse-riding stance) or zenkutsu dachi (forward stance) that he lost mobility.

Qn: What was the training schedule at the Meibukan dojo?

Ans: Grandmaster Yagi held 4-hour karate training sessions five days a week, Monday through Friday. Although the formal workout started at 7pm, the students would arrive earlier than that to work out on their own. I would arrive two hours before the workout, stretch, do calisthenics, hit the makiwara, and work with traditional Okinawan training equipment. Grandmaster Yagi was the superintendent of the Customs House. He would come home from work in a suit. If you saw him in the street, you would take him for a university professor. He was a man of about 5'8", weighed a solid 180 pounds, with broad shoulders and very powerful hands and arms. He would come home at seven, and without eating supper, put on his gi, and the formal training would begin.

Qn: What kind of training equipment was used at the Meibukan dojo?

Ans: There was a makiwara, chishi (strength stones) of about five to ten pounds, stone jugs for developing a strong grip, free weights, and a heavy punching bag. There was a homemade barbell of perhaps a hundred pounds that had been made from two railroad wheels. These wheels had probably been used years before on the small railroad cars that ran through the sugar cane fields. But in the honbu (headquarters) dojo, there wasn't an emphasis on lifting heavy weights. My impression was that Grand master Yagi felt that excessive weight lifting

would cause a loss of flexibility and speed. He stressed that punching against the makiwara was the best way to develop devastating power.

Qn: What was the atmosphere at the Meibukan dojo?

Ans: A very subtle spirit pervaded the dojo. When you stepped inside, it was as if you stepped into another era, another time, as if you were going back to the Shaolin monastery a thousand or fifteen hundred years ago. There was something mystical there, very difficult to express in words. A person had to be attuned to perceive this mood. There was very little speaking allowed. There was no socializing, no idle talk, no ego, no flexing of muscles or physical vanity. That would have been contradictory to the concept of the dojo, and was not allowed. The karate training consisted of a blending of physical, mental, and spiritual elements harmonized in a very smooth way. There was no harshness. The grandmaster led the class in a strict and disciplined way, but with a friendly attitude. The karate students felt very comfortable being taught by Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi.

Qn: How was the formal workout structured?

Ans: The formal training started at 7pm and ran to 11pm. Grandmaster Yagi would lead the workout personally, with the assistance of his senior student, Sensei Yushun Tamaki, one of the finest karate instructors I have ever met. All of the students would line up. There was a complete silence. We would begin by going through all the Goju-ryu kata to Suparinpe, one after the other. This practice was done very seriously, with tremendous concentration; the mind wasn't wandering, there was no wavering of the eyes. Once the student was training in the dojo, he had to be in command of his mind and in complete control of himself. Everybody responded to the commands at once. Everything was a drill in unison. There were no stragglers. We would always end the training with Sanchin kata and Tensho kata. Sometimes we would begin with Sanchin as well.

Qn: Would the junior belts step aside for the advanced kata?

Ans: No. Everyone, even white belts, did all the kata. But you must remember that the beginning Okinawan students had some awareness and appreciation of karate before they began training, since it was their national art. The beginners knew that just because they were allowed to go through the advanced kata didn't mean that they had mastered them. They were only familiarizing themselves with some of the movements. I was told by masters in Okinawa that to begin to perfect a single kata would take two to three hours a day for three to five years, and sometimes as long as ten years. The Okinawan students understood this.

Qn: How were you taught the kata at the Meibukan dojo?

Ans: Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi would usually take me aside and teach me the movements of the kata once. While he was performing the kata I would follow him. It was a great honour to be taught by the Grandmaster, and it was taken as a sign of respect that you would give absolute concentration, and learn the basic movements on the first try. I watched like a hawk. There's a saying in Okinawa that the master speaks only once. The kata were taught in a systematic and logical way in the Meibukan dojo. Sensei Yushun Tamaki led the karate class in the practice of the kata, and the students followed him. When we went through the kata for the first time each evening no corrections were made. But as we kept practicing the kata over and over, Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi and Sensei Yushun Tamaki would make the necessary corrections to each karate student. The kata were taught slowly and patiently step by step to the karate class. Generally, once a student was shown the kata, he was expected to correct the movements himself. When I was learning the Tensho kata I had a wrong move for one to

two months. Finally after paying closer attention to some of the advanced students practicing the Tensho kata during one of the workouts, I noticed the right movement of the hand and corrected it myself. This was a very difficult technique to learn, because it was performed fast. Leaving a person to discover and refine techniques by himself has a great built-in value. A student who has to do this becomes highly observant, one of the most important factors in mastering karate. You must remember that there is a Buddhist tradition in Okinawa: To make spiritual progress, you must search for yourself.

Qn: Where the students ever asked to perform kata in front of the class?

Ans: Twice a week or so, Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi would have us sit down quietly on the sides of the dojo, and one by one we would perform kata. The atmosphere in the dojo was so calm that you could hear a pin drop. We would get a chance to see the kata of every student, their strengths and flaws. We benefitted from the relaxed contemplation of each other's kata. There was never any praise given.

Qn: Did Grandmaster Yagi perform kata in his dojo?

Ans: On occasion. They were the finest kata I have ever seen in Goju-ryu karate. It was beauty in motion. The perfect balance of hard and soft. He had tremendous power, control, and speed. I remember his Sanchin in particular. It didn't have the extreme tension you see in some practitioners. But when he tensed his body, it was impressive and deceptive; like tempered steel covered by velvet.

Qn: What followed the kata in the workout?

Ans: After we finished going through the kata we would practice many different types of kumite that had been adapted from the breakdown of the kata. We would also practice combinations of striking, punching, kicking, blocking, and counterpunching. We would practice many patterns, jo-chu-gae, chu-gae-jo, gae-jo-chu, many different techniques done in a very fast, sequential manner back and forth across the dojo floor. Then we would practice ippon kumite (one-attack sparring) at close range, with one arm length between attacker and defender. At this range, given the skill and speed of the students, there was no margin for error. We paid close attention. We had to develop lightning-fast reflexes or we would get hit. The emphasis was on watching the pupils of the opponent's eyes. We watched closely enough so we could always see the punch telegraphed by the eyes. This was a form of active meditation, and much better than sitting meditation. The outside world did not exist, we couldn't worry about the past or future. Only the split-second counted. This made the mind very strong, it developed tremendous power of concentration. We practiced against various students, so we constantly had to adjust and readjust according to the makeup of the opponent. I was a weapons technician in the U-S- Air Force, and every day I had to move 3 to 5 tons of heavy equipment by myself. And then I trained in karate 4 to 6 hours per night five nights a week. This schedule made me very strong. But even with my strength and good training I had difficulty in blocking the punches of some of the Okinawan students. In three-step sparring against Mr. Tamaki, I was able to block his first punch, and then his second, but on his third punch he had so much momentum and power that most of the time I had to just get out of the way or get hit. There would be many repetitions of techniques, hundreds of punches, strikes, blocks, kicks. The workouts varied from day to day, but we always did the basics, covering the same techniques again and again and again. There was a heavy emphasis on fundamentals, kata, and Sanchin. We practiced kake-uke most evenings to develop good stance, strength, and balance. (This is the middle blocking exercise where the students link wrists, a relative of pushing hands done in a sanchin stance). This was not practiced as a full strength tug of war, as seen in some dojo today, but done in a softer, systematic, balanced way. I believe this to be one of the best Goju-

ryu karate exercises. I remember many times practicing against Mr. Tamaki. When I tried to exert too much strength on the palm of his hand, he would sense that I was rigid and off-balance, and sweep me to the floor. I had apprehension at first, and my mind wasn't as calm as it should have been. Eventually I learned that if I remained calm, without any preconceived ideas, I could sense when he was going to try to sweep me, and just lift my foot up. This taught me a fundamental principle that you have to relax both your body and mind to detect changes in your opponent. Kake-uke was originally used to pair up highly skilled practitioners for kumite. If one student could not move the arm of another student in kake-uke, or could not hold his stance, he would not be allowed to engage in kumite with that student. The feeling was, if he couldn't handle the other student in kake-uke, he would not be able to block his punches either and could be seriously injured.

Qn: Your students practice the arm toughening drill called "kotekitai". Was that practiced at the Meibukan hombu dojo?

Ans: No. That has been introduced in the Meibukan dojo in the past twenty years. This arm-pounding exercise originated in Taiwan, from Taiwanese Kempo. Before that, the students would toughen their arms by practicing forearm strikes on the makiwara, by hitting their forearms against the trunks of the banyan tree, and by blocking each other's punches.

Qn: How did the workouts end?

Ans: Every workout ended with Sanchin. Before Sanchin, however we practiced the exercise that I call the flexible horse. Each of us would count one hundred times. Usually there were twenty or more students, so we did at least two thousand flexible horses. It was hot and humid there, especially in the summer, so by the time we finished, we were soaking wet. Sweat would run down our faces, into our eyes, and cover the floor. I wouldn't dare wipe the sweat from my eyes because if I did, all of the Okinawan students would give me dagger-looks as if to say "You are doing something that is improper. Can't you take a little physical punishment? Don't you have the mental fortitude to ignore discomfort?" After Zazen (sitting meditation) and bowing to the master we would take off our uniforms and go outside to dry off. The China Sea was only a half a mile from the dojo, and sometimes there would be a cooling breeze. In about ten minutes it would dry up our shorts and we would be able to put on our clothes. Then I would walk three miles to the bus terminal and ride the bus home.

Qn: Could you describe the flexible-horse exercise?

Ans: Yes. We started in an upright position with the feet twice shoulder width apart. Both arms were outstretched touching each other in front of the chest with the palms up. Then we dropped into a horse-riding stance (Kiba-dachi) while bringing the palms of both hands to the outside of the knees. Next, we thrust up into an upright standing position, bringing the hands to the sides of the upper body in closed fists, while momentarily tensing all the muscles of the body.

Qn: You are reknowned for conducting hard, demanding workouts in your dojo lasting many hours. Were the workouts in Okinawa harder when you trained there?

Ans: Although the karate workouts at my dojo are very intensive, the training in Okinawa was even more rigorous. They were continuous workouts. There was rarely a break. When karate practitioners talk about the training in Okinawa in that era, they always talk about how hard it was physically. They talk about the many hours of daily training, the relentlessness of the workouts, the endless repetition of techniques. But many students never grasped that it wasn't the physical element that was most important. It was the way the training was conducted, it

was the mental intensity that counted. When you trained in the dojo, nothing else mattered. The emphasis in the dojo was in developing tremendous powers of concentration in a relaxed environment. The goal was to develop the mental concentration and physical power to be able to move in and stop an opponent with a single technique; one punch, one kick.

Qn: What was the attitude of the Okinawans towards foreign students in the 1950's?

Ans: The Okinawans were sceptical, and with good reason. The karate masters wanted to know the true intentions and characters of all their students. The masters were very observant, and I felt I was watched very closely at first. Eventually, after I proved that I could handle the physical and mental rigours of the training, I felt accepted. I had to show that I was sincerely and honestly interested in learning the art of Goju-ryu karate-do. I remember one time I represented the Meibukan at a large martial arts demonstration in Ginoza, Central Okinawa in 1958, with over 2,000 people in attendance. I was the only Westerner participating. When I got up to perform Shisochin kata, the crowd began booing and whistling. But when they saw me performing, and recognized that I was a serious student, they quietened down. When I finished, they gave me one of the biggest ovations of the day. Some of the attending Okinawan karate masters approached me after the demonstration and commended me on my performance. Okinawans were very gracious and friendly once they saw that you had a respectful and sincere attitude towards their national art of karate.

Qn: What differences do you find in the way Okinawans and westerners approach karate?

Ans: In Okinawa, and in Asia in general, one of the goals of karate training is to minimize ego. In the West, unfortunately, the emphasis in much of martial art training is in building the ego, which is quite the opposite of the training in Okinawa. There's a saying in Okinawa that when the rice grain is plentiful, the stalk bows. When empty, it stands tall. This saying is analogous to the Western saying, "An empty barrel is apt to make the most noise." The Okinawans are generally more disciplined, patient, and motivated than westerners in their approach to karate training. Also, the Okinawans have an initial advantage as karate is their national art. Therefore, the Okinawans have a better awareness of the goals of karate training than Westerners. In the beginning, self-imposed discipline will make the karateka feel uncomfortable and restricted. Okinawans understand and accept this, while most Western karate practitioners are unwilling to endure this initial hardship. After a while, of course, the self-imposed discipline brings tremendous inner freedom and harmony to the practitioner.

Qn: What were the major styles of karate practiced in Okinawa when you lived there?

Ans: The major, official styles of Okinawan karate, as recognised by the Zen Okinawa Karate-do Remmei, were Goju-ryu, Uechi-ryu, Matsubayashi Shorin-ryu, and Kobayashi Shorin-ryu. These were the four preeminent styles. This is still true today.

Qn: Were relations between the major styles friendly?

Ans: Yes, I frequently attended the meetings of the Zen Okinawa Karate-do Remmei in Naha City, where the leading masters and their top students would come together and discuss matters of mutual concern: how best to enhance and present the development of Okinawan karate, how best to present it, standards of etiquette, and standards of promotion. I attended these meetings with my second karate master, Ryuritsu Arakaki, and also on occasion with Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi. These were very polite, dignified gatherings. The masters were courteous to each other and presented their views in a dignified, respectful manner.

Qn: Did you meet the leading masters of the other styles?

Ans: Yes. I met many of them. The head of the Kobayashi style of Shorin-ryu was the late Grandmaster Chosen Chibana, I met him several times at the Okinawa Karate-do Remmei meetings. These were held at the dojo of Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine, who was the head of the Matsubayashi style of Shorin-ryu. I also visited the dojo of Grandmaster Kanei Uechi many times.

Qn: How did you happen to visit Grandmaster Nagamine's dojo?

Ans: I was invited by Goju-ryu karate master Ryuritsu Arakaki to attend one of the meetings. At that time, Master Arakaki introduced me to Grandmaster Nagamine and I also met many of his students.

Qn: Did you ever visit his dojo again?

Ans: Yes I would visit his dojo periodically, as the meetings of the All-Okinawan Karate-do Association were held there. I was the only Westerner present at these meetings. As time went on, I became friends with many of his karate students. Some of them were brown and black-belt students who were very impressive and powerful. Grandmaster Nagamine is one of the most respected and skilled grandmasters on Okinawa, and it was a great honour to have met him.

Qn: What were the workouts like at his dojo?

Ans: The practice at his dojo included a lot of weight lifting. They had a full range of barbells, dumbbells, and other free weights, and they practiced many different weight-lifting techniques. Grandmaster Nagamine told me that he encouraged his students to engage in strength building as well as karate training. Even though the students were muscular, I noticed they had excellent speed and reflexes. They were powerful karateka. I still remember seeing one of Grandmaster Nagamine's top students, Omine, throwing sequences of punching techniques. I could hear the sound of his punches breaking the air all the way across the dojo.

Qn: Was free-fighting practiced there?

Ans: No. Everything was prearranged. The emphasis in the karate training was very traditional, the kata, the drills, the prearranged kumite.

Qn: How was the training at the dojo of Grandmaster Kanei Uechi?

Ans: I visited the dojo of Grandmaster Kanei Uechi in Futenma City many times. He is a highly respected and very powerful grandmaster. Uechi-ryu and Goju-ryu karate systems have a natural affinity. They both were influenced by the martial arts of Fukien Province in China, and have a common geographical background. The Uechi-ryu karate training was very intense, and the students were superb karateka. They had a controlled form of free fighting, using classical Uechi techniques. They exercised enough control that they stopped their techniques short of full contact.

Qn: What was your impression of their unusual method of kicking. . . I'm referring to their toe kicks?

Ans: Their toe kicks were devastating, very impressive. They toughened their toes by hitting them against baseboards and other hard objects. I saw one student break five wooden boards held by another student by kicking just with his big toe.

Qn: I've seen films of their Sanchin testing. Perhaps it was only because of the camera, but it looked extremely hard. Were the students really being tested that hard?

Ans: Yes it was hard. I remember seeing two-by-four boards broken over the students' arms, legs, and abdomens. I saw Grandmaster Kanei Uechi testing the Sanchin by hitting the students in the abdomen with hard punches thrown out of a horse stance. The students looked rugged and highly conditioned. It appeared as if their entire bodies had been hardened through the Sanchin training and testing.

Qn: Did you meet other eminent Goju-ryu karate masters?

Ans: Yes, Several. I met the late Grandmaster Seiko Higa many times. He was an excellent teacher and had been the assistant to Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi. When I met Grandmaster Higa he was in his late fifties. When he performed the Goju-ryu kata, he had great power speed, and control. As a master gets older, the techniques do not depend as much on physical technique as on internal strength.

Qn: The two most famous students of Grandmaster Kanryo Higaonna were Chojun Miyagi and Juhatsu Kiyoda. Did you ever meet Grandmaster Kiyoda?

Ans: Yes. I had the great honour of meeting him in 1958 at his home in the city of Beppu, Kyushu in Japan. He was in his early seventies when I met him, and he was an extremely powerful man. His posture was erect. He had a strong voice, and his eyes were very sharp and penetrating. He was a large man. I saw a photograph of him in his younger years, and he was over six feet tall and perhaps 180 to 190 pounds. He had a very muscular build. Grandmaster Kiyoda told me that the study of kata should be supreme. He told me: "The true karate is in the practice of the kata, and the practice of kata is true karate." I will never forget those words. I also met his son who was over 6 feet tall and around 200 pounds. They showed me their photograph album which went back many years. They had a variety of group photographs with Grandmaster Kanryo Higaonna that included Juhatsu Kiyoda, Chojun Miyagi, Kenwa Mabuni, Higa Seiko, and many other great Okinawan karate masters. There was one particular photograph of Juhatsu Kiyoda wearing the traditional black uniform used in Okinawan festivals. He was holding a thick wooden pole about six feet long. I asked his son what Grandmaster Juhatsu Kiyoda was doing. He said that in Okinawa around 1920 when practicing karate, two advanced students would sometimes be paired in a controlled version of free-fighting; fighting designed to practice the techniques of a specific style. When the students engaged in the kumite, two masters would stand on either side of them, and when the action got too fierce and there was the possibility of severe injury or even death, the masters would cross the poles in front of the students and end the fight. He said that this was a very fierce form of kumite practiced only by highly trained karateka.

[Qn: The foundation of Goju-ryu karate was laid by Grandmaster Miyagi's teacher, Grandmaster Higaonna, who trained in China for over twenty years. Is there one particular Chinese style to which Goju-ryu is related?](#)

Ans: Yes. Okinawan Goju-ryu karate is related to Chinese Chuan-fa style. Kanryo Higaonna sailed to Foochow in Fukien province, China, when he was fifteen. There he met the famous Chinese Chuan-fa Grandmaster, Liu Liu Ko with whom he studied for over twenty years. Kanryo Higaonna became Grandmaster Liu Liu Ko's top student. Little is known about the actual style that Liu Liu Ko taught. Some karate masters say it was the Hung style; others say it was another style that had been indigenous to Fukien province for over one thousand years.

[Qn: Who was Grandmaster Liu Liu Ko?](#)

Ans: There isn't much written information on Grandmaster Liu Liu Ko. I was told that he was of the Chinese nobility and had been tested to become the equivalent of a knight three different times. He failed the imperial test at age 37 and again at age 50. On his 73rd birthday he was tested again, before the Emperor of China, after walking hundreds of feet carrying a rock weighing 180 kilos strapped to his back. When Grandmaster Liu Liu Ko arrived in front of the Emperor, he performed Sanchin kata and passed the test. Then he was knighted by the Emperor. Grandmaster Liu Liu Ko's training was said to have been very arduous. Anyone who aspires to practice karate must keep in mind the Chinese character "Nin" which means "to endure." There is no easy way of attaining mastery. It was through this long and difficult kind of training that Grandmaster Kanryo Higaonna was able to develop his exceptional skills. In 1890, he returned to Okinawa and began teaching in Naha. His skill, knowledge, and dedication soon became legendary.

[Qn: When he returned to Okinawa from China did Grandmaster Higaonna make changes to the Chinese martial art that he learned from Grandmaster Liu Liu Ko?](#)

Ans: Yes. Grandmaster Higaonna did make changes to the Chinese martial art that he learned in Fukien Province, China. Even though the style that he mastered in China was superb, he felt the need to revise and adapt some of the techniques to make his art suitable to the Okinawan lifestyle and culture. Also, Grandmaster Higaonna for some unknown reason changed the name of the highest kata from the Chinese pronunciation Yepatlinpa (meaning 108) to Suparinpe.

[Qn: Was Grandmaster Higaonna a strict karate master?](#)

Ans: Yes, a very strict teacher He would not allow or teach any student with a violent nature in his dojo. He was very selective as to whom he accepted. His training was very strenuous. The Sanchin kata was practiced for three to four hours during each session. A new student was taught only the Sanchin kata for as long as three to four years before going into another kata. While practicing the Sanchin, some of the students would collapse from sheer exhaustion. That was the intensity of Grandmaster Kanryo Higaonna's training. The Sanchin kata taught at that time by Grandmaster Higaonna was performed open-handed. When Grandmaster Higaonna demonstrated his Sanchin breathing kata, he would occasionally allow four Okinawans to try and dislodge him from his standing position while performing. They could not move him. When he finished the Sanchin kata the floor where he stood would be heated by the friction of the gripping of his toes.

Qn: Who were Grandmaster Higaonna's top students?

Ans: His top students were Juhatsu Kiyoda, Chojun Miyagi, and Kenwa Mabuni: Miyagi founded Goju-ryu karate from Nahate; Kiyoda founded Toon-ryu, a karate system named after the first Character in Grandmaster Higaonna's name, and Mabuni founded Shito-ryu karate.

Qn: Did Grandmaster Miyagi make any changes in the Naha-te system that he inherited from Grandmaster Higaonna?

Ans: Yes, Grandmaster Miyagi studied with Grandmaster Kanryo Higaonna for thirteen years, and upon his master's death went to China for two years to conduct further research into the martial arts. While he was in China, he met and befriended the Chinese White Crane Master, Go Ken Kin, and travelled around with him to several provinces studying with a number of great Chinese masters. When Chojun Miyagi returned to Okinawa, he decided to take the art of Naha-te and expose it to scientific scrutiny. His approach was very critical, and he discarded the techniques that did not meet strict scientific standards. Chojun Miyagi incorporated many Chinese martial arts techniques which he had learned while in China to the Naha-te system of Okinawan karate. He refined the existing kata and developed his own kata Gekissai I and II and Tensho. Chojun Miyagi designed the auxiliary exercises, kata bunkai kumite, and other forms of kumite that are performed in traditional Goju-ryu karate training dojo. He modernized the training and developed the structures that we still follow. He also changed the practice of open-hand Sanchin to closed-hand Sanchin.

Qn: What is known of Master Go Ken Kin?

Ans: He was a Chinese White Crane Master whom Master Miyagi met in Fukien Province, China in 1915. They travelled together for two years visiting and training with Chinese masters of various systems of Chuan-fa (kempo). Master Go Ken Kin introduced Master Miyagi to many great Masters. In 1936 Grandmaster Miyagi visited China again and studied Chinese martial arts at the Seibu Dai Iku Kai (Great Gymnastic Association, Pure Martial Arts Spirit) in Shanghai. Years later Master Go Ken Kin moved to Japan and lived there under the name Yoshikawa. He passed away in 1940 in Japan at the age of 55.

Qn: There are many versions of the origin of the name Goju-ryu. Where did the name come from?

Ans: From the old Chinese book 'Wu Pei Chih' ('Army Account of Military Arts and Science') by Yuan-i Mao, published in 1636. Grandmaster Miyagi named the system of karate "goju-ryu" (hard-soft style) from the term "goju" which appears in the sentence: "The successful method requires both give and take (go-ju)." When Grandmaster Miyagi was asked why he gave this specific name to his style of karate, he replied that goju defines the hard and soft nature of his style. Grandmaster Miyagi named his style of karate Goju-ryu around 1932. He was teaching and promoting Goju-ryu karate-do up to the time of his death on October 8, 1953 at the age of 65. He was called the last great samurai warrior of Okinawa because of his legendary strength and skill as well as his intense dedication to the marital arts.

Qn: On what principles did Grandmaster Miyagi base the foundation of Goju-ryu karate-do?

Ans: Grandmaster Miyagi subjected the art of Naha-te, as received from Grandmaster Kanryo Higaonna, to strict scientific examination. Originally, a martial arts expert was trained for killing an enemy with one blow. Karate as such was unsuitable for the contemporary world. Miyagi studied the basic "go" of Sanchin and the six rules and formed the "ju" or tensho form, thus combining soft and hard movements. He also organised the auxiliary movements designed to

help develop karate techniques by strengthening the body through calisthenics. He organized these exercises in preparation for Practicing the kaishu kata. Thus, he determined the theory for the practice of karate and organized it as a martial arts educational subject, an art of self-defence, and as a spiritual exercise. Grandmaster Miyagi spent his entire life contributing to the improvement and proliferation of karate-do. Before his intervention, karate had been considered a very mysterious practice, but by using a scientific approach, Miyagi created, through his Goju-ryu karate-do, a clearly defined and universal platform for the art which gave it a basis for mass acceptance.

Qn: Did Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi receive any awards for his contribution to karate?

Ans: Yes. In 1936 he received a medal for "Excellence in the martial Arts" from the Ministry of Education of Japan.

Qn: Did he hold any official positions?

Ans: Yes. In 1928, Grandmaster Miyagi travelled to Japan and instructed karate at Kyoto Imperial University, Kansai University, and Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto. Miyagi is credited as the first master to introduce karate on an international level. (Editor's note: i.e. outside of Japan). In 1930, Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi became chairman of the Okinawan-ken Taiiku Kyokai Karate-do (Okinawa Prefecture Athletic Association Karate Division). In 1934 he became permanent officer of the Okinawan branch of the Dai Nippon Butokukai (Great Japan Martial Virtues Association). As a result of his great efforts, karate was first recognized officially as one of the martial arts of Japan with the formal establishment of the Dai Nippon Butokukai, Okinawa Branch, in November 1933. In May of 1934, Chinei Kinjo, editor of the Okinawan newspaper Yoen Fiho Sha, invited Grandmaster Miyagi to Hawaii. There he gave lectures and taught in order to promote Okinawan Goju-ryu karate-do. He returned to Okinawa in February, 1935. In May of 1937, Prince Moriwasa Nashimoto, Commissioner of the Dai Nippon Butokukai, authorised Miyagi with the headmaster of Shinto shizen-ryu (jujutsu) and the headmaster of kushin-ryu (also jujutsu) to form the Dai Nippon Butokukai Karate Jukkyoshi (Great Japan Martial Arts Karate Teachers' Association). They inspected and regulated karate throughout Japan until the dissolution of the association. In 1937, Miyagi received the Kyoshi degree from the Dai Nippon Butokukai. In 1946, Grandmaster Miyagi was promoted to an official of the Okinawan Minsei Taiiku Kan (Okinawan Democratic Athletic Association). In 1953, Miyagi was instructing at the Ryukyu Police Academy in Naha City, Okinawa.

Qn: What is the origin of the term "karate"?

Ans: Originally this Okinawan fighting art was simply called "Te". Then the Okinawans made a strict distinction between their native art "Te" and "Tode", which meant "Chinese hand" for the Chinese art of Ch'uan Fa or Kempo. The Chinese ideograph "To" of "Tode" means "Chinese" or "Tang" (The Tang dynasty ruled China from 618 to 906 AD). A tremendous cultural revival occurred during the Tang Dynasty which was symbolic of the finest Chinese culture and enlightenment. Since Chinese culture was highly respected in Okinawa, anything labelled "Chinese" was regarded as superior. The word "To" is very elegant and raises the value of everything it is applied to. There is a certain snob appeal in calling anything "To." Gradually, the Okinawans came to apply the term "To" to all "te," especially those of Chinese influence. According to Grandmaster Miyagi, Karate, written in this way is the special word used only in the Ryukyus and it came from the Chinese Ch'uan-fa (Kempo).

[Qn: When was Tode changed officially to Karate?](#)

Ans: On October 25, 1936 a karate symposium sponsored by Mr. Choju Ota, Chief Editor of the Ryukyu Shimpo Newspaper was held in the Showa Kaikan, at Naha City, Okinawa. Among the Okinawan karate Grandmasters present were Kentsu Yabu, Chotoku Kyan, Chomo Hanashiro, Chokei Motobu, Chojun Miyagi, Juhatsu Kiyoda, Chosen Chibana, Mashige Shimma, Asatada Koyoshi, and Eijo Shin. At this conference it was agreed that the Okinawan martial art which previously was called "Te" or "Tode" be called karate or "empty hands." From 1936 on the practitioners of this Okinawan martial art began simply to refer to it as karate, using the ideograph meaning empty hands. In this way the emphasis shifted from technique alone to spiritual values as well.

[Qn: At what age did Meitoku Yagi start his training with Grandmaster Miyagi?](#)

Ans: Meitoku Yagi was 13 years old when his paternal grandfather took him to Grandmaster Miyagi, who was thirty seven years old at the time. His grandfather told Grandmaster Miyagi, "Meitoku Yagi is a descendant of the leading samurai of Okinawa and the first minister of the three ministers of Okinawa, Jana Oyakata." His grandfather also said: "Meitoku Yagi has Okinawan samurai blood in him, and I think he will be able to take over your place some day in the future, so please teach him your karate." That is how Meitoku Yagi was able to start training under Grandmaster Miyagi in 1925.

[Qn: Who was his ancestor Jana Oyakata?](#)

Ans: He was a very important official in Okinawan history. He was so influential that he escorted the king of Okinawa when the king had to go to the Peace Talk after the defeat of the Okinawans by the Shimazu clan of Satsuma Province, Japan at the conflict of Keicho in 1609.

[Qn: Was it Meitoku Yagi's own decision to start training in karate?](#)

Ans: No, it wasn't. He didn't have any intention of starting to train in karate. But he had to follow the order of his grandfather.

[Qn: I gather he came from a strict, traditional background?](#)

Ans: Yes. Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi has been a life-long resident of Kume village. The Okinawans said they were more afraid of the people from Kume than the military. This was because the religion of the people of Kume was Confucianism. They were very strict and had a discipline exemplified by the saying: "Stay three feet away from the master, but don't step on his shadow."

[Qn: Did Grandmaster Miyagi have a formal dojo when Meitoku Yagi started practicing karate in 1925?](#)

Ans: No. According to Grandmaster Yagi, Grandmaster Miyagi did not have a formal dojo; he taught karate in his backyard, and when it rained, he taught inside his home.

[Qn: You studied with the senior student of Grandmaster Miyagi and met many of his other students. How did they describe the Grandmaster as a person and a teacher?](#)

Ans: Grandmaster Miyagi's nickname in Okinawan dialect was "Busamagunku" or "Samurai" Miyagi. He was a very demanding and strict teacher. Meitoku Yagi began studying with him at age 13, after undergoing an eight-month probationary period, during which he had to perform

chores around Chojun Miyagi's house and backyard. Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi said that Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi had fierce eyes. "When you saw them," he said, "you wouldn't be able to say a word. You would never dream of telling him something that wasn't true." Grandmaster Miyagi was hard on his students. While doing Zazen (sitting meditation) he would not allow his students to relax as some of the other karate teachers would; instead he would make the students sit and meditate for one to two hours without moving. Sanchin was taught one step at a time. Sometimes a single movement would be practiced over and over again for several months, nothing but one movement for hours a day. When Meitoku Yagi would go to the communal bathhouse, people would see the bruises and welts on his shoulders from Sanchin testing and say: "Aha, you have been training with Chojun Miyagi." Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi placed great emphasis on developing the character of his karate students. He only kept those students who had high moral ethics. He was a strict disciplinarian. One day one of the students arrived for karate training with a towel wrapped around his neck, singing a popular song. Grandmaster Miyagi expelled him from the school. The student tried to apologize for his careless behaviour but Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi felt that if a student behaved in front of him in such a careless and disrespectful way, then he would do even worse things away from the master's presence. Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi said that an average person could not have tolerated the very intense karate training given by Grandmaster Miyagi. You had to be highly motivated. Grandmaster Miyagi would often tell his karate students: "Lions push their cubs over a cliff and they raise only the cubs that are able to struggle back up the cliff. That's how I teach here in my dojo." Grandmaster Miyagi taught only those students who could withstand the rigours of the training. If a student dropped out, he made no effort to draw him back.

Qn: What were Grandmaster Miyagi's favourite kata and techniques?

Ans: I was told in Okinawa that Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi's favourite kata was Shisochin. He had exceptionally powerful open-hand techniques, especially nukite (finger-tip strikes). Open-hand techniques take much longer to master than closed-hand techniques. His other favourite kata was Sanchin and Tensho. Grandmaster Miyagi had very strong punching and kicking techniques. His punches and kicks had explosive power. He was said to have superhuman strength. Grandmaster Miyagi was renowned for having a vice-like grip. It was said that he could put his hand on a four or five pound piece of raw meat and squeeze it into hamburger. When he was in China, I was told that he dropped his wallet in a rickshaw. When he went back to get it, the rickshaw driver refused to hand it over and tried to strike him. Grandmaster Miyagi instantly grabbed the forearm of the driver and squeezed so hard it paralyzed his arm, forcing the driver to give the wallet back.

Qn: Did Grandmaster Miyagi teach different versions of the kata to students according to their level of development?

Ans: Yes. As Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi kept teaching, he kept refining the kata. Also, he taught beginners simplified versions of the kata. Later, as they practiced longer and learned more, they were taught more refined, advanced versions. Therefore, in evaluating the level of any Goju-ryu kata, you have to know how long the master studied with Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi. He taught slowly and patiently. Clearly, someone who studied with him for a few years would not have kata and techniques as sophisticated and advanced as someone who studied and practiced with him for decades.

Qn: Who was the top student and successor of Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi?

Ans: Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi was the top student and successor to Grandmaster Miyagi. He studied with him from 1925 to 1953. He learned the most advanced and sophisticated

versions of the Goju-ryu kata and techniques. The Meibukan Goju-ryu kata of Grandmaster Yagi are unique. They have a flair, elegance, and fluidity all of their own. Grandmaster Miyagi passed away on October 8, 1953. Ten years later in 1963, his widow and family gave the Grandmaster's karate uniform and his black belt to Mr. Yagi. According to a speech given on the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the death of Grandmaster Miyagi on October 8, 1978, his daughter Suruki said that her family had decided to give her father's karate uniform and black belt to Mr. Yagi because he contributed the most and trained the longest with Grandmaster Miyagi. She said: "Mr. Meitoku Yagi was with my father for the longest time practicing karate. I think my father would be glad to see Mr. Yagi getting his uniform."

Qn: I understand the Japanese Government gave Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi an award.

Ans: Yes. On April 29, 1986, Grandmaster Yagi received the Imperial Award, Fourth Class Order from the late Emperor Hirohito in Tokyo. This award was in recognition of his great achievements in the field of karate.

Qn: Who promoted you to black belt?

Ans: Grandmaster Yagi promoted me to black belt. Before I left Okinawa, I was promoted by him to Sandan (3rd degree black belt). Grandmaster Yagi promoted me to Hachidan, Kyoshi (8th degree black belt) in Okinawa in 1985.

Qn: What was the occasion for your visit to Okinawa in 1985?

Ans: I was invited by Sensei Meitatsu Yagi to participate at a special celebration in honour of his father Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi's 73rd birthday on February 10, 1985. As the United States representative of Meibukan Goju-ryu karate-do, I attended this event and gave a congratulatory address and performed the 'Seenchin' kata on that day. My wife, Helen and my daughter, Doreen presented Grandmaster Yagi with flowers during the ceremony. Representatives from the United States, Japan, Brazil, and India were present for this birthday celebration as well as many prominent Okinawan masters. Grandmasters, Kanei Uechi, Shugoro Nakazato, Shoshin Nagamine, and Shinho Matayoshi all attended. The son of the late Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi, Ken Miyagi, was there, as was the son of the late Grandmaster Seiko Higa, Seikichi Higa. Hundreds of practitioners demonstrated kata and kumite in front of thousands of spectators. Afterwards a gala reception was held for special guests. This was a major cultural event in Okinawa, with radio, television, and press coverage.

Qn: What rank do you hold now?

Ans: Ninth degree black belt (Hanshi). Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi promoted me to the very high rank of Kudan, Hanshi (9th degree black belt) in Okinawa on October 21, 1990.

Qn: Why did you visit Okinawa in 1990?

Ans: To attend and participate in the 30th Anniversary celebration of the founding of the Okinawan Goju-ryu Karate-do Association. It was held on August 18, 1990 at the Shimin Kaikan in Ginowan, Okinawa. I was accompanied by my karate students who also demonstrated at this important event.

Qn: Are you the first person to receive the high rank of 9th degree black belt (Hanshi) from Grandmaster Yagi?

Ans: Yes. Outside of Okinawa, I am the first and only one who has received the 9th degree from Grandmaster Yagi, the Chairman of the Meibukan Goju-ryu Karate-do Association.

Qn: Your dojo in Watertown, Massachusetts is known as the most traditional Okinawan karate school in North America. Have you made many changes over the years in the way you teach karate?

Ans: No. I haven't made any changes Basically I am teaching in the same way I was taught at the Meibukan Honbu Dojo in Okinawa. I also keep the same attitude that permeated Grandmaster Yagi's dojo, - of respect, cooperation, discipline, and hard work.

Qn: Could you describe the benefits of traditional Okinawan Goju-ryu karate training?

Ans: Traditional Okinawan Goju-ryu training is very strenuous and disciplined. It develops a very strong foundation of fighting skills in the karate student. Traditional Okinawan Goju-ryu karate training emphasizes the repetitious practice of basic karate techniques, kata, and Sanchin training. Because of these intense and demanding training requirements, it develops and produces the best long-term results in the karate practitioner. Traditional day-to-day, continuous karate training strengthens the body, improves the health, cultivates the mind, and develops an indomitable human spirit that can be applied to any activity in life. Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi used to say that winning and losing are part of each other. "Don't be afraid to fail one day," he said, "because the next day you might win." Life is a constant struggle, and traditional Okinawan Goju-ryu karate training will prepare a person to face that struggle, to deal with life's ups and downs, in a very confident way.