



Seikichi Toguchi— Profile of a Master

A personal disciple of the legendary
Chojun Miyagi speaks out.

At nearly 70 years of age, this unique master comments on the history and personalities of karate. Seikichi Toguchi possesses an air of true tranquility, smiling often and moving with the grace and agility of a man half his age. During his visit here to the U.S. and Canada, master Toguchi allowed a rare interview going into his 55 years of study and apprenticeship under the renowned Chojun Miyagi. This printing is an abridged version of the complete interview and will serve as a rare and unique historical record.



By Scott Lenzi & Toshio Tamano

Left: A very rare photo of Seikichi Toguchi, front row, second from right, with an assembly of Okinawan masters, including Seiko Higa (back row, second from left).



Note: The questions and subsequent answers were conducted in Japanese and are translated as close to verbatim as possible.

Inside Karate: When did you begin studying karate?

Seikichi Toguchi: Formally, at 16 years old.

IK: Who was your first teacher?

ST: Sensei Seiko Higa.

IK: Why did you begin studying with him?

ST: Because his dojo was near my home — about 10 minutes on foot. When I began I had only two senior students — Mr. Yamashiro and Mr. Takamine. Higa Sen-

sei taught them privately first while he was a policeman in the Takamine section of Itoman city. Mr. Yamashiro has retired from karate and Mr. Takamine is the president of the organization Higa Sensei founded but is not currently an active karate teacher.

IK: Was Higa Sensei's dojo the first branch dojo of Miyagi Sensei?

ST: Yes; it was the first and only branch dojo of Miyagi Sensei and Higa Sensei taught as his representative in Itoman until Miyagi Sensei's death.

IK: Did you also study with Miyagi Sensei?

ST: Yes, shortly after joining Higa Sensei's

Seikichi Toguchi...



Itoman City, circa 1950, at the opening of a judo and karate dojo. Toguchi (back row, third from right) was chief instructor for karate at this dojo. Chojun Miyagi is seated in the second row, second from right.

dojo I began training with Miyagi Sensei also.

IK: What kind of teacher was Master Miyagi?

ST: Well, he was a typical ancient Okinawan bushi, very strict and very honest.

IK: Did you know Master Miyagi on a personal basis?

ST: Yes; he often came to our home. In general, Miyagi Sensei did not like to visit anyone's home. In that respect he was quite different from Higa Sensei. I suppose Miyagi Sensei came to my home because he was a good friend of my father. I don't think he visited any other student's house. I suppose he would not have come to our home as often if my father was not living with us.

Miyagi Sensei would often arrive around noon and not leave until well after midnight. When Miyagi Sensei's second son would arrive to pick him up he was usually sent home because he and my father were involved in a lively discussion.

IK: How did Miyagi teach karate?

ST: He was very hard and strict on technique. Until you became proficient in one technique he would never teach you more.

IK: We have heard the saying, "three-year sanchin." Did he really teach only sanchin for such a long time?

ST: No, he emphasized the importance of sanchin but did not teach only it.

IK: Did Miyagi Sensei charge tuition?

ST: No. Miyagi Sensei did not like the idea of teaching karate for money.

IK: Miyagi Sensei is famous for his strength. There are many stories about how he could rip a chunk of raw beef off with his fingers and that he peeled a man's forearm skin off just by grabbing him after being attacked.

ST: I have heard these stories, too. I don't know if they are true. Miyagi Sensei's nickname was *Nikutuee Maugutsku*. *Nikutuee* means to rip off meat and *Maugutsku* is Miyagi in the Okinawan dialect.

You cannot develop on a part-time basis. You must devote your life to it.

IK: Miyagi Sensei is praised as one of history's greatest karate teachers. I would like your opinion.

ST: Well, Higaonna Kanryo Sensei had many good disciples. But Miyagi Sensei was the only one who studied all the techniques and theories of *Naha-te*. Miyagi Sensei was very wealthy — he was adopted by a wealthy relative whose fortune he inherited. So he was able to offer his teacher housing and food and study all the time.

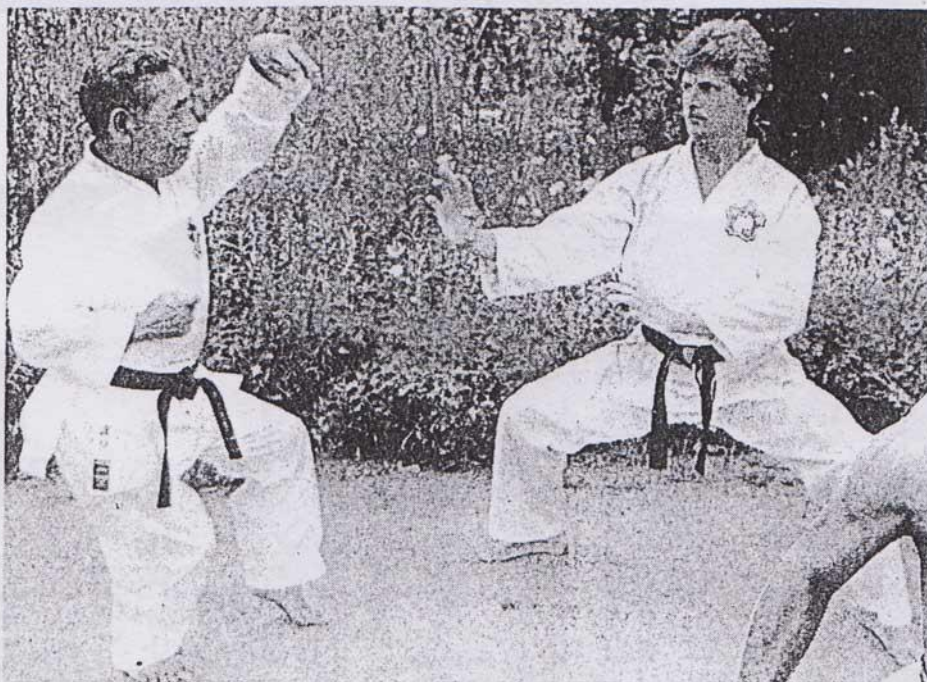
IK: What did you feel was Miyagi Sensei's greatest contribution?

ST: There are three. First is his creation

of a new type of instructional method, which is now the basis of the shorei-kan system. The second was to develop his karate into a modern day physical education program. Thirdly, Miyagi Sensei was



Seikichi Toguchi at age 17.



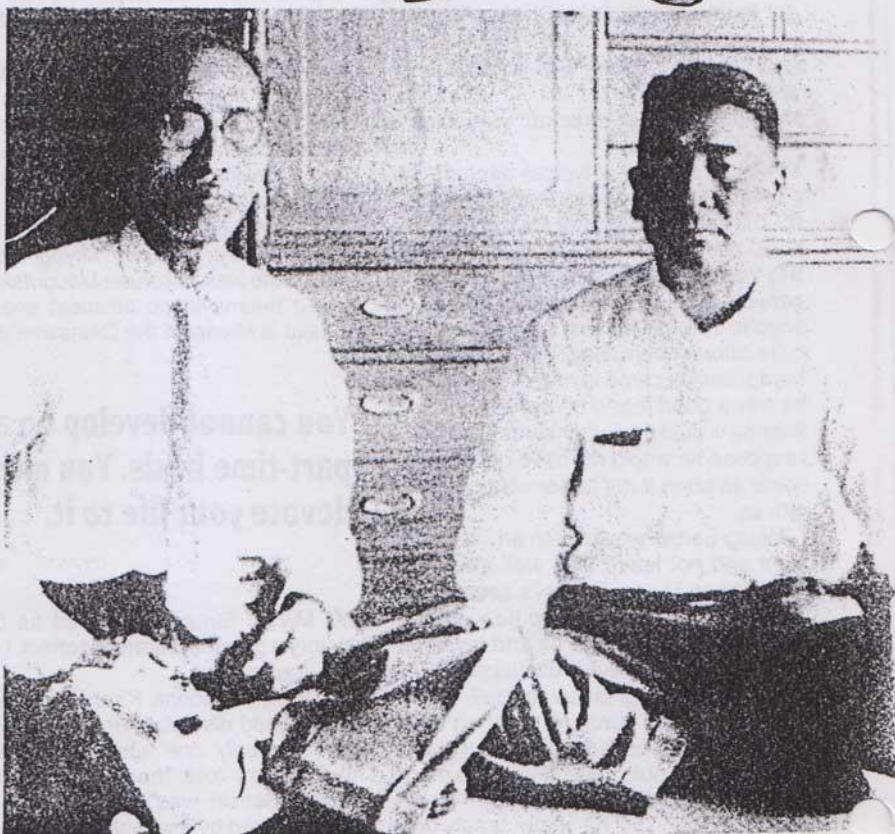
the one to have karate recognized as an official Japanese martial art by the Butokukai organization. For this contribution, he was awarded the title of *kyoshi*. He was the first karate man to ever receive this title.

IK: Toguchi Sensei, what dan did Miyagi give you?

ST: None. Nobody ever received the black belt from Miyagi Sensei. None of us, like Seiko Higa, Metoku Yagi who were my seniors or Miyazato Eiechee, who was my junior, received any degree from Miyagi Sensei. When we studied there was no promotional system. Around 1952-53 we students got together and formed an association to promote goju-ryu called the goju-ryu *shinkokai*. When we presented our ideas and regulations to Master Miyagi, much to our surprise he asked, "Who will give the degree to students?" Naturally we said, "Of course, Sensei, you are the president of the association, you should give the black belt diploma." He scolded us and said that as a true black belt degree could only be issued by a member of the Emperor's family, he would never give a black belt to his students. We gave up the organization. Even Seiko Higa, Miyagi Sensei's top student, did not receive a black belt. If anyone claims to have received this from Miyagi Sensei, I would have to say he is lying. As I mentioned before, Seiko Higa was the only student permitted to open a dojo — if anyone would have received the degree, it would have been him.

IK: How is it that you give rank?

ST: Rank is simply a way for a teacher to show the student's progress. It is not universal; I can give degrees only to my students. There is no set standard, so a teacher can only give degrees to his own students. Rank seems to mean only better business to some karateka — it is a



Toguchi Sensei with Kyoda Sensei, circa 1958. Kyoda was a renowned expert in *sanseiru kata*.

Seikichi Toguchi ...



Toguchi sensei passes on the lineage Miyagi to a new generation.



Top left: Toguchi Sensei with the author outside dojo. Above: Toguchi poses with child students. It is this unique and opinionated sensei's conviction that karate is a lifetime pursuit.

shame. In Okinawa, many people still in diapers, 30 or 40 years old, claim 9th dan — it is a joke. In judo or kendo, if you are 70 or 80 and have made contributions for many years then maybe you are 8th or 9th dan.

IK: Regarding rank, after you opened the Shorei Kan Dojo in 1955, many GIs came to study. Did you ever promote any of them to black belt?

ST: The highest rank I ever gave to a GI was 2nd dan, and that student died in the Vietnam war. None of the other GIs ever progressed above shodan.

IK: To change the subject, many students of Miyagi Sensei are now teaching karate. However, they all teach differently. Why is there such a difference?

ST: Well, I can only say that I am a professional karate teacher and have been since I was 35. Teaching karate is my life.

It was never a good job to make money. My wife got other jobs to support the household. I did just karate — many of Miyagi Sensei's other students had other jobs and did karate for leisure time. Naturally, there is a big difference in the way I teach.

The time spent practicing with Miyagi made a big difference also. If two painters have equal talent, and one studies for one year, the other for ten — of course you will see the difference. Many practiced when they were young, but few continued after high school.

Another important thing is how much of Miyagi Sensei's ideas of karate did they understand. Miyagi Sensei always said that karate cannot grow with classical kata only, so Miyagi Sensei created gekisai 1 and 2, 2 being progressively more advanced. He showed his vision. Miyagi Sensei planned to continue the series but could not due to the war. He told me that he was going to create kata called "gek-



iha" to continue on after the gekisai series. Miyagi Sensei's ideas were described as early as 1936 by Miyagi himself in a meeting in Naha city. This is why I have followed Miyagi Sensei's idea in the shorei-kan system.

Many people teach the techniques they learned from Miyagi Sensei, but they have not studied Miyagi Sensei's principles in order to develop. You cannot develop on a part-time basis. You must devote your life to it.

IK: Did Miyagi Sensei teach these principles to other senior students?

ST: Well, I don't really know about other people. After World War II he taught me much more theory and principle and how to develop karate.

IK: Did Miyagi Sensei appoint a successor?

ST: No — no one. When he died it was very sudden. He taught just the day before at the police academy. I think it is reasonable to assume that Higa Sensei would have become the successor — he was the most senior student.

About the author: Scott Lenzi is the U.S.A. representative of shorei kan.