

Sensei Williams
with Kenzo
Mabuni Soke in
the original Dojo
of the founder
Kenwa Mabuni.



MY JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF

KARATE-DO SEITO SHITO-RYU

Most people associate the date of September 11 with the terrible tragedy in New York. In 2003, September 11 fell on a Thursday and it was the day I started my Journey to Japan to achieve a goal that I set for myself, just after I started my Karate training in 1984. It took me 19 years, but I achieved it and it was well worth waiting for!

Modern technology had a lot to do with paving the way for my visit to Osaka where I trained with some of the highest ranking exponents of Seito Shito-ryu Karate-Do in the world. The technology I am referring to is the Internet, which is how I made initial contact with Kazuo Sakai Shihan, the Secretary General of Shito-Ryu International Karate-Do Kai. The organisation is headed by Kenzo Mabuni Soke who inherited it from his father Kenwa Mabuni, the founder of Shito-Ryu Karate-do in 1952. His father left him the Shito-Ryu name, his complete syllabus and the Dojo with the Association name Nippon Karate-Do Kai. All these remain intact today. He followed his father's curriculum exactly the way it was written down in 1929 and that's why he called it Seito Shito-Ryu or pure, true Shito-Ryu.

I have always trained in Shito-Ryu Karate-Do (mainly Hayashi-Ha Shito-Ryu) and I was looking for a way to get to the source. There are many organisations which were started by former students of Kenwa Mabuni which teach Shito-Ryu. Seito (or pure) Shito-Ryu teaching the curriculum of Kenwa Mabuni, which was passed down to his son Kenzo Mabuni Soke with no changes.

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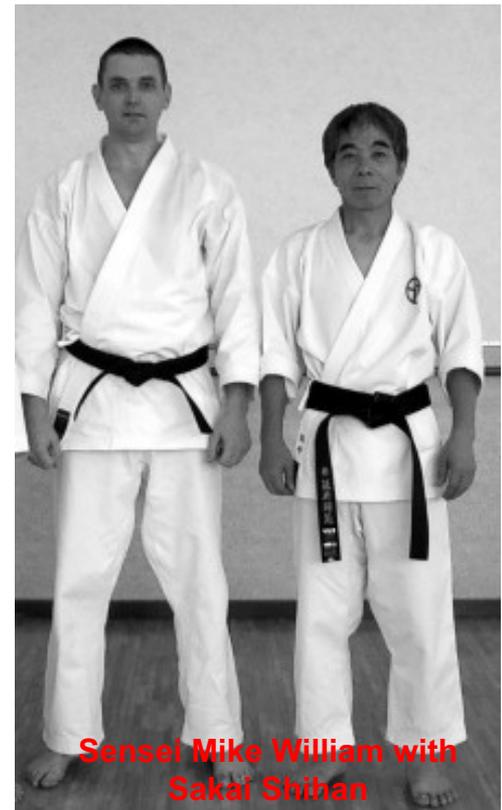
Kenzo Mabuni Soke dedicated his life to preserving the true lineage of his father's karate. He was not concerned with politics or image and remained unknown to the outside world until 1993. Upon the request of his good friend Osamu Ozawa (Shotokan master), Kenzo Mabuni Soke travelled to Las Vegas and exposed the world to Seito (pure) Shito Ryu, the true karate of his father, Kenwa

Mabuni. In April of 1994, Mabuni Kenzo conducted seminars in Albany, New York and Phoenix, Arizona. Subsequent to these seminars, Kenzo Mabuni Soke established the Shito Ryu Karate Do Kai of America (now called Shito-Ryu USA Karate Do Kai). Since then 12 more countries have been added with Australia being the most recent addition.

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After about eighteen months of corresponding by email and exchanging videos, I was invited to travel to Osaka and stay with Sakai Shihan to learn more about Seito Shito-Ryu Karate-Do. This was a chance of a lifetime and I did not hesitate in accepting the invitation. It was six months from the time I was invited until I arrived in Osaka. Apart from achieving my goal of actually travelling to Japan and train, I also wanted to be graded in Japan and to be accepted as the representative for Seito Shito-Ryu in Australia. I knew that I had set myself some difficult goals, but I was determined to do my best and achieve them. I arrived at Kansai International Airport in Osaka on Friday September 12 at 7.30am after an eight hour flight from Perth to Hong Kong where I waited seven hours for my next plane for the three hour flight from Hong Kong to Osaka. My learning experience started from the time I walked out of the arrival area at the airport and met with Sakai Shihan. We went to a coffee shop and talked about Seito Shito-Ryu and it was at that time that I was asked if I would like to meet Kenzo Mabuni Soke. Of course I was very keen to meet the son of the founder and Sakai Shihan told me that he would ask Soke if I could visit him at his home. We then left the airport and started on the one hour drive to the home of Sakai Shihan in Hashimoto, and on the way I learnt more about the history of Seito Shito-Ryu and about some of the people I would meet during my visit. During my eight day visit, I trained at five of the twenty five dojos which make up the Shito-Ryu Nihon Karate-Do Kai. The training sessions were hard and lasted for two hours, but every session was a great learning experience.

The skill and knowledge of the instructors at all of the dojos I trained at, was amazing, and best of all they were all more than willing to share it with me. I was lucky enough to receive one on one training in Kata with an 8th dan instructor with a second instructor (7th dan) also helping me. I knew that I was being watched closely as I had mentioned to Sakai Shihan that I wanted to attempt a grading for my 3rd Dan, so I made sure that I trained hard and put in 100% effort at every training session. It wasn't like other gradings that I have done where you know that a certain time frame is allocated and you know what you are required to demonstrate, this grading was over eight days! Sakai Shihan told me that my promotion to 3rd Dan would have to be discussed by the members of the Supreme Council and then their recommendation would have to be accepted by Kenzo Mabuni Soke. When I left Japan, I didn't know for sure whether I had achieved my goal of passing a grading in Japan and being promoted to 3rd Dan, I would have to wait! I was officially advised in December that Kenzo Mabuni Soke had approved my promotion to 3rd Dan and had issued my Menjo (certificate) on December 1, 2003. I made a point of writing down what I did each day in an exercise book so that I could look back on it for future reference. Each night before going to bed, I made a habit of filling



Sensei Mike William with Sakai Shihan

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out my book with the days lessons. I now have a permanent record of my trip with all the details of every training session I attended.

The dojo wasn't the only place I learned about

Seito Shito-Ryu. One evening I went with Shihan Sakai and his family to a BBQ restaurant for dinner. The restaurant was very popular, so popular, that we had to wait for an hour to get a table. The system for booking a table was quite interesting, in Australia we would ring and make a reservation, in Japan you go to the restaurant and write your name on a list. When a table is free one of the staff

comes out to the car park and calls out the next name on the list.

While we were waiting for our table, Sakai Shihan was talking to me about the kata Sepai and before I knew it, we were practising the kata in the carpark! We had to move a couple of times to make way for cars entering and leaving. Sakai Shihan demonstrated the moves and I followed, it's not that easy doing shiko dachi in jeans! On Thursday September 18 Sakai Shihan and Fukae Shihan took me to the home of Kenzo Mabuni Soke in Osaka. It was a fantastic experience to visit the house which was originally occupied by Kenwa Mabuni who is the founder of Shito-Ryu Karate-Do. The original Dojo where Kenwa Mabuni trained is still attached to the house and it was in this dojo that I met Kenzo Mabuni Soke. Soke Kenzo Mabuni is highly respected and it was a great honour for me to visit him at his home. We entered through the main door of the dojo and removed our shoes. Before going inside, we all knelt down on the wood floor in the seiza position and bowed before being invited in by Soke. The walls of the dojo were filled with history which included photographs of Kenwa Mabuni and the original syllabus and a list of Kata. A beautiful shrine in honour of Kenwa

Mabuni stood out at the back of the dojo. Kenzo Mabuni does not speak English and apart from a few words, I do not speak Japanese, so Sakai Shihan was the interpreter. I was given permission to take photos inside the dojo and I was also able to have my photo taken with Kenzo Mabuni.

It was a great feeling to actually go to the source of Shito-Ryu Karate-Do. The feeling was amazing and very fulfilling for me as I had achieved my goal and found my way to the origin of Shito-Ryu which is one of the four main styles in Japan.

Outside Japan there are eleven countries that are affiliated to the Shito-Ryu International Karate-Do Kai which comes under the control of Nippon Karate-Do Kai, the original organisation formed by Kenwa Mabuni and handed down to Kenzo Mabuni Soke.

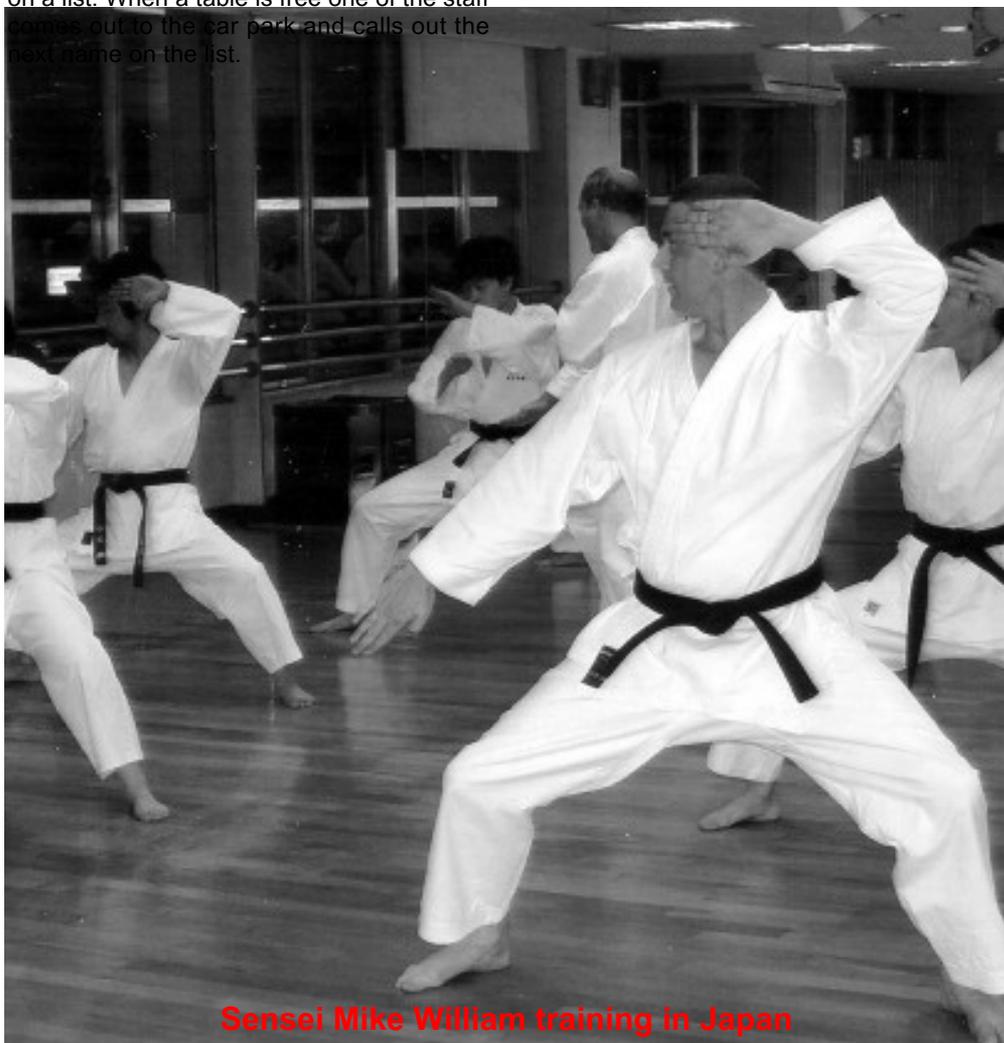
At the time of my visit there was no representative for Seito Shito-Ryu in Australia.

I had made an application long before I went to Japan and when I met with Kenzo Mabuni Soke, I asked him if he would accept my application to be the representative for Seito Shito-Ryu in Australia. My application went before a special meeting for consideration and on December 6, 2003 Kenzo Mabuni Soke officially appointed me to be his representative in Australia.

In Japan, the Australian organisation is registered as Shito-Ryu Australia Karate-Do Kai. Anyone in Australia who is interested in being part of the organisation can contact me at sensei@iinet.net.au and I will provide the membership requirements. The final decision on membership applications is made in Japan.

Over time, we are planning on having a group of affiliated dojos throughout Australia practising the Seito Shito-Ryu Karate-Do of Kenzo Mabuni Soke.

In 2005 representatives from all of the affiliated countries will meet in Osaka for an International Taikai (tournament). I have been invited to attend and I plan on taking my family with me on this trip. Anyone who is a member of the organisation in Australia will be entitled to attend.



Sensei Mike William training in Japan

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