

Sensei Raymond Richard Castilonia

Sensei Castilonia, Kyoshi and founder of Aoinagi-ha Shito Ryu under O'Sensei Kim was a true artist of life. He was a physician, earned an MD and PhD, was an avid mountaineer, a scuba diver, a certified mountain rescue team member, a college professor on environmental issues and a loyal son.

But he considered himself, first and foremost, a martial artist.

Some highlights of Sensei Castilonia's diverse and complete **martial arts history** follows:

Sensei's initial introduction to traditional martial arts began in the art of Judo in 1957 thanks to his father who took him to a YMCA class.

In 1964 Sensei's formal karate training began, learning Okinawan karate under the Gencks brothers in Southern California.

In 1969 he trained under Del Saito in the Goshin Jitsu School in San Bernardino. The school was headquartered in Hawaii with Sensei Al Kahalekulu as chief instructor and Del Saito as the California representative. Because of the rigorous schedule imposed on Sensei by his medical training he would go to the dojo at 5:30 in the morning where a bedraggled Sensei Saito would put him through the paces, sometimes falling asleep while Sensei practiced.

Sensei Kahalekulu was Sensei Castilonia's first Shugyo Sensei and taught him many of the kata and lessons of life we still practice today.

When Al Kahalekulu decided to stop actively teaching Martial Arts, Sensei Castilonia, along with Del Saito joined up with Chuzo Kotaka's organization that is also based in Hawaii and embraced the Shito-ryu style of karate we still teach and practice in Aoinagi today.

On March 8, 1972 Sensei received his first-degree black belt and the title of Sensei. He became assistant instructor at Sensei Saito's school and also began shito-ryu karate instruction at LLU.

In 1974 when Chuzo Kotaka would not renew his certification, Sensei had no choice but to leave Del Saito and Kotaka's organization. He traveled to Hawaii once again and trained with Sensei James Miyaji. From 1974 until the early '90s, Sensei returned to Hawaii and trained with Sensei Miyaji twice a year often taking along several of his students to experience Sensei Miyaji's "**moving Zen**".

In 1975 through Sensei Miyaji, Sensei Castilonia was introduced to O'Sensei Kim. O'Sensei Kim became Sensei Castilonia's primary instructor and Sensei Miyaji remained as his representative to the Zen Bei Butokukai.

This introduction sparked a 27-year relationship with O'Sensei Kim that ended only at the death of Sensei Castilonia.

After a whole year of wearing a white belt, a series of challenging tests and tasks to evaluate his desire to learn, as well as his capability as a martial artist and student-including completing a research paper comparing Master Funakoshi with Master Itosu, Sensei Castilonia obtained the rank of Yondan (4th degree black belt) from Sensei Kim. (This can be accessed on the Aoinagi UCSD website)

In O' Sensei Kim's words, "*Sensei Castilonia was the first Butokukai member to break the barrier and beat the JKA in National competition!*". He won 1st Place in Kata at the National Karate Championships paving the way for many future Butokukai national and world champions including several of Sensei Castilonia's own students.

His achievements in competition include a second place finish at the Pan American Karate Championships that brought international fame, glory and recognition to Mr. Kim's organization. Sensei Castilonia didn't care much for the "tournament scene" but because it was important to his Sensei **he accepted the charge and took it all the way to the top.**

In 1978 Sensei established Aoinagi Karate-do at the Redlands Community Center, in Redlands California.

In 1980 the organization blossomed into Willow Enterprises, a commercial school that was established in Redlands on Alabama Street and in its heyday had well over a hundred students.

In 1984 the school was closed, when the priorities of a commercial enterprise conflicted with the principles that Sensei Castilonia held near and dear. **Karate was always very serious business for Sensei but never a business.**

At this time, only a few dedicated students remaining to train. They trained in parks, backyards, fields and virtually any place that Sensei would teach them.

Two years later, in 1986 the School reopened in Redlands, retaining the name Aoinagi Karate and still carries on his legacy today.

Sensei Castilonia felt that teaching was he highest calling and education a critical piece in one's personal development. We are honored that a educational scholarship has been set up in his name and are very grateful to the Zen Bei Butoku Kai under the leadership of Sensei Rod Sanford for making this a reality and making education accessible to a whole new generation of budding martial artists, teachers, and life long learners.

Neville Billimoria

Aoinagi Karate-do at UCSD
May 2005

Since the 1970's, a variety of Aoinagi branches have sprouted and grown in cities all over the North American continent.

It is difficult to quantify exactly how many students have learned and practiced Aoinagi but as of 1989, Sensei Castilonia had directly taught well over 1200 students.

To date, Aoinagi has awarded over 86 black belts under Sensei's direction and with his endorsement.

We now have schools in Redlands, Loma Linda, San Diego, as well as in Toronto, Canada with a new school opening up in Mount Vernon on the East Coast next month. The green willow tree, Aoinagi, continues to thrive and blossom and grow...

Many lives have been touched and transformed by this organization and Sensei Castilonia's lifework to keep traditional martial arts alive and well in the United States.

We all know Sensei as the seasoned and loving martial artist.
Now I would like to share some **personal** history about Sensei that you may not know...

Sensei was born on April 2, 1945 in Yonkers, New York.
He came to CA with his family when he was only 9 years old.

There was nothing more important to Sensei than his family!

As an only child he loved his parents intensely and supported them throughout his life with pure love and incredible caring and energy.

The Castilonia family settled in Rialto CA for a while before moving to San Bernardino where Sensei attended grade school before going to Pacific High School in San Bernardino.

In high school Sensei's grades were not too good because, for the most part, he was bored and un-stimulated. Because of this, on completing high school, he ended up going to junior college.

This is the only under-achieving part of his entire life story!

During his first year in junior college his grades improved significantly, and with a rocketing 4.0 average transferred to UC Riverside where he maintained this 4.0 average through his entire undergraduate education at UCR.

He transferred to the La Sierra campus of the Loma Linda University where he enrolled in the pre-med program. Sensei entered med school at LLU, after being denied initial admittance due to the limits on the number of non-Adventists that were accepted each year.

Armed with an acceptance letter from Stanford, an unwavering spirit, and no shortage of charm, he convinced the Dean of Admittance to amend the policy and accept him. **This was one of many examples of Sensei's persevering ability to follow a dream and see it to fruition NO MATTER WHAT.**

Sensei obtained a Masters of Psychology and a Masters of Public Health at Loma Linda.

Sensei also got married at the age of 21, and then graduated from med school a year later. He got divorced after 3 years of marriage.

At this point in his life under the direction of his karate Sensei at the time, Sensei Al Kahalekulu, he went on a martial arts experiential journey (Mushashugyo) around the world, spending months visiting and discovering new places, ranging from the remote villages in Thailand to the densely populated cities of India and the arid deserts of the Kalahari.

He came to love Thai food but didn't think much of enduring camel rides across vast expanses of desert. He said it made his butt too sore!

As a passionate naturalist with a real love of nature he thrived and blossomed in the natural world.

Sensei was an avid student of entomology and actually discovered a new species of butterfly in Laos while on this trip around our planet. He was a strong advocate for environmental issues and cared deeply keeping the legacy of a living planet for future generations and not letting our natural resources become obsolete and passé' like the Sierra cup he carried slung to his pack on countless Sierra trips including a month long walk of the entire John Muir trail. **He gloriously summited 40 peaks with one Aoinagi student alone!**

Upon returning to the States, after his travels around the world, Sensei attended USC's graduate school in Physiology/Kinesiology. His research was on venomous animals. Sensei received his Ph.D. from USC.

Meanwhile Sensei continued his practiced of Medicine working in family practice.

Many of us know Sensei as the expert mountaineer. What you may not know is that this passion began as a result of an acute fear of heights, which under the suggestion of his Sensei he transformed and overcame by joining the Riverside Mountain Rescue team for 6 years, as well as by learning to fly airplanes.

Sensei was a master at turning stumbling blocks into stepping-stones and turning enemies- like fear-into your friend.

It was during his Mountain Rescue days that he learned to sleep on the floor every night.

This was to become conditioned to sleeping on the ground while on rescue missions.

Sleeping on the floor in a sleeping bag is something that jived with his samurai training and Sensei slept on the floor until his very last day.

Some of us joked that he adamantly refused to sleep in a bed and when his doctor ordered a hospital bed to be sent to the house in the last few days of his life he decided enough is enough and escaped the whole “bed thing” by ‘up and leaving’ his body.

Now he enjoys the canopy of stars as his sleeping quarters...

Simplicity and rusticity were natural states that Sensei loved and embodied and even though we know his gentle side he was super tough and able to tolerate intense severity, hardship, discipline and adversity as exemplified by his courageous battle with Cancer.

His initial mountain rescue experience kick-started his deep interest in mountaineering and he continued to become an accomplished mountaineer climbing peaks all over the world. **Sensei taught us that we *all* have mountains to climb...**

Sensei also loved the water and enjoyed sailing, scuba, snorkeling and kayaking. As a young child he crossed the Catalina Channel with his father in a homemade fifteen-foot powerboat with a minimum of equipment and no communications devices.

Over the years, Sensei continued training and teaching, while working in many hospitals in Southern California.

He practiced hyperbaric medicine since the early 80s and practiced Emergency Medicine for 5-6 years at Corona Community.

In 1988 Sensei gave up his ER practice in Corona but continued his practice of hyperbaric medicine with an office in Redlands.

Even in medicine he was taking people on “dives” and helping them “work under pressure”.

In the medical community Sensei was a genuine patient advocate and as the world of medicine changed, he no longer felt it served the patients best interests. In 1992 he gave up medicine and went into teaching at CAL State San Bernardino. Here he introduced other students in all walks of life, to appreciate nature and the environment as well as to enduring principles and tools for right living.

Sensei was many things but most of all he was a truly gifted and inspiring teacher that touched so many lives in so many ways and transformed them for the better. Teaching was his calling and so many of us heard his call to open our hearts, get into things fully, to live in the moment and enjoy the simple things in life.

Sensei always followed his heart and moral code with little regard for the perks and tinsel that came with the social status of being a doctor, preferring the less flashy educational environment that was more aligned with his core values and vision. We will always love you and miss you Sensei and try to serve you honorably and with dignity. **God Bless You...**