

Mr. Robert W. Smith 1926 -2011

His Motto in life “Wisdom leavened with love”



On July 1st 2011 the International Martial Arts community lost one of its most extraordinary patriarchs whose life has been one worthy of a feature film. Born in Iowa, America, the circumstances of the great depression forced him to enter an orphanage from age 3-13 years old. As a seventeen year old teenager he joined the U.S Marine Corps and served in the Pacific where he developed a passion for western boxing and Judo that he later went on to attain a San Dan at the famed Tokyo Kudokan Dojo. Graduating with highest honours at The University of Illinois he received his M.A; he quickly moved to the next chapter in his life and one that proved fortuitous for us in the international martial arts community.

In 1955 he joined the CIA writing team as an analyst and was sent to Taiwan as an advisor to the admiral of the Taiwan Defense Command. It was here that he was exposed to many of the great Chinese Martial Artists that had fled the mainland. With his natural wit, candour and honesty he was able to train, interview and write about his personal insights into this golden era of Martial Arts. It was here also that laid the roots for great books like “*Secret Fighting Arts of the World*” written under his alias name John F Gilbey and later “*Chinese Boxing Masters and Methods*” that highlighted his experiences in Taiwan with many of the legends that we now many of us quote and often try to mimic.

Regardless of their style of training thousands were excited by his writings, he wrote 16 texts, dozens of articles for magazines and some 240 book reviews for imminent newspapers across America. His most recent text “*Martial Arts Musings*” - a portrayal of martial arts in the 20th century tells it all only as he could. Not only his experiences over 50 years but insights into the present and future martial arts. He wrote with such historical accuracy and a balance of principles, practice and drew on the cultural influences not only the martial arts as he saw them but history of our world as we know it now.

Mr. Smith trained and taught Martial Arts for more than 50 years to thousands of people, for the past 27 years taught a free Tai Chi class every Saturday morning to the general public.

Mr. Smith’s pioneer writings on the Martial Arts ignited a flame in the mind and hearts of so many practitioners and teachers of the Martial Arts. I have Mr. Smith to credit for exciting a naïve 19 year old from a country town to fly to and live in Japan to study

Japanese Karate and Chinese Kung Fu. Subsequently I created a career from this experience and have enjoyed a blessed journey, training, researching and teaching Martial Arts.

One of the highlights of my life was spending a delightful afternoon with Mr Smith during a U.S teaching tour with Chen Yun Ching in the fall of 2006, he enthralled me with stories and insights into so many subjects. He most generously gave us never seen before footage of Chen Pan Ling performing in Taiwan and treated us to a delightful Chinese lunch.



Seated: Mrs Alice Smith & Mr Robert W Smith with Chen Yun Ching and James Sumarac - Asheville USA 2006

You were more than the world's leading authority on Martial Arts, you were one of nature's gentlemen, and you were never afraid to speak out against injustice and unethical practices in the martial Arts, loving to poke at fraudulent behaviour. Your life experiences built a foundation that provided many of us with a reference point to the often misunderstood and too often misrepresented martial arts. You were our guiding star and your shoes can never be filled.

On behalf of the Australian Martial Arts community I say Thank you.

James Sumarac