



Goju Hall #804 of New Rochelle, N.Y.
Founder: Raymond A. Fitzpatrick

Ken "Big Ken" McGrath

1959 - 2009

Ni Dan, Nisei Goju-Jitsu
Ik Kyu, Nisei Jiu-Jitsu
Knight of 582 North Ave
Friend, Brother and Student

On January 12, 2009, I was called to the main office at work to receive a call from someone that I didn't know. It was horrific news. She identified herself and stated "Kenny was dead!" I cannot begin to explain how I felt. The closest adjective I can think of is ELECTRIFIED. I had to go home from work. While working at night on his job as a 25 year Metro North Railroad track man, he was struck in the head by an oncoming train. His death was swift and caused major road and rail delays on Friday, January 9, 2009; only 4 years after his dear friend and fellow black belt, Sharrieff Rashed, passed away in 2005.

Born in the Bronx, NY, Ken began his martial arts journey at the Hombu dojo of both Nisei Goju-Ryu and Nisei Jiu-Jitsu, located at 2411 Westchester Avenue, Bronx, NY. His first art was Jiu-Jitsu and he trained with the late, Theodore West, Sensei in 1977. He progressed to the rank of Ik Kyu and began to study Nisei Goju-Ryu with Earl Monroe, Sensei (deceased) at the "Body Place" dojo in the Bronx in 1980. It was here that we met. Ken was training with such notable Dans as Louis Jackson, Rupert O'Bryan, Nick Spennicchia, Ben Chamble and Larry Carrington. His dojo brothers were Frank Ruiz, Jr. and Frank Lanzillotta. After the closing of the "Body Place", Ken decided to join the New Rochelle Karate Institute in 1983.

When he started, Shidoshi, Warren Young was a 2nd Dan. Shihan, John 'JC' Coschigano was recently promoted to Sho Dan. The late, Thomas Jackson, Kenny Seymour and Renshi, Tracey Seymour were Brown belts. Pat Garvey, Michael Mills and Sharrieff Rashed, deceased, were Purple belts. Debbie "Legs" Casteneda, Peter Jenkins, Kevin Newberry, Bill Kostik and Richard Backer were Green belts around the time he joined. Mike Kelly, Shihan and Steve Spiro, Renshi were white belts. The above were all present at the seminar presented by Grandmaster,



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Frank Ruiz, Sr at NRKI in 1983. This group formed the nucleus of NRKI and eventually, Nisei Goju-Jitsu. Ken became a great friend of the late, Sharrieff Rashed. He acquired the nickname “Big Ken”, as he was the largest person training at the time. But he was truly a gentle giant. Ken was moved to green belt in December 1983 with Steve Spiro.

Ken competed in many tournaments of the era and did well, but his forte was dojo sparring. He really didn't care for tournament style sparring. He won his first award in 1983 as a white belt with Steve Spiro and Debbie Casteneda. Michelle DeCarlo, one of Debbie's rivals and Sensei Monroe's student, also placed. Warren Young, Larry Carrington and I swept the black belt division at the same event. He also placed at the Empire States National Tournament in 1984. By March 1985, Ken received his purple belt during a large promotion at the Metrofit Athletic Club. Master Instructors, Earl Monroe and Chaka Zulu, Sensei attended this event.

Due to circumstances in his life, Ken could not train as consistently as I would have preferred. Yet by 1987, he was elevated to brown belt and began to prepare for his black belt test. On August 8, 1993, I promoted Ken and Frank Lanzillotta to Sho Dan Ho. Sensei Monroe attended his promotion. He was promoted to Ni Dan in 1997. I last saw Ken on September 20, 2009, when we all paid tribute to Earl Monroe of Nisei Goju-Ryu. He spent the whole day with me.

Today, he is served by his wife, Alberta, his twin sons, Kurt and Karl McGrath, his daughter and Grandson, Sean, Sensei, dojo brothers and sisters. Ken has over 130 friends paying tribute to his memory at a dedicated Facebook group page called, R.I.P, Kenny Heavy Metal McGrath.

Frater Infinitas (Brothers Forever)
Submitted by,
Raymond A. Fitzpatrick, M.C.S.
Iemoto, Nisei Goju-Jitsu

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