



Professor Nicholas R. Cerio

The Man, the Myth, the Legend!

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On July 9, 1936, a child was born who grew up to be one of the most recognized and influential people in the Kenpo/Kempo world. That man's name is Nicholas Raymond Cerio. Professor Cerio was born in Boston, Massachusetts. At a very young age, he took on many odd jobs to raise money to help support his family. At the age of 10, he moved with his family to the Federal Hill district of Providence, Rhode Island. During his early childhood, Professor Cerio was continuously getting into fights defending his 'turf'. It was in his later teens that Professor Cerio started boxing at the Federal Hill House in Providence. Boxing was a perfect match for him. It gave him the outlet to channel his aggression while starting him on the theories of angulation and continuous motion that he would endlessly refine over his lifetime. Professor Cerio's love for boxing continued on into his tour of duty with the Air Force in the mid 50's. In the Air Force, Professor Cerio would box in the lightweight division with great success. While in the Air Force, Professor Cerio got his first introduction to the art of Judo. The Professor was fascinated by Judo's intricacy and the fact that there was a science and a proven theory backing up all the movements. Thus, upon being honorably discharged from the Air Force, Professor Cerio, at age 22, began studying Judo at the YMCA in Providence under George McCabe. This relationship would continue for the next three years at which time he wanted to pursue a martial art with a heavier emphasis on fighting. In 1961, he met Ted Olson and began the study of Tae Kwon Do. Professor Cerio spoke very highly of Mr. Olsen and was very sad to be told that Mr. Olsen was no longer teaching for personal reasons. This left a large void in his pursuit to develop himself in the Martial Arts.

In 1962, he was introduced to Sensei George Pesare. Sensei Pesare had introduced the art of Karazenpo Goshinjutsu to New England two years earlier. Professor Cerio threw his heart and soul into his training with Sensei Pesare. He frequently entered tournaments for fighting in the black belt division (often as a brown belt). These tournaments would be the catalyst for his introductions to many of his later instructors. In 1966, Professor Cerio earned his Shodan (1st black belt) in Kenpo under Sensei Pesare and also opened his first school named Cerio's Academy of Martial Arts (Professor would

use this name for his school right up until the time he developed his own system). Everyone who knew Professor Cerio could easily spot his car by his license plate 'CAMA' which he kept throughout his entire life.

After earning his Shodan from Sensei Pesare, Professor Cerio broke away to continue his martial arts education. As mentioned earlier, Professor Cerio was a frequent tournament competitor. It was during this time that he met a man who was a frequent judge/referee for many of his fights. That man was Master Edmund Parker. Professor Cerio would have a long relationship with Master Parker. After being introduced, Professor Cerio and Master Parker began informally talking about Kenpo history and showing each other techniques each had learned and developed. It was at this time that Professor Cerio learned of a man that would change his life forever. That man, of course, was William Kwai Sun Chow. Professor Cerio asked to meet Professor Chow and Master Parker agreed to write a letter of introduction and set up a meeting. This part of history is unclear. Some people will say that Professor Cerio was introduced to Bill Chun, Sr. first then to Professor Chow. Others will say the opposite. This much is fact. Professor Cerio received his Shodan from Professor Chow in August 1966. He was then tested by Master Chun (a sixth dan at the time) for Shodan in August 1967 (both dates have been verified by the actual diplomas). Bill Chun, Sr. was Professor Chow's top student at this time. Professor Cerio spent one year between 1966 and 1967 training with Master Chun to earn the privilege of continuing training with Professor Chow. This privilege was granted permanently in 1967. Professor Cerio would make several trips to Hawaii over the next four years to learn everything that Professor Chow was willing to teach him. The stories of the training with Professor Chow were met with shock and disbelief. They consisted of grueling horse stance training with added weights and full power punches numbering 500 or more (if you raised up in your stance, more punches were added). It wasn't long after training Professor Cerio that Professor Chow recognized the potential that Professor Cerio had as a martial artist and a leader. In 1968, Professor Chow told Professor Cerio that he should start to develop his own system of Kenpo which would be more practical in the States. Over the next three years, Professor Cerio continued his training with Professor Chow. This training further polished Professor Cerio's fighting ability while giving him a profound respect for Professor Chow that he would carry for the rest of his life (when asked "who do you think of when you put on your belt?", Professor Cerio answered, "I think of the Professor").

In 1971, Professor Chow bestowed two great honors on Professor Cerio. First, he awarded Professor Cerio his Godan (5th black belt) making him one of Professor Chow's highest ranking students at that time. Second, he presented Professor Cerio with his belt. It was shortly after this trip to Hawaii that Professor Cerio stopped training with Professor Chow on the mistaken information that Professor Chow was retiring from teaching.

In between his visits with Professor Chow, Professor Cerio established relationships with

a number of other high caliber Martial Artists. Through his vast number of tournaments participated in, Professor Cerio met two other people with whom he would accept training from. The first was James Benko, a high ranking black belt in the Hakkoryu Jiu Jitsu system. Professor Cerio would obtain a Brown Belt from Mr. Benko in April, 1968 (Professor Cerio would continue his training in Hakkoryu Jiu Jitsu with Professor Larry Garron. Eventually earning a Shodan from Professor Garron). The second person was Mr. Ernie Lieb. Master Lieb had the fortunate experience of defeating Professor Cerio in the black belt fighting division. After the victory, Master Lieb approached Professor Cerio to congratulate him on his performance. He then opened his Gi to reveal a set of black and blue ribs, courtesy of a Professor Cerio punch, and remarked "I think we both know who really won the fight". Professor Cerio was deeply touched by Master Lieb's humility and skill and began training with him a short time after. It was Master Lieb who would introduced Professor Cerio to another of his more famous instructors, Master Tadashi Yamashita.

In 1969, Master Parker tested Professor Cerio for his Sandan (3rd black belt) sanctioned by the IKKA. The rank was also sanctioned by the American Karate Association (AKA) of which Master Parker and Master Lieb were Directors.

Professor Cerio then concentrated on his studies with Master Yamashita learning the intricacies of Okinawan weapons and Self Defense techniques. In 1970, Master Yamashita awarded Professor Cerio his Yondan (4th black belt). During a seminar in Michigan in 1973 with both Master Yamashita and Master Lieb, Professor Cerio was told that he would be testing for his Godan rank the next morning. With shock and determination, Professor Cerio trained in his hotel room preparing himself for the next days event. During the test, Professor Cerio was asked to demonstrate his self defense techniques. After dispatching three separate opponents, rendering them unable to continue, this portion of the test was over. Professor Cerio was awarded his Godan in September 1973 sanctioned by the Midwest Karate Federation.

During the mid 70's, it was a common practice for Professor Cerio to visit the local Chinese restaurant after training and teaching was over for the day. It was in this unlikeliest of places that Professor Cerio would meet one of his most respected and most feared teachers. His name was Gan Fong Chin, master of the Sil Lum Kung Fu system. Not much is known about this teacher, other than his technique, speed and power were said to be phenomenal. Professor Cerio, after training long and hard with Master Chin, would be bestowed his Hachidan (8th Dan) and title of Sifu in August 1973. After this honor, Professor Cerio started wearing his white and red paneled belt. He would alternate between wearing this belt and the one bestowed on him by Professor Chow earlier.

Throughout this time, Professor Cerio continued his long relationship with Master Parker. It was throughout these years that Master Parker advised and coached Professor

Cerio on how to establish and organize his system of Kenpo. A journey that started in 1968 with Professor Chow's urging came to reality in 1974 with Master Parker's guidance. In 1974, Professor Cerio officially proclaimed his new system to be called NCK. Professor Cerio would continuously modify, improve, and perfect his system throughout the rest of his life. His association with Master Parker also continued throughout the 80's. It was in March of 1983 that Master Parker bestowed the honor of Kudan (9th black belt) in 'Kenpo Karate', not American Kenpo as so many people have indicated. Master Parker was recognizing Professor Cerio's ability in the Martial Arts. Having not learned all of the curriculum for American Kenpo, Master Parker recognized Professor Cerio in their mutual art of Kenpo Karate.

After thirty-one years of training and devotion, Professor Cerio received two highly coveted awards in 1989. On April 22nd, Professor Thomas Burdine of the Kokonryu Bujutsu Renmei Association presented Professor Cerio with his 'Professor' title. At a banquet held in Professor Cerio's honor on September 23, 1989, Professor Burdine, this time also representing the World Soke Council, awarded Professor Cerio the title of Kaichi Yudansha Shihan. This title meant that Professor Cerio had obtained 'Above Ranking' status. The World Soke Council, after reviewing Professor Cerio's credentials, knowledge, and ability, deemed him worthy of status above that of the Dan ranking system and gave him the power to carry on his system with what ever ranking system he deemed appropriate. Professor Cerio, having great respect for the 'traditional' Kenpo ranking system, named himself Judan (10th black belt) of NCK by the power given to him by the World Soke Council.

Over the next ten years, Professor Cerio would be honored by many organizations and Halls of Fame. His devotion to his system and his black belts was tireless. He would continually give recognition to those whom he felt deserved this honor. This would not only include his black belts but many of his under ranking students as well. This is clearly evident by the number of under ranking students he included in his many videos, books, and magazines.

On October 7, 1998 at 2:50pm, the martial arts world lost a leader. Professor Cerio passed away peacefully on that Wednesday afternoon surrounded by his many friends and family members. Professor Cerio lived his life to the fullest. He never sold his reputation or his soul for monetary gain, although many people tried to convince him to sacrifice both. To Professor Cerio, his art and his reputation were all he had and everything he earned were from these two qualities that he created.

Rest in Peace Professor.....we miss you.