

Inspirational Martial Arts Stories 2003

From: www.your-martial-arts-resources.com

Phantom shapes up as unstoppable:

From: <http://www.theadvertiser.news.com.au>

(November 28, 2003):

Lethal Commonwealth heavyweight kickboxing champion Pat "The Phantom" Christofi has beaten cancer 14 times and it's clear he won't let anybody take anything from him.

He has had 14 operations, chemotherapy eight times and doctors gave the finely-tuned 95.8kg kickboxer eight months to live in 1993. He's a fighter who doesn't quit.

Christofi, 36, will face another fight tonight – this time against Melbourne's Alex Radovanov for the Commonwealth title. After beating cancer, nothing seems capable of stopping the Adelaide-based "Phantom".

"I'm a fighter right through and I never give up," Christofi, 36, said, during a break in the twice-a-day training regimen he's followed for the past four months. "They gave me a few months to live and here I am 10 years later still fighting."

Christofi heads an all-star fight night at the Magic Millions venue at Morphettville racecourse from 6pm.

Two Australian titles will be decided along with the South Pacific middleweight title fight between Adelaide warrior Vince Palumbo and Victorian Corey Krywula.

But it's the expected battle between Christofi and Serbian-born Radovanov over 10 two-minute rounds that has good judges saying this will be the biggest kickboxing event Adelaide has seen.

"I'm ripe and ready and I'm not prepared to lose what I've got (title)," said Christofi, who has been training in Melbourne and J&A Fitness Centre in Adelaide for the past four years.

"I'll stop him before we're halfway through the fight. I'll wear him down with my strength, power and aggression.

"I've come all this way to put on a good event and I'm going to put on a good show in the ring."

Christofi knocked out 143kg, 198cm Brad Hogan, of Melbourne, within 40 seconds in his last fight to notch up six successive stoppages.

A former professional orthodox boxer, Christofi uses his punching accuracy to great effect.

"I have strong legs but my hands are my back up ... and I don't miss," he said.

"Radovanov won his last six fights by knockout too so he's very strong and stubborn. His record is 36 fights for 32 wins so he's good. I'm here to fight, you better believe it."

Martial Arts Instructor, Cancer Survivor:

From: <http://www.kltv.com/Global/story.asp?S=1495154>
(October 23, 2003):

An East Texas man is using his talent for martial arts to celebrate his victory over cancer. For 20 year old Tony Splawn of Gilmer, teaching Tae Kwon Do is the best job he could ever have. What makes Splawn unique is that he's a leukemia survivor. He was diagnosed at the age of two with a rare form, he went through the treatments, and there were many times when his family was told by doctors to prepare for the end.

"There was a time when they came in and told my parents they had done all they could medically possible to save me and if I did make it I would never walk again without physical therapy" says Splawn.

Fortunately, he did make it, and he thinks it's because his future was in martial arts. And he passes on his message of hope to his students. "The adversity that he has overcome. He's mature way beyond his years and I think that has a lot to do with the kind of discipline that he's grown to develop," said student Robert Abnell.

"There's a lot of people that after they go through situations in their life, they just give up. I tell people just don't give up, just keep fighting there's always a way to overcome your obstacles" says Splawn.

In total remission for years now, he has won gold and bronze medals in U.S. nationals Tae Kwon Do competitions, but he gets his greatest thrill from teaching kids. For now, he enjoys every day as it comes.

A lifetime of judo:

From: <http://www.sfchronicle.com>
(October 17, 2003):

90-year-old Keiko Fukuda, the martial art's highest-ranked woman, still goes to the mat for her Bay Area students.

An elderly woman sits in the only chair allowed on the light green carpet of padded mats in the judo club.

It's just a metal folding chair, but her students treat her like a queen on a throne. They hang on every soft-spoken word, every wave of a hand, every approving nod or smile.

She is dressed in brilliant white: a quilted jacket with overlapping lapels over thin white pants with reinforced knees. It is her cherry-red belt, knotted loosely over her jacket, that marks her as sovereign.

The belt signifies that Keiko Fukuda, who celebrated her 90th birthday last spring, is the highest-ranking woman in the world in judo, a Japanese martial art in which technique and balance -- rather than power -- are the key to victory.

During a recent class in her San Francisco club, Fukuda watched a 22-year-old woman struggling to learn a new move -- a "side sacrifice" technique, in which the attacker drops to the ground while grasping the lapels of an opponent's uniform, rolls to one side and

tosses the opponent into a heels- over-head somersault to the mat.

In judo, an individual uses an opponent's strength, weight and momentum against the opponent.

When words and gestures failed to get an important point across, Fukuda rose slowly to her feet. She left her sturdy black cane, with its wide curving crook, resting on the mat.

In tiny, staggered steps, Fukuda moved into position in front of the student. She reached up to grab the young woman's lapels, grasping them with wrinkled hands stiff from arthritis and weakened from old judo injuries. The room fell silent. Everyone else stopped training and turned to watch.

Fukuda dropped, rolled and threw her young opponent -- three times in a row.

She then returned to her chair for the rest of the two-hour class.

"There are times when she'll do that, get up and show us something, but not too often," said student Molly Boutdy, who was learning the technique for a coming test for a higher ranking. "She can't stand up for long."

Fukuda, who speaks English with a strong accent, can be hard to understand at times. But that doesn't hinder communication with her students.

"She gets her point across," 57-year-old Vaughn Imada said with a fond laugh. Imada, who runs the San Jose Buddhist Judo Club, travels to San Francisco once a month to take Fukuda's advanced class.

Imada, who has been studying judo for 30 years, said Fukuda sometimes uses sounds, instead of words, to convey a concept.

"We listen to those sounds -- and we laugh," Imada said. "Then we think about it. Then we try the technique again and say: Oh, that's what you meant."

He said Fukuda is a strict, but patient, teacher. "She makes judo fun," Imada said. "Everyone enjoys learning from her."

Vicki Trent, now the highest-ranking student in Fukuda's club, spent 16 years driving back and forth from her home in Santa Cruz to the club in San Francisco. Finally, 11 years ago, Trent moved to the city to be close to the school and to the woman who had become her mentor.

Trent, a 48-year-old attorney who recently became a real estate agent, said the word "enlightened" comes to mind when she thinks about Fukuda, who teaches the philosophy of judo, as well as its physical techniques.

"She is a person like everybody else -- with foibles. I've certainly seen that over the years. At the same time, her awareness of the truth and the deeper meaning of life is evident in her sense of humor and her love of life, in her joie de vivre," Trent said. "That has kept me quite devoted to her as a teacher."

Fukuda, who stands a couple inches shy of 5 feet, has been teaching judo for nearly 70 years.

Fukuda, who surrendered her Japanese citizenship to become a U.S. citizen, has traveled all over her adopted country spreading the gospel of judo. She also has given seminars in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Norway and the Philippines. When she was 76, she flew to France to teach the country's top-ranked judo instructors.

The U.S. Judo Federation, which represents more than 350 clubs, gave Fukuda the red belt in 2001, in recognition of her lifelong contributions -- domestic and international -- to the martial art.

The U.S. federation has awarded only three red belts. The two other recipients were men, who have since died. The belt indicates Fukuda has reached the ninth level in judo. In the history of the 120-year-old martial art, only about a dozen people in the world have achieved a higher rank -- the 10th level.

She continues teaching today despite the ailments of old age -- Parkinson's Disease, which makes her right hand tremble like a leaf in a breeze, triple bypass surgery more than a decade ago, and aged ankles and knees.

"Her spirit and mind are carrying her through," said Shelley Fernandez, 72, a former student who invited Fukuda to live in her Noe Valley home when Fukuda landed a job teaching judo at Mills College in Oakland. Fernandez thought she might stay a year or two. That was 37 years ago.

"My mother died in 1965, and Keiko came to live with me in 1966," Fernandez recalled. "It was like my mother came back to me. Keiko has the same personality as my mother -- a joyousness about life and a warmth for people. She was God's gift to me."

Fukuda is revered as one of the last living disciples of Jigoro Kano, the founder of judo.

Kano, who opened his judo school -- known as the Kodokan -- in Tokyo in 1882, added a "Women's Section" about 40 years later. When Fukuda began taking lessons in 1935, she was one of only two dozen women in the school, which is known today as the Kodokan International Judo Center.

Kano had invited her to study judo because of her martial art lineage. She was the granddaughter of a renowned jujitsu master, who had taught that Japanese martial art to Kano.

"At that time, I was only 21 years old, being taught the ways of Flower Arranging, Formal Tea Ceremony and Brush Writing, which was customary for young ladies in Japanese society," Fukuda wrote in her 1973 book, "Born for the Mat: A Kodokan Kata Textbook for Women." "Through memories of my grandfather I felt very close to judo, even though I had never seen judo practiced before."

Fukuda's mother -- her father died when Fukuda was very young -- accompanied her to the judo school that day.

"I decided to take Judo lessons a few months later," Fukuda wrote. "My mother and brother both supported me, although my uncle opposed the idea because I was a woman. My mother's and my brother's thoughts were for me to learn, and get married to a Judoka (a judo expert) someday, but not to become a Judoka myself."

She would never marry.

"Judo is my lifetime partner," Fukuda said, speaking through a translator during a recent interview in her Noe Valley home. "Any place I go, judo is my family. Students are very nice to me. I have family all over the world."

Fukuda first visited the United States at the invitation of a judo club in Oakland in 1953. She stayed for 11/2 years. She returned to California in 1966 and traveled all over the state giving seminars.

That same year, she gave a judo demonstration at Mills College, and the school immediately offered her a job. She taught judo there for more than a decade.

During those same years, Fukuda also taught in the home she shared with Fernandez on Hoffman Street. When the number of students swelled, she moved her classes to a Buddhist temple in Japantown.

Her club, the Soko Joshi Judo Club ("The Women's Judo Club"), moved to its current quarters, at Castro and 26th streets, in 1973.

Fukuda still teaches there three days a week, offering classes for female students aged 13 and older. Her students have hailed from all over the Bay Area, including San Rafael, Berkeley, San Jose, San Francisco and Santa Cruz.

The wall above the wooden desk in the club is crowded with more than a dozen plaques from grateful students. Most begin with the words "In Appreciation".

Many more awards are stashed in her home just a few blocks away.

She has given her "Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold Rays with Rosette," a silver-and-gold medal studded with dots of ruby-red ceramic, to her brother's family in Japan. The award is one of the country's most prestigious honors for people aged 70 and older. The Consul General of Japan gave Fukuda the medal, along with a signed certificate from the Prime Minister of Japan, at a gala dinner in San Francisco in 1990.

Last week, Fukuda took home another award -- an engraved silver bowl from Tiffany. She was one of four women over age 70 who received 2003 Women of Achievement, Vision and Excellence awards from GirlSource, a nonprofit group for low-income teenagers in San Francisco.

"Too many awards, too many awards," Fukuda quietly insists when reminded she will soon receive another -- from the U.S. Judo Federation -- to add to her collection.

Fukuda's judo motto is: "Be strong, be gentle, be beautiful."

For those unfamiliar with judo, it may be hard to reconcile the words "gentle" and "beautiful" with a sport in which competitors send opponents sailing through the air and slamming to the ground.

Fukuda said the goal of judo is to be "gentle on the outside" and "strong on the inside."

In "Born for the Mat," she described training in Tokyo under a renowned judo master, Kyuzo Mifune.

"I remember clearly to this day that his grip on my Judo uniform was so gentle that I was

not aware of it," she wrote. "Still, if I made the slightest movement in an attempt to throw him, he was no longer in that position; instead, my body would be flying through the air. Prof. Mifune was small, even for a Japanese man (about 5 feet 3 inches), but his body movements were extremely speedy and it was very difficult to keep up with him, because he could foresee the opponent's movements and could forestall him ahead of time."

Fukuda is renowned for her expertise in judo "kata," a choreographed, mock fight between two people that demonstrates, in various combinations, the martial art's offensive and defensive moves.

"Through the study of Kata, one will experience the true spirit of actual fighting, and comprehend the principles of technique," she wrote in "Born for the Mat," which includes step-by-step instructions, in words and photographs, of the seven katas of judo.

Fukuda's second book will be released this spring by North Atlantic Books in Berkeley. The book, titled "Ju No Kata," focuses on a slow-motion, elegant kata whose mastery is required to enter the higher ranks of judo.

"She is a living treasure from another era," said Jess O'Brien, the publisher's martial arts editor. "Her influence on judo is widespread. She has been training so long and she is still able to find new insights into Ju No Kata -- obvious ones and subtle ones."

The book's cover photograph shows Fukuda performing a particularly difficult move, in which she is balanced on a partner's arched back. Fukuda's body tilts at a 45-degree angle to the floor, her head facing the mat, her toes pointing toward the ceiling -- a move she had to hold for several seconds.

A black-and-white photograph hanging in Fukuda's home shows her -- at 51 -- in that same gravity-defying pose, during a kata demonstration at the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo.

It was the first year in which men earned Olympic medals in freestyle judo, matches in which competitors won points for throws and immobilizing holds. Women's freestyle matches were added at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. But there is no kata competition at the international event -- a situation Fukuda would like to change.

Fifteen years ago, she established her own tournament, the Fukuda Judo Kata Championships. This year, the tournament will be held on Oct. 25 at the San Jose Buddhist Judo Club. It is expected to attract about 100 participants, including competitors from other countries.

Fukuda has also worked for many years to spread kata competitions throughout the world, said Robert Fukuda (no relation), executive director of the U.S. Judo Federation, which represents nearly 10,500 members.

"What she's trying to do is get kata competition included as part of the world championships," he said. "Then the opportunity opens up for it to become part of the Olympics. Part of her work over the years has been to get kata competitions more diffused around the world. More of the unions (there are five "unions" in the International Judo Federation) are doing it. The Pan American Judo Union is the only one that has an official kata championship."

While Fukuda's sights are set on that Herculean goal, she has no problem focusing her still-keen eyes on the parade of students who still seek her advice and appraisal.

When she attends judo seminars these days, Fukuda usually watches students from the protective comfort of a wheelchair. But she doesn't hesitate to rise out of the chair onto the mat when she sees they need help.

"It's almost like someone has hooked her up to a battery charger," Robert Fukuda said. "She comes out of the wheelchair, gets out there, demonstrates the technique and sits back down. You can see that it takes a lot out of her. But that's just how she is. She wants to help. She wants people to do it correctly. To learn the right way."

No holding back:

From: <http://www.statesman.com>
(July 17, 2003):

Six years after losing his eyesight to a bullet, William Vandry is a big winner in Brazilian jiu-jitsu

Your brain quickly scans every "Karate Kid" movie, professional wrestling match and combat video game you've ever seen, but it doesn't matter, because William Vandry can already see your next move, even though he can't quite see you. Vandry has already choked, slammed, tossed, pulled and thrown you around his Northwest Austin studio, Vandry Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, and you realize it would be easier to walk out of Fort Knox with a backpack full of gold bars than it is to actually hurt him. You're dripping sweat, your jiu-jitsu uniform, called a gi, is in shambles and you think you are losing feeling in your shoulder. So Vandry shakes your hand once again to start a match and, in an act of desperation, you dive for the 6-foot, 220-pound Pan-American champion's throat and try to choke him. Your forearm is on his neck and -- for a brief second -- you think you actually have him right where you want him.

Think again.

"Move your arm a little to the left," Vandry says. "Good. Now try to get more leverage. That's it. Now stand up more." You press all of your weight against his Adam's apple. "Oh wow. Is that it?" The next few seconds become a blur. All you remember is Vandry grabbing the collar of your gi, yanking your leg and rolling you into a ball. He's taken total control of your body and as you struggle to stop him, it's easy to forget that he is blind, or that a bullet once traveled through his brain. But then again, that's how he wants it. "I'll decline interviews because people want to portray me as some poor blind guy. I hate that," Vandry, 36, said. "I've never felt sorry for myself, so why should anyone else?" As Vandry releases you from the hold on your leg, it's you who needs a crutch. Or maybe a wheelchair. Vandry, though, looks relaxed, as if he has been lounging by a pool. "You know," Vandry says, pulling on his black belt, "they only give these things to people who know what they are doing."

William Vandry became attracted to Brazilian jiu-jitsu watching Royce Gracie, one of the famous fighting Gracie brothers, compete in the first Ultimate Fighting Championships on pay-per-view television in 1993. "As soon as I saw (Royce), I thought to myself, 'I have to learn that,'" Vandry said. He began studying in 1995 when Carlos Machado, a cousin of the Gracies, taught a seminar in Austin. Machado moved to Dallas that month to open a gym, and Vandry became one of his first students.

"From the beginning, William was very intense," Machado said. "It was becoming his love." Brazilian jiu-jitsu is a grappling art based on using leverage to overwhelm strength without

much kicking or punching, as in karate or tae kwon do. There are some take-downs and self-defense techniques, but the focus is to use submissions or chokes to win a match. The main fighting position is referred to as the guard, where a fighter lays on his or her back with legs spread apart, putting the fighter in the best position to defend or attack.

Vandry grew up in a military family. His father was a command sergeant major in the Army. He lived around the world, including Germany and Panama, before his dad was sent to Fort Hood in Killeen.

Vandry enjoyed martial arts growing up and was inspired by old Bruce Lee movies. When he met Machado, he already was a black belt in karate and kung fu. He had also studied Western boxing and muay thai. Vandry trained with Machado once a week and also taught classes at the Killeen Community Center.

He had achieved blue belt status in jiu-jitsu before he was almost killed in an argument outside a nightclub. The shooting left Vandry legally blind, but he did not let his disability end his life. Six years after being shot, Vandry won a gold medal at the Pan American games in California. He fights on a world-class level and is one of the leaders in teaching women and children the art of jiu-jitsu, but all of that almost never happened when his life was drastically changed one night.

Vandry owned Dreamstreet, a topless club in Harker Heights, outside of Killeen, about 80 miles north of Austin. Around midnight on April 22, 1997, Vandry was shot after an argument between Melvin Robinson III -- a soldier at nearby Fort Hood -- and one of Vandry's employees.

According to Vandry and reports at the time in the Killeen Daily Herald, Robinson tried to sneak into a dancer's changing room, and a bouncer -- who also was one of Vandry's jiu-jitsu students -- escorted him from the club. Robinson returned an hour later with a pistol and shot Vandry outside the front door of the club.

"He came back looking for the floorman and I went up to talk with him," Vandry said. "I figured if he wanted to fight, I would do some jiu-jitsu thing to him and it would be over . . . I never saw a flash or the bullet or anything like that. Next thing I know, I'm strapped to a bed." The .25-caliber bullet entered Vandry's head near his left temple and damaged the occipital lobes of Vandry's brain before exiting through the lower right part of his head. He has two small dime-sized indentations at both points.

Robinson, 21, was arrested and turned over to military authorities. He pleaded guilty to carrying a concealed weapon and was convicted by general court-martial of attempted unpremeditated murder. He was sentenced to seven years at Leavenworth Federal Prison in Kansas and was released last December, prison officials said.

"It doesn't bug me that he got off easy," Vandry said. "We wanted him to get life, but that didn't happen. I can't worry about it. All I know is that he'll be a young man when he gets out and I have a life sentence."

Vandry wasn't able to leave his house for eight months after the shooting, and it was more than a year until he could return to the jiu-jitsu mat. Machado drove every day from Dallas to the hospital in Temple to see Vandry and later visited him at his house.

"I knew William needed some stability in his life," Machado said. "I had to be there every day for him. Every day. He felt like he let us down, but I had to let him know that he

hadn't."

Vandry's eyes and his optic nerve were not injured, but the bullet damaged his brain's occipital lobes, located in the back of the brain, that control visual images collected by the eyes. Vandry said his vision is impaired by several blind spots. The spots are not dark, but simply areas his brain cannot process images. Vandry, though, can sense movement and can see some things. When he looks at a face, he says he can roughly see the top of a person's head and their chin. "See this napkin?" Vandry said one night during dinner, as he held it up about six inches from his right eye. "Right now I can see parts of it." He then moved the napkin across his field of vision. "All right, I can still see it . . . still see it . . . and now it's gone." The napkin was three inches from his nose. "I know it's there, but I can't see it. "(My vision) is like a vacuum that the cord has been cut in half," Vandry said. "The vacuum still works, but not at full power. Something is misfiring." Coming out of the hospital, Vandry first had to heal physically and then relearn everything he needed to in order to live a normal life. He received cane training (the cane is now on top of his refrigerator) and later a seeing-eye dog (an 80-pound Stafford Shire Terrier named Lexanna).

"I always loved to cook, and it became very hard to flip omelettes once I lost my vision," Vandry said. "I ate a lot of meals off my shoe."

The Texas Commission for the Blind, along with his family, helped Vandry back to a regular life. He is unable to drive or read anymore, but has adjusted to life with impaired vision. He retaught himself to cook, and he likes to run with Lexanna and his girlfriend in the park. Vandry has come a long way since his neurosurgeon once told him, "I think you need to think about an early retirement."

"I know what it's like to be as weak as a kitten," Vandry said. He spent the first four months after the shooting in bed. The gunshot had given him vertigo, and he could only escape the dizziness by laying on his side. "It was the worst possible feeling, but I never thought about quitting," he said. "I hate people who feel sorry for themselves. I knew my eyes were messed up, but my body would be fine, so there was no point in giving up."

After eight months, Vandry began to seriously consider returning to jiu-jitsu, and with the help of Machado, he was back on the mat one year after the shooting. "I tried to give him a training picture of things we could do," Machado said. "I always told him that he could come back, and even though he is limited, he could adapt his game." And, eventually, that's what Vandry did. He returned slowly, still with an equilibrium problem, but -- with the help of Machado -- he developed his own expression of the art that concentrated on the legs of his opponent.

He became a master of leg holds and submissions and adapted his game to better suit his abilities. Most jiu-jitsu fighters focus on the arms and neck of their opponent. Vandry developed a fighting position in which he sits like a kindergartner about to sing "Itsy-Bitsy Spider," and he attacks his opponent's legs, using other holds and submissions. "No one else fights like William," said Vandry's student, David Thomas, who finished second at last year's Pan Am Games as a featherweight for purple belts and is starting his own martial arts studio. "When you go against him, you really have no chance."

In 2000, Vandry, using his unique fighting style, returned to international competition with a fourth-place finish at the Pan American Games in Florida. It was his first competition in four years, and he complained about his finish. "Everyone thought it was great for me to be there, but I was there to win," Vandry said. "Once the match was over, I

could not wait to go back again and do better." Vandry took second place the next year in the super-heavyweight division (201-214 pounds). This year, he captured gold in the same division and became the Pan American champion for his weight. He also took second place in the open weight division, losing his final match to the defending champion, Jorge Pereira.

Along with training and competing, Vandry wants to expand his studio, which he opened when he moved to Austin in 1999. He recently added a third class each day, based on demand. He teaches classes for men, women and children.

"To have a black belt who reaches out to women is incredibly rare," said Tracey Graham, who is one of Vandry's 25 female students. "It's amazing the time he is able to give to us. There isn't anyone else who spends the time instructing women like he does."

Vandry also is working on a series of books and videotapes on jiu-jitsu. "Don't worry," Vandry jokes, "You won't see me doing infomercials on late-night TV." He continues forward with his life and with his business. That night outside his Killeen bar is a distant memory. Vandry would rather think about the people who helped him back.

Vandry earned his black belt last June in an emotional ceremony at Machado's state tournament in Dallas. "I just wanted to get the belt and get out of there," Vandry said. "Then Carlos starting talking about everything that happened and I broke up. He went through everything that happened to me in detail and it was so overwhelming."

Vandry wasn't the only one touched during the ceremony, in which he became one of the first four Brazilian jiu-jitsu black belts in Texas. "William is an inspiration to us all," Machado said. "He really is a walking miracle." Actually, more like a fighting miracle. And it's best not to disagree with him because, you know, they only give those things to people who know what they are doing.

A Matter of degree: 70-year-old enjoys black belt in karate:

From: <http://www.news-journalonline.com>
(July 12, 2003):

EDGEWATER --At age 70, Richard Schraeder still gets a kick out of life. He proved that recently when he traveled to Punta Gorda for three days of testing needed to earn a black belt in Okinawa-based Uechi-Ryu karate.

Walking down the street, one might not picture Schraeder as being able to break a board with his fist. At 5 feet 10 inches tall and weighing in at 192 pounds, the senior citizen tends to blend in with his peers. He shows all outward signs of his age -- wrinkles, liver spots and more skin than hair on his head -- but carries himself with confidence.

"I know I can defend myself and my wife. That means a lot to me," the Hacienda Del Rio resident said. However, Schraeder stresses his form of karate is about defense rather than offense. "This is not Jackie Chan or Bruce Lee," he said. "We are not here to attack anyone. When confronted, you are supposed to back off but, when you are attacked, you can stop it and defend yourself."

Schraeder found karate after moving to Southeast Volusia about three years ago from the Ocala area. Interested in staying physically fit, the retired newspaper distribution worker and his wife, Carol, started looking for a gym and found Nautilus by the Sea. Even with all

the workout equipment, it was something going on in the back that caught Schraeder's attention -- Bob Otto's karate class.

The two met and Otto, a New Smyrna Beach police officer and sixth-degree black belt, convinced Schraeder to give the sport a try, despite being more than six decades older than the youngest person in the class.

Today, Schraeder spends about 16 hours per week in training, which includes stretching, practicing his technique and sparring with his fellow students. While he concedes he does not have the strength he once did, Schraeder said karate has helped keep him flexible and makes him feel younger, especially when he is working out with his classmates.

"They cheer me on and keep me going," he said. "Bob (Otto) puts me with everyone."

Carol Schraeder said when her husband first expressed interest in martial arts, she told him to go for it but now says she did not realize the commitment the sport requires. "I thought it would be like me going to the gym," she said.

Otto said having a student like Schraeder is rare. "He is the oldest person I have ever heard of being presented a black belt," he said. Otto is not the only person in the class to hold Schraeder in esteem. His black belt training partner, New Smyrna Beach resident Hanae Chamberlain, also voiced admiration for a man who is her senior by almost five decades.

The 24-year-old said she and Schraeder encouraged each other in their quest while giving each other a few whacks.

"I whacked him because he whacked me," Chamberlain said with a smile.

"I got her with a roundhouse kick (to the hip)," Schraeder said. "Then she got me with a toe kick to the stomach."

Otto said while karate can be for anyone of almost any age, when you have a student like Schraeder, truism is reinforced. "Age does not matter," he said.

Black belt success for mum Terri:

From: <http://www.eadt.co.uk>
(June 6, 2003):

Terri Sawkins has won medals for her sport.

She received her coveted black belt in a variation of Kuk Sool - a Korean martial art - and then took part in a national tournament at Norwich Sports Village last week. There were many winners but her achievement was more remarkable than most because Terri is blind.

She has been in the sport for four years after she was hooked after a self-defence class and has progressed up the rankings and through the belts. Both her children have trained in the sport, Kristian, 16, is a blue belt and Heidi, 14, a brown belt. Terri, 45, who travels by train from Colchester to Ipswich for her classes admitted she never thought she would land her black belt.

She said: "I never intended to go for a black belt. I just want to keep going as long as I can. I didn't want to grade but they put me in and, from time to time, gradings came along." It

is exciting to get this far. I will go on with it. I don't really have ambitions but want to take advantage of things when they come along. "In 1996 I climbed Ben Nevis, I've also abseiled and water-skiied. There are loads of things I would like to do but for a single mum on benefits most are not realistic.

"On my 40th birthday I went water-skiing and last year I went swimming with dolphins. But I never thought I would get a black belt.

Terri has been blind for 23 years and admits she has never seen her children. "Perhaps it is a good thing," she joked.

Paying tribute to her instructors she said: "It is down to the instructors who have been teaching me and pointing me in the right direction. Kuk Sool Won is about commitment and they certainly have that. I do most things that everyone else does, though I don't do much sparring. "The forms and techniques, and I practise the full weapons sparring as well. "I am very grateful for the Ipswich club for taking me on.

Daughter Heidi said: "My brother started first, mum joined and then I joined. "We have gone along together though but with school work it is hard to carry on. Mum still goes every week."

Chief instructor at Ipswich is Kyo Sa Nim John Garrod, he said: "She has done absolutely brilliantly. There is a lot of hands-on because it is based on self-defence but she does all the techniques. She has overcome her disability. "I have only know her four or five months since she came over to Ipswich after training at the Colchester club but I think it is a fantastic achievement to get her black belt.

"We do practise sometimes by closing our eyes it is amazing how difficult it is. She competes with everyone else and is not left behind in any way. "We don't treat her any differently. We do have to give her a bit of space to make sure she doesn't clash with anything." "There are thousands of people training in Kuk Sool Won in the country, from Caithness down to Bristol, and as far as I am aware Terri is the only one who is blind."

Kuk Sool is a comprehensive martial arts system derived from the rich and varied martial arts techniques and traditions that have arisen in Korea through the ages. Kuk Sool is a complete martial art that is dedicated to the cultivation of mental and physical strength and well-being, and to the preservation of traditional Korean martial arts. Although its origins may be traced back to antiquity, the present Kuk Sool system was devised only recently.

Paralysed man becomes ninja:

From: Herald and Weekly Times
(February 24, 2003):

A paralysed north Queensland man has overcome his disability to become a brown belt in the ancient Japanese martial art of Ninjitsu.

Mackay hospital administrator Dan Bazin, 25, was born with Spina Bifida and lost the use of his legs in an operation when he was two years old. After trying other forms of martial arts, he took up Ninjitsu two years ago and is now one step away from a black belt.

Mr Bazin said Ninjitsu was a fluid, free-moving kind of martial art whose laws could be

adapted to accommodate his disability.

"Karate is primarily kicks and punches, Judo is known for its throws, and we use a bit of everything - it's very fluid," he said.

"You don't need to be able to do it sometimes, just to know how the principle works allows you to work around your disability and perform it anyway."

Mr Bazin uses techniques involving his arms and Japanese swords.

If others are practising a jumping move that allows warriors to minimise their profile to the attacker, he can simply take out the jump.

"In attack I would turn sideways to minimise my profile, allowing me to counteract more efficiently," Mr Bazin said.

Mr Bazin said growing up in a wheelchair was difficult and his personal breakthrough only came about four years ago.

"It took me years," he said.

"You can have as many opportunities thrown your way but if you don't want to take them, you won't."

However, Mr Bazin said participating in activities such as Ninjitsu could be a difficult choice and would not suit everyone.

"Basically (deciding to) accept the fact that I'm in a wheelchair, accept the fact that people will be able to jump and kick and I won't be able to," he said.

"But to do it nevertheless."

"There are a lot of people who are in the same situation as me or a lot worse off and they can't make that decision because they've got too much stacked against them."

The art of Ninjitsu was developed hundreds of years ago in Japan by opponents of the ruling Samurai warrior class.

Ninjitsu is sometimes translated as the "art of stealth", as warriors used a wide range of techniques to hide and fight.

It has become famous as a result of movies and television shows such as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Beverly Hills Ninja.