

Inspirational Martial Arts Stories 2005

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

'We still believe in miracles':

From: <http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/1206taekwondo05.html>

(December 6, 2005):

Year after shooting, injured victims full of love, hope

David Rueckert wasn't really dead after all.

The bullet he had tried to stop with his wrist slammed into his temple, tearing through his optic nerves and lodging behind his eye.

In the seat beside him, with blood from her own wound filling her lungs, Rueckert's fiancée, Jennifer Longdon, told a 911 dispatcher he was dead, and she was dying too. "Please tell my son that I love him," she said.

One year later, on a sunny afternoon, Longdon reached for Rueckert's hand and gently guided him to a couch he'll never see. Longdon sat next to him again, this time in a wheelchair, paralyzed. Rueckert is blind.

"There is never a day that I say, 'Oh, goody! I get to sit in a wheelchair.' But I prefer this to what could have been," Longdon said.

"We were supposed to be dead."

It was the night of Nov. 15, 2004. Rueckert, a fifth-degree black belt and four-time taekwon do world champ, and Longdon had just finished teaching classes at the studio Rueckert owned in north Phoenix.

"What do you want to have for dinner?" Longdon asked as they got in the car. They had just returned from a vacation to Fiji, and there wasn't anything in their refrigerator. So, they decided to swing by the drive-through at the Filiberto's restaurant at 32nd Street and Shea Boulevard to pick up Rueckert's favorite sandwich.

As they pulled onto an access road that would take them to the drive-through, a red truck revved its engine and sideswiped them. Longdon didn't hear the first shot.

"Get down," Rueckert said, reaching over and pulling her body underneath his. She heard more shots; two ripped into Rueckert.

The shooting stopped. Rueckert tried to drive away. His talk became gibberish and he slumped over. Two more shots were fired. A bullet slammed into Longdon's back.

The couple spent the next three months in separate hospitals. Then there was rehabilitation. They saw each other twice before they were reunited in April.

"I'm glad I'm alive, and I'm glad David is here," Longdon said. "At least we get a chance to spend the rest of our lives together."

The file on the shooting sits in the middle of Phoenix police Detective Jason Schechterle's

desk. He has five shell casings, four witnesses and a hunch. The red truck was seen parked near the Filiberto's for about 10 minutes before the shooting. But, so far, there have been no arrests. Police now are appealing to the public for tips.

"Whoever did this did a very good job," Schechterle said. But "there is not a perfect crime. Somewhere, somehow, I will find out who did this. I will not give up."

Before the shooting, Rueckert, 47, and Longdon, 45, taught tae kwon do six days a week. She was a massage therapist. He was an environmental consultant, the owner of four corporations.

Their romance stemmed from years of friendship and blossomed into an engagement. They learned to say "I love you" in five languages.

In the mornings, they would hike to the top of Piestewa Peak, share a piece of fruit and watch the sunrise.

"My life was better," Rueckert said. "The year before we were shot, it was beautiful."

Rueckert reached out for Longdon's hand. They have lost everything. The businesses, the home they once shared, even her dogs.

"It can be daunting to get up and face the day," Longdon said.

But, she said, "You get two choices. You can curl up in your bed and stay there until you die, or you can get up and get going. We have moved forward."

Their secret: "To stand up one more time than we fall down, and we do it every day," Longdon said.

"I understand that I have this challenge, but I'm going to get better and better," Rueckert said. "We still believe in miracles."

They are hopeful that science will catch up with their injuries. Maybe then, her spinal cord can be fixed along with his eyes.

Longdon dreams of dancing with her son at his wedding some day. Rueckert wants to dance with her.

For now, though, they are building a new life together. They have conquered the grocery store and will soon start renovations on a new home. Longdon just learned how to drive again, and she will start school in January to become a counselor. She wants to help others with spinal cord injuries.

Rueckert is learning Braille and how to walk with a cane. He is pursuing a doctorate in toxicology. He plans to compete again in tae kwon do, possibly this spring. He won't be able to spar anymore, but he believes he can do the solo competition, a set of 95 choreographed moves that simulate a fight.

Recently, he broke a board with his foot.

"Life goes on. So, OK, I can't see anything today. That doesn't stop life. I'm living with a woman that I love that is my soul mate. I have great friends," Rueckert said.

"What happened to us was awful, but we can't just sit here and wallow in it."

Besides, they figure, their best revenge is to build their new life even better than the one they had before.

"You always look back and think, 'I wish I could have done this different' or 'I wish I had done that different.' This is our chance," Longdon said. "Life is going to turn out really good."

"And," Rueckert said, turning toward Longdon's voice. "I will dance with you."

Disabled Learn To Karate Chop Away Depression:

From: http://news.yahoo.com/s/wesh/20051116/lo_wesh/3066317

(November 16, 2005):

Mike Misner seems like any other ordinary guy, but he's much more. Each week, he performs outstanding personal acts of kindness.

Each week, Misner does his best to inspire and empower Central Floridians with disabilities to achieve things they never thought possible, WESH 2 News reported.

That's what makes Misner this week's Jefferson Award Hometown Hero.

Misner teaches a program called Adaptable Karate. Karate is a sport he took up 28 years ago. He stuck with it and ascended to the ranks of black belt. It's always been important to him, so when he and his family moved to Orlando from New York a year ago, he began looking for opportunities to do more with his hobby.

He happened to tune into a radio broadcast featuring a man named David Ring. Ring was born with cerebral palsy. Both his parents passed away before he was 10. He felt his life was over.

Other kids and even adults made fun of him and treated him like an idiot. Ring withdrew from life. Misner listened as Ring explained how he turned everything around. A big part of that was a chance encounter with martial arts.

Misner understood how karate built his own self-esteem and was intrigued with whether it would work for those with disabilities. He began to practice karate from a wheelchair so he could gain a better understanding of what they could and could not do. And he began to adapt his teaching to fit anyone's capabilities. He called it Adaptable Karate.

"It's not physical, somebody kicking someone's butt in a movie, that's not what it's about," Misner said. "A lot of it is the voice inside your head that says, 'I'm too short or I'm too stupid or I can't do this.' You're defeating that, giving self-esteem."

He had no trouble seeking out an organization to work with. Quest is dedicated to improving the quality of life of the disabled in Central Florida. Misner began by giving up his lunch hour at Northrup Grumman once a week to teach a class. The results were encouraging right off the bat.

Aside from the medical and physical benefits, those who participated said they saw improvements in discipline, control, an increase in the speed of thought processes, self-

development, fitness, confidence, relief from stress, self-defense, and they had fun.

Misner has made a positive impact in many lives and has the potential to reach hundreds more through his selfless efforts to bring karate classes to the disabled community. Future goals include having an Adaptable Karate training facility, and expanding the program to other cities.

"What I'm trying to do is see this program in different cities, maybe as part of Special Olympics," Misner said.

He's working on a wheelchair instruction video to help raise money to purchase athletic wheelchairs to use in his classes.

For more information, visit www.questinc.org.

Students with challenges find niche in martial arts class:

From: <http://www.saratogian.com/site/news.cfm>
(November 14, 2005):

SARATOGA SPRINGS -- Every time Rose King sees her 6-year-old son Alex throw kicks and punches, dressed in his white tae kwon do robe, she finds it hard to believe that only a month ago she'd almost given up on finding the right sport for him.

Alex has autism. Sometimes he stumbles over his words. He finds it hard to remember things if they are not repeated and taught slowly.

King tried different programs, but neither baseball nor hockey worked out for him.

'These kids learn, but they learn differently,' King said. 'Coaches don't understand him or they don't have the patience. They need a little more attention.'

Then King discovered the Cutting Edge's Tae Kwon Do program for kids with autism. Alex fit right in.

'It's a great exercise,' King said. 'He loves it. He practices the forms at home all the time.'

Cutting Edge Tae Kwon Do offers two special classes for individuals with disabilities in addition to its regular courses.

Alex attends a Saturday class for children with autism. On Thursday, Brian Miller, the center's owner and head instructor, teaches 10 adults from the Saratoga County ARC.

All students have different physical and mental challenges, including developmental disabilities and partial cerebral palsy.

'The principles of martial arts can help anybody,' Miller said. 'It instills confidence. It doesn't matter if you are in a wheelchair or if you have other disabilities.'

One of the students in Miller's Thursday class uses a wheelchair. Another leans on a walker, but no one is left out. While some practice kicks, mobility-impaired students train in hand moves, blocks and punches.

Just like all other classes, students start with a bow of respect and go through a series of punching, kicking and blocking exercises.

The only thing Miller excludes from this particular class is sparring, a traditional element of martial arts training.

'We try to minimize physical contact for safety reasons,' he said.

Lisa Przewlocki said her favorite moves are the kicks. She cries triumphantly every time her leg hits the plastic target.

'I just scream out,' she said. 'I can't help it. It just makes you feel good.'

All of Miller's students get the same tests and exams. A few weeks ago, Miller's adult ARC class passed their first exam and replaced their beginners' white belts with yellow ones.

'We just do it at a slower pace,' he said. 'I wouldn't let them test until I think they are ready. Martial arts are a process. It does not come overnight.'

Miller started training when he was 7 and got his black belt at 11. At the age of 12, he competed in the World Martial Arts Festival in St. Petersburg, Russia.

After he earned his degree in psychology and art from Albany University, he got a job with Saratoga ARC, where he worked with people with disabilities for three years.

Miller started the programs for people with disabilities about five months ago as a way to combine his martial arts skills with his interest in psychology.

Aubry Crossan, the ARC daytime aide, who brings the group to the class, said she has noticed positive changes in the students' behavior.

'Everyone's self-confidence has improved,' she said. 'They got to bring their white belts home and they were so proud.'

Now even the one student, who refused to do the kicks in the first week is not afraid to try them any more, Crossan said.

Part of that is a result of Miller's patient and persistent style of teaching. When students follow his instructions, he encourages. When they step off the wrong foot, he repeats the instructions until they get them right.

'Patience is definitely a skill you have to develop,' he said. 'I tell every student in this program they are not allowed to say: 'I can't.' I just don't give up on them.'

Martial art is life-altering for blind couple:

From: http://www.denverpost.com/ci_3212807?rss
(November 14, 2005):

This is a story of chance meetings and second chances, of love and honor, discipline and respect. And taekwondo.

Asked to speak at a fitness convention in Longmont in 1999, Hung Tran, the owner of

Tran's Martial Arts & Fitness Center there, talked to the crowd forcefully.

"I spoke about how they can take action in their life, that they are never too old to do things," Tran, now 37, recalled recently. "I told them I'd be willing to give a free membership for a year to anyone willing to take their life back."

Soon, he had two new clients: a married couple, Tom and Barb Fletcher. Both were hitting 50. Both were out of shape. And both have been blind since birth.

Today, the Fletchers are working with Tran toward achieving their black belts. For now, Barb Fletcher sports a blue sash around her waist, two colors away from her goal.

Tom Fletcher, who wears red, is one color away. Both of them say taekwondo changed their lives.

"This is more than martial arts and being fit," Tom Fletcher said. "You're more calm about your surroundings and your world."

The best part, his wife said, "is being able to feel safe and having a way of defending yourself. I think everybody should take some type of self-defense. You put on a confident air, hold your head up."

They didn't always feel that way. Nor did their instructor.

"We came to this country in 1975, refugees from the Vietnam War," Tran said of his family.

His father raised all five children as a single parent, working as a bagger at King Soopers near their home in Fort Collins.

The family lived on food stamps and in government housing, Tran said, and he often encountered hostility.

"I got picked on and beat up almost all my life in this country," he said.

Then an older brother invited him to watch taekwondo. The brother had been taking classes from an instructor who taught him in exchange for him cleaning the school.

Soon, all five children, three boys and two girls, were taking classes, all in exchange for cleaning the school.

"That's a gesture I remember to this day," said Tran, whose siblings own four other locations of Tran's Martial Arts & Fitness Center. "So we have a scholarship program."

And that's how he met the Fletchers.

His first day of class, Tom Fletcher recalls, "I literally got sick to my stomach. I walked out on the mat and thought, 'What am I doing here?'"

Growing up, he said, "I was very short, very timid," and the object of scorn from some classmates.

He also struggled with a brutal reality: "I was a ward of the state and molested by a foster parent."

Slowly, deliberately, Fletcher said, Tran worked with him and his wife, painstakingly maneuvering their hands, arms, feet and legs to form every move required to learn taekwondo.

"He's so patient," Barb Fletcher said, "and he teaches us step by step, and we go over it and over it. He has so much discipline and respect."

The combination, they said, empowered them.

"As a child, I wouldn't fight. I would just freeze," Tom Fletcher said. "Now, I have enough confidence to do something, but I'll do my best to make sure it doesn't get to that point."

The students are also teachers.

"I'm learning, too, as we go," Tran said. For his advanced red belt, Tom Fletcher is required to run 2 miles in 20 minutes, Tran noted, so they are learning to run together using a tether.

"The best thing I've learned is patience," Tran said. "They're always positive. If I say, 'No, you need to do it this way,' they'll smile at me. I can't get frustrated with them."

Others speak of that same energy.

"They're always there with that positive attitude," said Monica Hall, an instructor at the Longmont Tran's location and owner of Active1 Self-Defense. Hall, 42, who has worked with the Fletchers at Tran's in the past, said she considers them role models.

"They always have a smile, an encouraging word."

Tran agreed that others can learn from the Fletchers.

"If those guys are willing to step out of their comfort zone and do things they are not comfortable with, none of us have an excuse."

Fighter wins world title:

From: <http://www.greeleytrib.com/article/20051103/SPORTS/111030089>
(November 3, 2005):

Nothing can scare Greeley's Mike Bevins away from a challenge. After all, the 45-year-old Greeley man has escaped death by electrocution and lived to tell about it. So facing the world's best in the sport of karate isn't about to intimidate him.

Bevins proved that at the Wado International Karatedo Federation (WIKF) 2005 World Championships Sept. 28-Oct. 2 in Plano, Texas. Bevins took home his first world title in the sport, taking the gold medal in the Veteran Male Open Kilo Kumite division.

What had to be a lot more scary for the lineman with Xcel Energy in Greeley was going back to a job that nearly killed him 16 years ago.

In January of 1989, Bevins was working as a lineman, repairing power lines for a utility company in Florida. While working on the last power pole of the day, he noticed a woodpecker hole that needed to be patched and sent the apprentice he was training that

afternoon back up in the bucket on the truck to fix it.

While moving the arm of the bucket truck they were using, the apprentice accidentally hit a 7,200-volt primary line with the lower boom of the bucket.

At the time, Bevins was inside the truck and had his hands on the controls that operate the stability legs up on the truck, causing him to be electrocuted.

"I knew he got into something, but I didn't know what," Bevins said. "But I was completely taken over by electricity."

He couldn't pull away. He couldn't do anything. A high-pitched noise kept intensifying in his head making him feel like it was going to explode. His head was completely arched back and his eyes rolled back into his head. His feet shot straight out and pulled him into the truck.

Finally, the apprentice realized something was wrong when he blew an 80-amp fuse, which sounded like a cannon going off and stopped the electrical surge.

It was the last thing Bevins remembered. His apprentice rushed to his aid and found Bevins nearly dead. He was black and blue, had no heart beat and wasn't breathing. So the apprentice performed CPR while a neighborhood woman called 911.

After about the fifth or sixth time of performing CPR, his apprentice brought him back to life. Bevins awoke screaming and holding his chest, trying to catch a breath. He calmed down, but started crying uncontrollably. Then he was back to normal.

"Then I ended up trying to calm him down, cutting up jokes and everything," Bevins said of his apprentice.

Bevins came away with burns on the bottom of his feet, his elbow, his finger and a hole the size of an egg on his shoulder. He spent five days in a Tampa Bay hospital burn center, but felt blessed to walk away without any lasting effects.

"Like I tell people, God has got a reason for me being here on this earth because I was gone," Bevins said. "That was it for me."

Still, the incident was a life-changing moment for Bevins. At the time his competitive life was split between doing Joju karate and participating on the southeastern rodeo circuit as a bull and saddle bronc rider. He was doing both, but he wasn't as successful as he wanted to be in either sport.

So he quit rodeo all together and focused on karate. He met Suzuki Tatsuo, the world's foremost expert in the art of Wado-Ryu karate at a fighting seminar in Florida.

"I was just amazed," Bevins said. "He was 60-something years old and just fast and crisp and just making fools of people."

Bevins was so impressed, he quit the style of karate he was doing and asked Suzuki if he could join his organization. He went to Japan where he studied at a university with others in the art of Wado-Ryu.

"It is nothing like any other style because a lot of the footwork and a lot of the body-

shifting movements come from swordsmanship," Bevins said. "It comes from Jujitsu and is incorporated in Wado."

It turned his career around. His first year doing Wado-Ryu, he made it as an alternate on the WIKF U.S. national team and by the second year became a member of the team.

Since becoming a member of the U.S. team, he has traveled around the world competing. He has been to four WIKF World Championships, but before this, the best he had done was a silver medal in the 1995 Pan American Games and a gold medal in the team championships last year at the Pan American Games in Puerto Rico.

However, before this year, he was competing in the 18-34 age group against much younger kids because he never wanted to compete with the "older guys."

This is the first year he has competed in the 35-and-older age division. He finally got the world title that had eluded him. He also helped the U.S. team medal for the first time, winning the bronze.

"I have always said I am a late bloomer, I am getting better with age," Bevins said. "My wife says I am possessed."

While his wife Linda "Lynn" Bevins, 42, said that her husband is very nice person who will socialize with anyone and is "very outgoing," he does take on a different persona when he is competing.

"When he is fighting, he has got a whole different kind of mean face on him," she said. "When he is fighting, he is always in focus and in tune with what he is doing. Sometimes he doesn't even seem like the same guy to me."

These days, though, Bevins plans to compete less. He wants to get more into personal training, teaching young people the art of Wado-Ryu. He is starting his own Ichiban Karate Club that will meet from 7-8:30 p.m. every Monday and Thursday at Northridge High School once registration is completed.

Bevins has done personal training before with athletes, including Brad Pyatt, the Indianapolis Colts wide receiver and former University of Northern Colorado standout.

"I hope I can help kids and not waste time with their training because there are so many factors in good training."

However, he said those who join the club should be prepared for the tough training needed to learn Wado-Ryu correctly.

"It is not a game of tag. It is not a fighting game where you wear feet pads, shin pads, head gear, big long gloves and chest protectors," Bevins said. "The only thing you wear in this competition is knuckle mitts to keep from cutting your opponent."

Physically Challenged, but an Expert in Karate, Boxing!:

From: <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com>
(October 26, 2005):

This man may be physically challenged, but he is a karate player and a boxer.

The inability to speak since birth did not deter Jhalakraj Koirala from taking up what he liked most. And at 33 now, he trains young people the two sports. The trainees call Koirala, a resident of Walling municipality-8, Devasthan, Lato Guruji (a teacher who cannot speak).

Koirala, who has passed the SLC exams and proudly holds a black-belt in karte is not only a trainer but a source of inspiration for the yuonsters that take lessons from him.

Over 300 pupils, including girls, who took lessons on the two sports from him have now mastered the arts and some of them are currently serving the Indian military.

He currently trains about 200 young pupils.

When it comes to conversing with others, he uses the sign language. "I have no job as such, but am earning about Rs 5,000 a month," he scribbles the words in a sheet of paper.

One of his best friends Sunil Regmi says: "I have never seen such a fine person in my life. Koirala is speechless, but he is also clever." Koirala took his own lessons in the sports in Narayangarh in the year 1989. He has won over 50 prizes and various organisations have honoured him. He is also seeking help from the National Sports Council to train rehabilitated drug addicts in the area.

"It will be easier to impart training after the construction of a hall. I have received permission from the municipality to train students in the hall," Koirala says.

Lincoln boy kicks cerebral palsy, works toward black belt:

From: <http://www.journalstar.com>

(October 25, 2005):

Go ahead, try to knock Mark Yuen down. Think you can do it?

The kid's got two bum legs, eyes that don't see straight and a shunt buried in his head.

When you hear his story it sounds like a butterfly with a burst of adrenaline could knock this middle-schooler to the floor. Heck, he doesn't even need your help. He'll fall down on his own.

He'll be running around the dojo one minute and the next he'll be on his back, like Dempsey, down for the count.

But, guess what? Mark gets up.

There's a Japanese saying: Fall down seven times. Get up eight. That's what the head of his karate school says Mark does.

How many times has Mark fallen down? You don't have enough fingers. Mark is 12. He's had surgery 11 times.

He was adopted from an orphanage in the Philippines when he was 16 months old, a black-haired toddler with cerebral palsy.

For 6 years, he's worked and worked and worked to get here — standing in the middle of his dojo at the Okinawa Karate Center on 58th street.

He could have quit. Lots of times he could have quit. He didn't. Two mornings a week the sixth grader wakes up before the newspaper hits the front porch.

Karate class starts at 6. Mark sets his own alarm, no one needs to nag him to get up. His mom, Sharon, goes with him. She and his dad, Gary, are there when their boy falls.

They know it's hard. They know something else. They know he can get back up.

A few weeks ago Mark dropped band. He flat out refused to keep playing the baritone. His mom had to give up the dream her boy would one day perform in the marching band.

"That wasn't Mark's dream," she says. Mark wrote about his dreams and his battles.

In karate I have fought several battles. ... My eyes can't focus straight every time I do a move ... my feet won't always position right ... my kicks are small ... In life I have also fought battles ... living in fear of when my shunt will shut down ... if I don't have surgery in time I might die ... fear is a battle that I've had with my surgeries ...

A week after surgery there's Mark, back at the dojo in his wheelchair. Then he shows up on crutches, battling back, bit by bit.

"He's a breath of fresh air," his karate teacher Steve Saathoff says. This is the kid who tried to stuff a fake rat in Saathoff's gym bag as a prank, the kid who has a neon smile and black hair that sticks up like a wire brush.

"He'll never be the star of the basketball team or the football team," Steve says, "but this is something he can do."

Out of a thousand kids who start out in karate, maybe 10, no maybe five, will make it this far.

When Mark was 5, this place was his physical therapy office, the dojo was smaller, down the strip mall. Every time he left his therapy appointment he'd walk by and look inside.

Mom can I try this? No. Mom can I try this? Mom can I try this?

He was 6 when she said yes. At first it was fun. And then it got harder, each belt harder and harder than the next. The work was worth it.

"It's pretty cool," says Mark. "Whenever I tell someone how far I am their jaw just drops."

Thursday night the dojo is full; all around the edges, people sit watching.

Five men are here to test for their black belts. Five men and one boy. The boy has two bum legs, eyes that don't see straight and a shunt buried in his head.

In an hour, he will have his first-degree black belt. They call it shodan. To begin. There are 10 degrees of black belt beyond this.

I will always have battles in life and in karate. I will face battles with a positive attitude and courage. I will not give up. I will continue to progress towards tenth-degree black belt ...

Fall down seven times. Get up eight. Go ahead, try to knock him down. Watch Mark Yuen

get back up.

Sunday Profile: Karate Instructor Frank Thomas:

From: <http://www.mlive.com>

(October 9, 2005):

"C'mon," Frank Thomas barks at his students. "Hips square. Elbows up."

"Do not kick your leg out as your knee is coming up," he continues. "Do not land like a pregnant yak." Then, as Thomas is apt to do, he finishes with an unexpected flourish. "Land like a butterfly," he says with as much serenity as he can muster.

He then races across the room so he can observe from another angle. Or, more precisely, he motors there.

Since 1994, Thomas has been in an electric three-wheeler.

He teaches karate without using his legs, a job made easier by the fact he has spent his life achieving the unachievable.

He was born with cerebral palsy, resulting in weakness on the right side of his body. Still, he has been a student of karate since the age of 15, studying under the best of the best.

These days, instead of demonstrating the kicks, blocks and punches, he shouts the commands, eager to point out the slightest misstep or imperfection.

"Between your block and your punch, I could have a seven-course dinner," he deadpans to one sweating student. And "One must not be a bouncing ball when landing. One must be a rock."

Thomas, 57, holds court three days a week at Xtreme Fitness & Tanning in Coopersville, his gruff voice booming above the "aye"s and "hi"s shouted by students as they practice techniques.

"It was easier going to boot camp than karate class," says former student Chuck Palmer, of Muskegon.

"I've seen him send somebody out in the snow to do push-ups," adds Xtreme Fitness owner Janet Roberts.

But she also has watched as 4- and 5-year-olds in his class for kids greet him with toothy grins and big, big hugs.

"When she asked me to teach kids, I said 'Oh my God, not kids. I make my grown-ups cry,' " Thomas says.

Later, he admits, "I love it when I say 'great job' and their eyes light up like headlights. These are great things."

Karate is everything to Thomas. And not just any ol' karate. Japanese Shotokan karate -- the traditional self-defense style that stresses how to kick high and punch hard -- is his zenith, his touchstone, his pinnacle.

He worked as an electronics technician at Muskegon Community College for 15 years and, earlier in his career, as a broadcast engineer for radio stations in South Haven, Jackson and LaPorte, Ind. But you won't find photos of co-workers or trinkets from the office around his small home in Apple Carr Village, a mobile home park in Muskegon.

Instead, a photo of Shotokan master and author Hidetaka Nishiyama hangs in his living room, surrounded by his certificates of achievement and a diploma announcing his ascension to yondan -- a rare and prestigious rank for black-belt Shotokan karate instructors.

"I've produced two black belts since I've been in this chair," he says as he circles his living room in his Amigo three-wheeler.

Thomas, who was born in Grand Haven, was deprived of oxygen during a difficult birth. The oldest of Art and Bess Thomas' three children, he walked with a limp and was "a little spastic," he says, but didn't let the weakness on his right side slow him down.

"I drove motorcycles. I did all kinds of things. I never paid any attention to it," he says of his disability. "I never listened to other people. I had my own drummer."

He and his siblings worked with his dad at the family business, Thomas Grocery in Grand Haven.

"Dad never let me take sports because I had cerebral palsy, but I heard about this thing called karate, and I read a book called 'Karate: The Art of Empty-Hand Fighting,'" Thomas recalls. The book was written by Nishiyama, who Thomas later met and trained under.

With the book as his guide, he practiced the kicks, punches and techniques it described.

"Everybody thought I was nuts. They'd wonder, 'Why's a handicapped person trying to use karate?'" he recalls.

He found instructors in Grand Haven and Grand Rapids in the early 1960s and trained in several types of karate -- Shotokan, Tae Kwon Do and Shorin Ryu -- until he graduated from Grand Haven High School in 1966.

Three years later, fresh from the now-defunct Elkins Institute of Radio Technology in Chicago, he was hired as a disc jockey and engineer at AM radio station WJOR in South Haven.

And he secured his first "dojo" -- a place to teach karate. He ran classes through the South Haven Recreation Department and performed at the local Blueberry Festival.

As he moved about the region, he introduced Shotokan karate to LaPorte and Kingsford Heights, Ind. He trained with one of the best, Shojiro Sugiyama, who is credited with bringing Shotokan karate from Japan to the Midwest.

"You never learn karate for yourself," Thomas says. "You learn it for older people, for the handicapped and for those who are being abused. So if you learn something for yourself, it's a bonus."

While pursuing a rank of shodan -- first-degree black belt -- Thomas learned a little something about his own never-say-die attitude.

Four times in the 1970s and '80s, Thomas appeared before Sugiyama and other certified experts on a testing board in Chicago, demonstrating the craft he had honed to near perfection. Four times Sugiyama, who had veto power over the board's decision, shot him down.

"When an instructor said to him, 'You'll never make it,' that just made him push harder. He's always been like that," says Thomas' son, Josh.

"He denied it because he thought I'd quit," Frank Thomas adds.

Despite his disability, Thomas received no special treatment.

"There was no changing of the moves, no nothing. What was expected from me was also expected of everybody else," he says.

Quit? No way.

"Even though you get the heck kicked out of you, you continue," he says.

So he did.

In 1985, after more than 25 years of training, he received the rank of shodan from a similar board in St. Louis.

"I cried," he says. In fact, he still tears up when he thinks about it.

"But don't say I'm sentimental," he quips.

Three years ago, that same American Shotokan Karate Alliance board in St. Louis awarded him the rank of "yondan," which is among the highest available for an instructor. That test, taken from a wheelchair, involved instruction, answering questions about technique and a thesis. His writing, of course, was about teaching karate from a wheelchair.

So how does Thomas teach karate from a wheelchair?

"Very well, thank you," he says with a smile. He is relentless as he zooms back and forth across his dojo at Xtreme Fitness.

"Stand at attention," he demands of one student. "You look like a cork, up and down, up and down. Power transfers in a straight line. It doesn't like to go up and down ... and especially around corners," he quips to another.

"Yes, sensei," the men respond, using the Japanese term for "instructor."

Thirty-seven-year-old Rick Becker, who has taken karate since he was a child, says the class provides an escape from the pressures of everyday life. Long ago, someone told him karate "gives the fallacy of control over the world," he says.

"Everything is so structured and has rules. In each class there are new things to conquer," says Becker, a school psychologist in Wyoming.

"My first instructor was Japanese. He spoke broken English and used few words. Frank is kind of the opposite. He can't physically do that much anymore, so he uses words for

everything.

"There are things I get from him that I never got from other people," Becker says.

Chris Hollowell, 19, of Grand Rapids, is a first-degree black belt -- a shodan, thanks to Thomas' training. Steve Hollowell, Chris' dad, dragged Thomas out of retirement in 1999 to help his son make the Junior Olympics. Hollowell finished as high as seventh in one competition there.

"I went looking for a sensei to teach my son. I found a sensei and a friend," says Steve Hollowell. "Not everyone can do what Frank does. I think he's one of the best in the country."

"He'll chew you up and spit you out," says Chril Hollowell. "I think if he'd been my instructor when he was still walking, I would have quit -- or else I'd be a lot better."

Thomas swears he never put a student through anything he hasn't been through himself.

Spinal compression, which is a buildup of calcium in the spinal column, forced Thomas into a wheelchair in 1994. The degenerative condition isn't uncommon for those with certain types of cerebral palsy.

At the same time, he and his ex-wife each wanted custody of their two children, Josh and Megan, what he calls the most important fight of his life. They got joint custody. Josh is 21, Megan's 18. She and her young son live with Thomas. They're his best and more important "trophies," he says. "They are alive and well and are productive citizens."

When he was no longer able to walk, Thomas spent a few months at Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital in Grand Rapids to learn about life in a wheelchair.

He was no stranger to the place. As a child, he was there during his five surgeries to improve leg function. He recalled a military-like setting with beds lined up in neat rows and patients wearing identical clothing.

"Things had changed a lot since then," he says. "We had fun."

One day, when he was bored, he sat outside and panhandled, joking with passersby he wanted to use the cash for line-dancing lessons. "I got about 25 bucks before security shot me down. I took the money, split it up with the guys, and we had dinner."

Today, he takes prescription medication to ease the shakes and pain associated with spinal compression. He no longer drives his van, equipped with a ramp for his Amigo, because he has frequent and severe muscle spasms.

"But it's better than leprosy, right kid?" he jokes.

Chris Hollowell, his dad, and other students get behind the wheel and drive him the 23 miles from Muskegon to Coopersville for karate classes three times a week.

Thomas makes ends meet through federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments and an occasional drafting or electronics job.

Last winter, Xtreme Fitness owner Roberts called Thomas at the suggestion of one of his

former students to see if he would teach a few classes, including a class for kids.

"He said he was afraid he'd scare the children so he'd have some of his students teach that class," Roberts recalls.

But the kids took to him immediately.

"We've benefited from having Frank, but I think Frank has benefited from having somewhere to teach karate and to work with the children," she says.

It's true, Thomas says.

"The kids have taught me how to grow as a human being. They try so hard, and they do so well," he says.

And the adults ... well, he dreams of the day he can wheel his way onto a beach so he can bark his orders at them as they battle to keep their balance in the currents of Lake Michigan.

"There would be wonderful stance training in the water. And I could make them run up and down a sand dune," he says with a smile.

"If I can find a way, baby, they're mine."

Karate helps hyperactive youngsters:

From: <http://morningsentinel.maintoday.com/news/local/2020492.shtml>
(October 5, 2005):

Winslow -- Stormy Wentworth lived up to his given name.

The 9-year-old from Burnham, diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, drove his parents to the brink of insanity with his manic energy and lack of self-restraint.

Nicole Wentworth said the situation grew worse when her son entered kindergarten.

"At this point he was 5," she said. "We didn't know what to do. He wouldn't do as he was told. He ran the household, not mom and dad. It was all Stormy."

But today Stormy is more settled. He earns A's and B's at school and will wake early at times to clean his room and make his own breakfast before his parents get up.

His transformation, his mother said, has everything to do with an ancient form of self-defense. Karate, she said, has helped him deal with his demons.

"I think it was the interactions with the other kids, but also the movements and exercises they do," she said, "because it helps him unwind and get his energy out in a positive way instead of a negative way."

Stormy takes classes twice a week at Huard's Ju-Jitsu & Karate Inc.'s studio on Outer Clinton Drive. He isn't the only child diagnosed with ADHD or attention deficit disorder enrolled.

Instructor Mark Huard said that in recent years he has received an increasing number of calls from parents who see the martial arts as a way to help their children combat those disorders.

Huard said he has seen vast improvements in the behavior of such students that he and other instructors have taught.

Dr. John Salvato, medical director of the Edmund Ervin Pediatric Center at MaineGeneral Medical Center, acknowledges that the martial arts can be beneficial to children with ADHD or ADD.

Salvato, however, is quick to stress that medication remains the most effective treatment for the conditions and, depending on the severity of the case, can be critical to helping a child function successfully in society.

A child with ADD, with or without hyperactivity, tends to be inattentive, impulsive and distractible. Salvato said if any one of those qualities is not present, the diagnosis does not apply.

Along with medication, Salvato said, many other strategies can be used to help children with these conditions, from sports involvement to heavy school and parental support.

The martial arts, he said, are ideal activities for such children, as are swimming, gymnastics and most other pursuits that are individualistic in nature with more intimate instruction than typical team sports.

"The advantage of those sports, particularly the martial arts, is that class sizes are typically small," Salvato said. "You are talking about a low teacher-to-student ratio."

Geneva and Joel Eldridge said their ADHD-afflicted son, Adrien Tourtelotte, 9, has benefited dramatically from taking karate at Huard's.

"He was our daredevil," Geneva Eldridge said. "He had no sense of fear, no sense of consequences and endless energy. The no fear is what petrified me the most."

The Eldridges still have Adrien on medication and see karate as a complement to that treatment, not a replacement for it.

Still, they are delighted with the effect the twice-weekly training has had on their son.

"He is so concerned about doing just the right thing and being respectful," Geneva Eldridge said. "He is always thinking what Sensei (teacher) Mark (Huard) would say."

In Stormy's case, medication proved to be a mixed blessing. Nicole Wentworth said it tamed his behavior but also caused him to be zombielike.

"You could handle him," she said, "but it was like he was not even there."

Three years ago, the Wentworths took Stormy off the medication, and Stormy came back in all his fury.

"We were ready to pull out our hair," Nicole Wentworth said.

That situation continued until last year, when some friends suggested they put Stormy in a martial arts program. Word had begun to spread about the potential benefits.

The Wentworths figured it was worth a try. What resulted far exceeded their expectations.

"We have noted such a big improvement in his attitude and outlook," Nicole Wentworth said. "His respect level toward us has changed dramatically."

Stormy talks earnestly about his ambitions in karate, progressing through the various belts that signify more advanced skills.

"I like that when I come to do it, I get to learn new parts of the martial arts," he said.

"I really like it a lot. I'm hoping to stay in it long enough to be a 10th-degree black belt."

Salvato said karate helps children such as Stormy stay in equilibrium through its methodical, predictable routines and incremental reward system.

Huard said at their school they give ribbons as well as belts to children so that the rewards come more often. He also makes a point, he said, to keep students with ADHD or ADD as busy as possible.

If he needs a kicking pad or some other piece of equipment, Huard said he sends those children to do the fetching.

Along with keeping them occupied, such chores tell Stormy and Adrien that they are needed. That is another boost to self-esteem, and that alone can do wonders to improve a child's attitude, Huard said.

Nicole Wentworth said her son's commitment to karate is rock-solid. "At one point he wanted to play football, but the problem was it landed on the same day as karate," she said. "We gave him a choice, and he said 'I'm not giving up karate for nothing.'"

Blind Oceanside girl gets a kick out of karate:

From: <http://www.nctimes.com>
(September 10, 2005):

Oceanside -- Inside the Shorin Ryu Karate dojo in Oceanside, Chloe Deremiah, 5, balanced on a trampoline, kicked on command, expertly blocked punches, and deftly handled her stick-like weapons.

On the other side of the studio, Chloe's mother, Tina Woodring, sat holding her daughter's cane, beaming with pride.

"She's by far totally exceeded (my expectations)," said Woodring.

Chloe's instructor, Sensei Tina Le, agreed.

"Her focus is amazing," said Le.

Chloe, who earned her yellow belt in karate earlier this month, was born with septo-optic dysplasia, a birth defect that results in an optic nerve that is too small in diameter for light

to get back to the brain.

In Chloe's case, she has been blind since birth, something that does not seem to have stopped her from enjoying life.

"She can do anything, basically," said Woodring. "I don't want her to have any limitations."

Woodring got the idea to sign Chloe up for karate lessons when she saw a flier for karate classes at the community center on Camp Pendleton.

"I wanted her to learn to defend herself," she said.

Woodring called around to several karate dojos about enrolling Chloe in classes, but most dojos said they couldn't teach Chloe or that it would cost extra to train her.

"I think a lot of places don't want to be bothered with a child like that," said Le.

Woodring took Chloe to one of the classes at Camp Pendleton that was taught by Le and her fellow Sensei Jorge Lopez, but the other children were a distraction. Still, it was obvious Chloe was enjoying herself, so Le suggested that Woodring enroll Chloe in private, one-on-one lessons at her Oceanside dojo.

In July, Chloe began her twice weekly lessons. The first few lessons were difficult: Chloe had a hard time staying focused and talked throughout her lesson. Still, Le saw Chloe's potential.

"I could see what she was capable of doing," said Le.

Le said she was unsure at first how hands-on she should be with Chloe.

"The first time I was guiding her around," said Le. "Then her mom said, 'Just let her go.' I learned fast that she can maneuver herself."

The first challenge, said Lopez, was gaining Chloe's trust. Since Chloe took to Le right away, she began training her. Now, both Lopez and Le work with Chloe.

Woodring said she is amazed at how quickly Chloe has taken to her instructors.

"It takes a lot for my daughter to trust someone," she said. "She's taken to these two. They're willing to go above and beyond to work with her. They have a gift."

Le and Lopez work by teaching Chloe to rely and react to her senses. When she hears or feels an object, she will block it or push it away.

Le said Chloe has totally transformed in the two months she has been working with her.

"There has been a noticeable change," said Le. "She walks with more confidence. Her coordination is much better. She is able to focus. She's more mature now."

Woodring agreed.

"Her attitude has changed," she said. "Her behavior has changed. She listens better now. Now she's more confident (and) she's not afraid to try new things. Everyone's amazed."

Woodring recently retired from the Navy after eight years of service and was considering moving back East, but decided to stay in the area so Chloe can continue her lessons with Le and Lopez.

"She's taken to this place," said Woodring. "I can't move her."

Le said she and Lopez are hoping to start a class just for students with disabilities. Woodring said she would like to see that happen.

"I wish they would get more kids with disabilities," she said. "These Senseis are awesome."

Woodring said she is grateful that they have treated Chloe just like any other student.

"It gives her a half hour to be normal," she said. "Just because someone has a disability doesn't mean they can't do it."

Therapy through martial arts:

From: <http://www.thejournalnews.com>
(August 10, 2005):

Briarcliff Manor — At the direction of his instructor, Michael Asher placed his foot on the re-breakable plastic board she held near the floor. The board, designed for children, is easily split in two. Still, the 5-year-old's leg strained against the hard surface.

In the end, Asher could not complete the exercise alone. The prop refused to give way as his foot pushed downward with all the force he could muster.

Instructor Laura Giacovas smiled with genuine enthusiasm. Her words of encouragement and praise — doled out in this class for the smallest of accomplishments — came from a belief that Asher's unsuccessful effort represented enormous progress.

Asher has a developmental disorder, like every other child in this Taekwondo class. In his case it is autism, a brain disorder that interferes with a person's social-interaction skills and sensory processing.

"He never believed that he really can do that, that he really can break the board, he can kick up that high," his mother, Angela, said.

"Other physical activities he had (previously) shied away from, he's willing to try. That's half the battle."

The battle being waged here is against disability and the accompanying box to which society relegates its sufferers. Taekwondo's traditional opponents — intact wooden boards and imaginary muggers — are an afterthought. For kids unable to look people in the eye, kids who can barely lift their leg a few inches off the ground, martial arts is a vehicle, not a destination.

The goals of the so-called Champions class at United Martial Arts Centers in Briarcliff Manor are much more in line with a special-education program than a self-defense seminar. If a student keeps his eyes on the instructor and participates in most of the exercises, it's considered a successful session. Whether the elbow strikes could tear through a Kleenex is inconsequential.

"Being the best you can be, that's the driving force behind everything that happens and every interaction that goes on," Giacovas said.

Giacovas, known as Instructor G around the school, is a slot machine of self-esteem. Show her any effort and a wealth of kind words cascades out, leaving you feeling as though you'd earned a black belt with one punch.

She has a master's in Special Ed and previously worked for the Children's School for Early Development in Hawthorne. After studying at United Martial Arts Centers on her own time, she realized that Taekwondo could be adapted to aid social and physical development in her students. With the blessing of Master Chris Berlow at UMAC, she organized a program first through the Children's School and then through UMAC.

Fellow instructor Susan Eisenstein loved it as a way to break down the societal barriers of what mentally and physically disabled people are capable of.

"Instructor G is absolutely like a role model for all teachers," said Dllah Shakerdge, whose son Ethan has shown noticeable behavioral changes in his five months with Giacovas.

"He feels good about himself. That's the most important thing."

A typical class attracts eight to 12 students, ranging from 3-year-olds to teens, with the occasional adult thrown in. Some are autistic, some have Asperger's syndrome, some have Down syndrome. The diagnosis, Giacovas stressed, doesn't matter. Eye contact — called "sa sun" — is eye contact, no matter what the specific label.

The principles of the class are derived from an unlikely source: a corporate productivity guidebook called Fish!, whose principles originated at the even unlikelier Pike Place Fish Market. At the start of each session, students are asked to raise their hand and offer up axioms like "have fun," "make someone's day," and "choose the right attitude," which Giacovas scribbles on the "character board" at the front of the room.

She returns often to these ideas over the course of the 45-minute session. Repetition of a few basic premises, she hopes, will communicate meaning to children for whom communication is a daily struggle.

"She has certain phrases she uses in the classroom," said Cheryl Hurlburt, mother of 6-year-old Andrew. "If something goes wrong (at home), they'll turn around and spit it back at you: 'choose the right attitude, mommy.' So they understand what she's trying to get at."

Of course there are days when a student won't respond to any kind of coaxing, no matter how perfect the methodology. Only when he or she is aggressively disruptive of others will they be asked to leave, and even then they're permitted to remain with their parents off to the side.

"You can't give up," stressed assistant instructor Kelly Kant, 16.

Drug abusers find hope in karate:

From: <http://www.myrtlebeachonline.com>
(July 16, 2005):

Program teaches perseverance

At age 42, John Crumpler has earned a new nickname: the Karate Kid.

It's what his family jokingly calls him now that Crumpler - a wiry man with Texas in his voice and a curlicue tattoo spelling "Teresa" on his chest - has been drug-free for more than 20 months and, for the three most recent months of his sobriety, learning kyushin karate at a downtown Durham dojo or martial-arts school.

Every Tuesday and Thursday evening, residents and graduates of the Triangle Residential Options for Substance Abusers, or TROSA, program file into the Ligo Dojo on Parrish Street as part of their treatment.

When Crumpler arrived on a breezy May day, he twice yelled "Ooosh!" - the Chinese character "osu," which translates roughly to "I'll push forward in the face of resistance."

Persevering through hardship is something the TROSA members and the dojo's owner, Nathan Ligo, 34, know all about.

This is Crumpler's fifth try in rehabilitation, and this time he says he'll succeed with the karate and Ligo's strict instruction.

"I have to maintain that rigidness, that structure. That's the way we learn. I make this karate a priority, just like I make it a priority to go to work. I always wanted to take karate as a kid, but my mom and dad couldn't afford it. I think this is the biggest blessing besides getting in TROSA. I was doing drugs, didn't care, lost all respect. Karate gives me the discipline I need."

Crumpler is one of Ligo's most experienced TROSA students; he started when the dojo opened in March. And even when he's tired and Ligo asks him to demonstrate a circular kick, Crumpler is up for the task.

Because as some contortionist stretches leave him glistening with perspiration or as an opponent delivers a bruising kick to his lower body, it's proof that he's alive and free to experience life without "chemical help."

Crumpler gets to see himself as a leader, contrary to the society's general view of drug addicts.

"Sometimes people look at people who are substance abusers as self-destructive, but sometimes they see them as society's garbage," said Kevin McDonald, TROSA president and founder. "And they forget that they are somebody's father or daughter."

Ligo, however, remembers. He thinks karate can heal - even as students pummel each other - if the individual is committed to bettering themselves.

Buzz-cut hair and square-shouldered, Ligo has a military edge to his look.

But he wasn't always the formidable sensei, or teacher, that he is today.

"I wasn't very happy when I was a teenager. I was the smallest in my class and I was rebelling by the time I was 14, doing marijuana and smoking. But I lucked into taking [karate] classes with a graduate student at UNC who was a physics student. That man [Song Suo Choi] impressed upon me how I could change my life," Ligo said.

Blinded by bullet, he thrives:

From: http://geoffandwen.com/blind/newsarticle.asp?u_id=6477
(June 13, 2005):

Martial arts shape former S.J. resident's outlook

Robert J. Ott was permanently blinded by a bullet to the head 15 years ago; despite the loss of his vision, his sense of perspective has never been clearer.

On Oct. 6, 1990, Ott stepped in to protect a dancer from an overzealous admirer attending a bachelor party at the Admiral Lounge, a former go-go club on Admiral Wilson Boulevard.

After the two scuffled, another member of the bachelor party went out to his car, returned with a .38-caliber handgun, and shot Ott in the back of the head. He lost an eye and left Cooper University Hospital a little over a month later blind and unsure how his life would proceed.

At the sentencing of the shooter May 1, 1992, Ott, a longtime martial artist who owned his own studio in Somerdale, told the court about his plight.

"I can't travel. I can't teach. I don't have the freedom I used to have," Ott said that day.

But these days, Ott, 39, doesn't say the words "can't" or "don't" much.

After enrolling in a business education program with the New Jersey Council of the Blind shortly after the accident, he began to crawl his way out of the darkness.

"I had to take a step back and learn how to be blind and this was an opportunity to get back on my feet," said Ott last week during a visit back to South Jersey.

Moving to Seattle in 1995 with two gym bags and \$500 was a gamble, Ott said, but it paid off. He began food catering for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: "I had nothing to lose. It was up or down."

After running the Modern Day Cafe at the NOAA for 10 years, Ott secured a lucrative contract to supply all food services for Fort Lewis in Washington state, and now is in charge of 650 employees, 22 percent of whom are disabled, he said.

Ott also gives motivational talks for foundations for the blind and helps teach occupational training for other blind people.

Married with a daughter, Ott lives in Olympia, Wash., and returned to South Jersey last week to attend a food service convention and run several seminars at a friend's martial arts studio. Ott is a sixth-degree black belt in Korean Hapkido and created his own form of martial arts, which he calls Ki Do Kwan.

He said martial arts is a lifestyle that gave him the foundation to overcome his injuries.

"It's enabled me to see things I couldn't see when I could see," he said. "That shot took my eyesight but that was all I was going to let it take."

The shooter, Robert Moore, of Philadelphia, was arrested in June 1991 and convicted of

aggravated assault and weapons possession a year later. He was released in August 1999.

"I turned what he did around and utilized it," Ott said. "I certainly don't thank him for doing it - it's more than that."

Ken MacKenzie, owner of several martial arts studios in Camden County, has been friends with Ott since they were two teens passionate about the sport.

"We both just had the biggest dreams and Bobby just had an unusual passion," said MacKenzie, a ninth-degree black belt. "He had always been a warrior."

Ott's mere presence at a seminar is a powerful experience for MacKenzie's students.

"People can no longer have excuses around Bobby," said Mackenzie, 40. "People are always saying why they can't do something. He came from the bottom up and that's powerful."

Ott, who is writing an autobiography with a ghost writer, said he can still connect his foot with someone's jaw if needed, but agreed that moves and weapons are not the most important aspect of his seminar and his lifestyle.

"I'm a regular guy who went through hell and back and got back on my feet," he said. "I want people to know that they can do it, too."

They're Still Kicking:

From: <http://www.canadaeast.com>
(May 24, 2005):

Father and son return to karate after harrowing motorcycle mishap less than a year ago

After suffering a fractured femur and pelvis, tearing abdominal muscles and sustaining extensive nerve damage in a leg, Michel Carrier's full recovery is something short of a miracle.

Less than a year after a harrowing motorcycle accident, the Moncton resident is also active in sports again and is taking karate to a higher level than he ever imagined.

The accident occurred Canada Day weekend of last year. Carrier was driving on his motorcycle from Quebec to Campbellton with his young son, Mathieu. They opted to take a rocky, dirt road instead of the main highway.

Michel recalls swerving out of control on a sharp turn and into oncoming traffic.

"I do not remember much after that, but I remember trying to regain control of my bike. I managed to avoid the first truck, but we went head on with the second truck," explained Michel.

Mathieu, 11 at the time, was thrown about 15 feet after the collision and suffered a broken pelvis.

"When we got to the hospital the entire staff was very impressed with Mathieu. They informed me that he remained calm, cool and collected throughout the entire time. They had never seen anything quite like it," Michel said.

"After evaluating Mathieu, the doctor's informed me that they could not operate on Mathieu's pelvis because he was still growing," explained Michel.

"Instead, he had to wear a medical wrap around his pelvis for two months in order to help put it back into place."

"After those two months, Mathieu went through intense rehabilitation for another two months in order to regain resistance."

Michel's recovery from two long operations would take much longer than his son's. Michel said his knee and hip, where pins were inserted, are still swollen, but "at least I am still walking."

He's accomplished much more than that. These days, he's karate training regularly with his son.

"Even though I am not able to do a lot of the things I did before the accident, karate has helped me keep my sanity through this difficult time," Michel said.

"I am able to kick, but it bothers me to stand for long periods of time. My upper body is pretty strong so I am able to punch almost normal."

Michel's entire body is still very sore.

"The accident took a lot out of me. I do not think I would be here today if I had not been as athletic as I was. Being in good shape helped me survive the accident and has helped me recover faster," explained Michel.

As a kid growing up in Dalhousie, Michel was involved in boxing, martial arts and judo. He left home with his late wife when he was 17 and moved to Moncton.

"Once I moved to Moncton I was still extremely active. I ran a half marathon and used to be able to run 12 miles in 76 minutes.

"I started to take karate more seriously after Mathieu was a bit older. When he was growing up he wasn't all that interested in hockey or basketball so I decided to put him into karate and it took off from there.

Before the accident Michel used to train two or three hours a day. He is now able to put in about three or four hours a week.

"It's a slow recovery, but I am stubborn enough to keep pushing myself through it," said Michel, who is currently a blue, brown-striped belt.

"Mathieu and I train together during the week, which makes it easier for transportation. We have our father son arguments, but Marc (their instructor) keeps us in line," said Michel while laughing.

Michel explained that as much as he wants to concentrate on his recovery, taking care of his home and family are the number one priorities.

"It is very tough being a single parent raising a young boy. Mathieu is an excellent kid. He is very athletic and does well in school. I am also working on getting back to a stable health

so that I can get back to putting in a full day of work," Michel said.

Although this has been a roller coaster ride of emotion for Michel, he mentioned there was one thing that was harder than anything else.

"My biggest concern was my son's recovery. It made me so upset every day that he had to suffer and go through it all. Once he was fully recovered, I was able to concentrate on my own recovery."

Although Michel and Mathieu have both made remarkable recoveries, he admits there is still a long way to go.

"Again, I am very stubborn and I will not stop training until I feel I can not recover any more. I do not care how long it takes.

"I've had to make a lot of adjustments in my life, yet I've managed to get through it all so far. I have learned that exercising has been a big key and I always refuse to give up."

Michel and Mathieu's instructor Marc Paradis has been amazed by their recoveries and commitment to karate.

"They were both in horrible conditions after the accident. Michel came to the school days after the operation and was white as a ghost," explained Paradis.

Paradis remembers Michel as a boxer.

"We both lived in Dalhousie growing up. I've known Michel for a long time and have always been impressed with his positive attitude. He is just a great guy.

"His physical health before the accident was impeccable. Michel is very determined and will someday have his fitness and health back to their original state."

Not only was Michel's recovery period remarkably short, but he did it all on his own.

"Michel is a very determined man. He has worked and trained very hard to overcome the accident. Many of my students find him extremely inspirational," Paradis said.

"What impresses me the most about Michel is how he always demonstrates such an incredible positive attitude through these tough times."

Liddell helping injured victim:

From: <http://www.mmaweekly.com>
(May 19, 2005):

Chuck Liddell is giving back to the community after a tragedy almost took a woman's life. Taryn Robinson, of Arroyo Grande, California, was the victim of a hit-and-run the night Chuck Liddell won the UFC world title vs Randy Couture.

On Saturday, April 16th, Taryn was on her way to watch the Ultimate Fighting Championship 52 with her friends featuring Liddell vs Couture. As she crossed the street at 5th and Farroll in Grover Beach, she became the victim of a hit and run as an unidentified person hit Taryn with their car and fled the scene. Police to this day still haven't found out

who did this to Ms. Robinson.

Taryn was rushed to Arroyo Grande Community hospital with many injuries; including, major head trauma, two broken legs, a fractured vertebrae and many cuts and bruises.

Later that evening she was air lifted to Cottage Hospital in Santa Barbara and was admitted to the ICU. After being released from the ICU, Taryn remained in the Hospital for another week. She was then transferred into a rehabilitation center, where she still remains.

Once Chuck found out what happened, he donated a percentage of his purse to Taryn and the UFC will also make a donation in Taryn's behalf. If you are on the central coast, you can attend an event being held to help Taryn. They will be having a Chicken BBQ for just \$10.00 per person on Friday with all proceeds going to Taryn's medical bills. Any at-will donations will be kindly accepted by calling The Pit in Arroyo Grande, and you can ask for John Hackleman.

Blind confidence Paralympic champ's visit gives a lift to new Blind Judo Foundation:

From: <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/04/15/PNGC4C5LL51.DTL>
(April 15, 2005):

Condensation fogged the storefront window of Cahill's Judo Academy in San Bruno, and the air inside was warm and close as about 25 athletes practiced hip throws, foot sweeps and falling techniques on a long, narrow mat.

In the back of the room, renowned coach Willy Cahill instructed 20-year-old Lori Pierce while she was modifying a hip throw. She set up the throw several times, stopping at the last moment before actually throwing her workout partner, Mike Alperin, a 200-pound green belt. At one point the 69-year-old Cahill stepped in and placed the palms of his thick hands on her face and gently adjusted the tilt of her head.

"There," he said. "Can you tell the difference?"

She nodded and resumed the starting position. Then, with amazing speed, she spun into her partner, lifting him off the ground, over her shoulder and onto the mat with a thud.

"Yes!" Cahill said to Pierce, who broke into a broad smile. "Again!"

Last summer, Pierce won a silver medal in judo at the 2004 Paralympics in Athens, and a couple of years before she took a gold medal at her first international competition, the Blind Judo World Championships in Rome.

Pierce, who lives in Colorado, was in the Bay Area to practice basic judo skills at Cahill's and, more importantly, to demonstrate judo techniques on behalf of the newly formed Blind Judo Foundation, a San Mateo nonprofit.

"Our mission is to bring judo to the blind and visually impaired community to help them develop confidence and adaptive skills," said Ron Peck, who founded the organization along with Cahill. "It's a great sport because along with leadership and character development, it offers balance and falling skills, which are critical to the blind and sight-

impaired."

The foundation is the brainchild of Peck, executive director of the Neurological Disease Foundation, and Cahill, a member of the Black Belt Hall of Fame who over 42 years has coached more than 1,000 national and international medal winners. He also has coached several U.S. Olympic and Paralympic judo teams.

Peck, a former tae kwon do competitor, and Cahill worked together last year to raise money for travel and accommodations for the U.S. Paralympic team, which receives no government funding. Their fund raising was so successful that they thought: Why not form the foundation to promote judo to athletes and teach coaches the skills to work with blind and sight-impaired athletes?

Cahill said the first time he coached a group of blind judoka several years ago, he explained a certain technique and then there was a long pause before the students said to him: "Coach, we didn't see a thing you did."

"I learned quickly that everything has to be hands-on and you have to focus in on everything you are trying to teach and understand it in a completely different way," said Cahill, who has developed a tactile coaching style that incorporates a lot of taps and nudges. "Blind-judo coaches have to develop a different sensibility."

During her visit, Pierce gave a demonstration to about 70 kids at the California School for the Blind in Fremont. Along with Cahill and other specially trained coaches, Pierce worked out with the students and taught them some basic throws and falling techniques. "The kids were in awe of Lori," said Mary Alice Ross, one of the school's adaptive physical education teachers. "They were thrilled to work out with her, and they loved it when she slammed one of our students onto the mat. It was definitely a confidence-builder."

There's no better example of the confidence judo inspires than Pierce herself. During the Paralympics in Athens, she and another blind athlete stunned their coaches when they struck out on a self-guided tour of the bustling city, with its confusing grid and notoriously aggressive drivers. It was a tour many sighted visitors are reluctant to take without a qualified guide. Pierce, who speaks no Greek, said they had a great time.

"It was really fun wandering around the city, like we did," she said. "People were very friendly, and if they didn't speak English, they helped us find someone who did."

Pierce is the youngest of eight children and was always included in whatever sports her siblings were into. But she said judo is the one she gets the most from.

"I like trying new things," she said. "And judo has helped me develop the confidence to go for it."

The foundation was started last year, but there are already as many as eight judo coaches who have developed skills in coaching blind and sight-impaired students. In addition, Cahill's Judo Academy is equipped for blind and sight-impaired students. But Peck said that the foundation's most valuable resource is Cahill.

"We have Coach Cahill, who is really a superstar coach in the world of judo," Peck said. "This guy is an amazing guy. He has over 50 years of credentials and has trained Navy SEALs, Homeland Security agents, pilots, as well as Olympic and Paralympic teams. He's really the best there is."

Peck said, "The foundation has good momentum, but what we need is board members. We're looking for people who are interested in the blind and visually impaired and who want to be actively involved." Ross said the students at California School for the Blind are eager to take judo classes if the details can be worked out. She said money would have to be found for staff time and weekly transportation to San Bruno. "We're working on finding funding, but we're not quite there yet," she said.

She hopes money can be found because the kids would clearly benefit from it as they do from other sports, such as in-line skating, kayaking and rock climbing.

"It's pretty amazing the things these kids do," she said. "It's also pretty amazing how much they are underestimated."

Mauian first woman with 50 years in ki-aikido:

From: <http://www.mauinews.com/story.aspx?id=5000>
(January 14, 2005):

HALIIMAILE – In the world of ki-aikido, Olive Silva is a trailblazer, the only woman in the world who for 50 years has been a disciple of the martial art.

The 82-year-old godan, or fifth-degree black belt, is a treasure, one of only three living ki-aikido disciples with five decades under their belts.

The Haliimaile resident recently was honored for the distinction with a letter of appreciation from ki-aikido's top officers in Japan and a ceramic plate from Master Koichi Tohei, the founder of the martial art.

"Let your ki flow like a stream and never let it stop," says the translation of the calligraphy on the plate. "Getting stuck on something, whether good or bad, is never good. The past does not return. Only human beings cling to the past. The universe never ceases."

The honoree describes "ki" as "universal energy." She has used her special knack for "extending ki" to others to relieve aches and pains and even save lives.

While a staffer for the Hawaii Center for the Deaf and Blind on Oahu, she was called to the deck of a pool where a boy was pulled from the water.

"The boy was already purple, the eyes looking at me," said Silva in an interview Tuesday.

She said she gave the boy "aikido resuscitation . . . pressing the ki" into the boy.

He began to breathe again and survived.

Silva described this extension of ki as putting "your energy flow into the person's body, to put the universal energy into the person." It's a natural coordination of mind and body, she says.

Silva describing the extension of ki seemed much like the elderly Obi-Wan explaining the "force" to young Luke Skywalker in "Star Wars." Yet, when Silva embarked on the ki-aikido way in 1954 as a 30-something mother with children, she was likely not as philosophical about life and the energy of the universe.

In fact, she described herself as a “toughy.”

“Everybody call me when they go to fight,” she said. “I was a tough guy.”

Silva was also athletic, as was her dad, a star in the Chinese baseball leagues on Oahu, and her brothers. In fact, she played slow-pitch softball and basketball into her 50s.

“I just like playing and doing it, competing and beating the next person” - all in the context of good sportsmanship, she said. Without sportsmanship, “they start fighting,” Silva added.

The athletic “toughy” was curious about aikido and interested in self-defense when she attended her first class at the Haliimaile Gym. There were no mats, like the ones at Maui Ki-Aikido dojo in Wailuku, but their instructors noted that there are no mats in real life when a roll might be required.

Once she started, Silva was hooked.

“I liked the coordination,” she said. “We learn to coordinate one’s mind and one’s body.”

There were three or four other women in the class when they started, but it was male-dominated and mostly adults.

“They were a lot of men folks.” Silva said. “I had to be strong.”

There were comments like “what is this woman doing over here” but she just kept working.

“I just continued and don’t say much, just show that I can do it just as well as you can,” Silva said.

Three years later, she became a black belt, working and training under Shinichi Suzuki, an 8th-degree black belt and the highest ranking ki-aikido disciple outside of Japan.

The other women in her class eventually dropped out of aikido.

“You have to sacrifice a lot of your time,” she said noting that some of the women got married and started families.

The Honolulu-born Silva already had started her family with the late Paul Silva. Some of her six children tried aikido but none has taken it up, though one daughter took up karate, she said.

While being a mother and aikido black belt and instructor for the program in Haliimaile, Silva has extended her ki to young and old in the community. She was a physical education instructor at St. Joseph’s and Makawao schools, housemother for the Lahainaluna High School borders, coordinator of a special motivation class for girls at Baldwin High, director of the county Summer Fun program, staff member at the Hawaii Center for the Deaf and Blind, and trainer for Lahainaluna and Pop Warner football teams.

In 1973, Silva was named Volunteer of the Year by the Maui County Office of the Red Cross for her work in helping elderly on Maui obtain Food Stamps. As part of Project Fund, Silva handled more than 400 cases, traveled an estimated 1,800 miles and volunteered more than 600 hours over nearly five months, according to a Maui News report that year.

Through the years, she has been challenged a few times, mostly in dealing with teen-agers. Ki-aikido instructors teach their students to avoid conflicts and to even walk away from potentially volatile situations.

But sometimes there is no choice.

She once put down a boy who challenged her at the school for the deaf and blind and then proceeded to let him chase her around the building before the school administration arrived.

“I tried to evade him, and I didn’t want to do anything more than when I put him down,” Silva said, adding that the boy later absolved her from responsibility and took the blame for the incident.

These days, Silva travels to the dojo several times a week and helps out. She meditates for 40 minutes to an hour every morning. Injuries to her back and knee have slowed her a bit, but it’s not apparent in her step.

Silva broke her back trying to lift someone off a wheelchair. She heard the crack, too.

“I’m OK,” she said, noting that she had surgery to repair her spine. “I went back to aikido. I don’t pity myself. You have to learn from that and don’t let that happen again. That’s where the awareness comes in.”

It’s that awareness that she says makes her a more accomplished aikido practitioner than when she was younger. Silva has learned that the secret to aikido is not in physical strength but in movements and extending ki.

“Don’t underestimate me,” she says. “I can still compete with them in the dojo. Many of them are physical, even black belts.”

“Now, it is not physical,” she said about her current approach to aikido. “It is serene and caring and how to extend ki without being physical. Another person can counter your strength. There is always someone stronger.”