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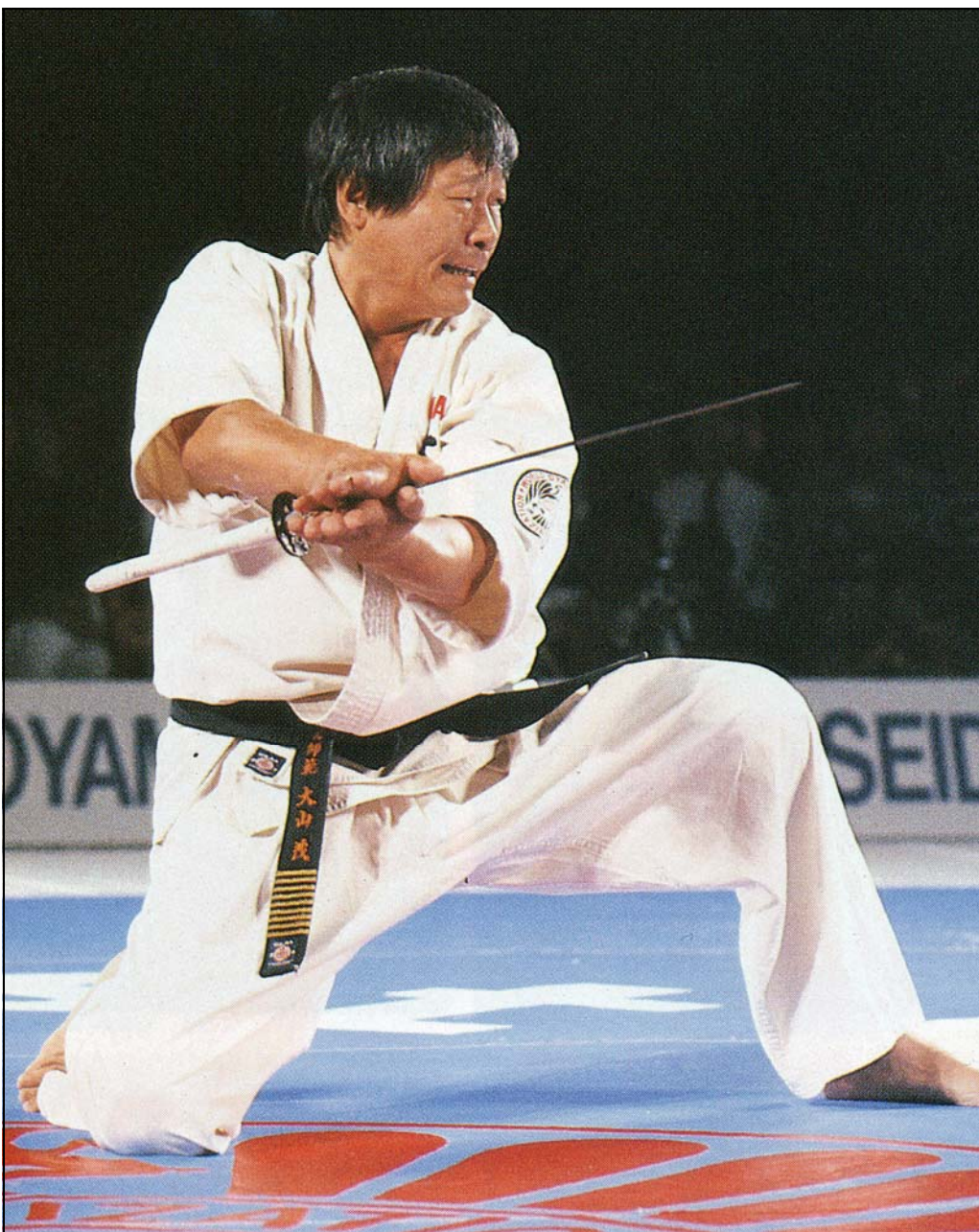
**World Oyama Karate**

**Honbu Newsletter**

Issue 42 - March, 2016

# MY BROTHER SOSHU SHIGERU OYAMA

By Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama



My brother, Soshu Shigeru Oyama, passed away on February 14, 2016. Early that morning, my phone rang, which was strange because no one ever calls me early on a Sunday morning. Soshu's wife, Patricia, was on the other end. She was really upset and had a hard time telling me the news. At first, I couldn't say anything. I was so sad, but I tried to keep myself calm and tried to calm her down as well. She told me that around midnight, my brother began having trouble breathing. An ambulance came to rush him to the ER, but after a short while, his breathing stopped completely.

There was a simple funeral for just family members and on March 4th, we held a memorial service because so many people around the world, including Japan, Europe, the Middle East, South America, Canada and the

# My Brother Soshu Shigeru Oyama

United States expressed the desire to travel to pay their respects.

At first, we decided to hold the memorial from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m., but as more and more people contacted us, we lengthened it to 5:00 – 9:00 p.m. So on Friday, March 4th, I got up at 4:30 a.m. and Sensei Karl drove me to the airport. Alabama is already blooming with the coming of spring, but when I landed at LaGuardia airport, all I could see was snow!

The funeral parlor only had seating for about 160 people. So, our plan was to have 4 services on the hour from 5:00 – 9:00 so that everyone could have a chance to attend. When Soshu's son, Ted, arrived at 4:00, people were already lined up outside. Shihan Sakataka, Shihan Dai Saito and I arrived at 4:30. The lobby was packed with flowers. Before, when people had asked about where to send flowers, we told them thank you for their consideration, but please do not send any. The reason was, if everyone sent flowers, the entire place would be full of flowers and there wouldn't be room for any people. But even so, the lobby was packed with flowers and people brought them that day as well.

There were former students of Soshu who had come from all over the world. Students he had taught 20, 30, 40 years ago. It was like a kindergarten, junior

high and high school reunion. There were also many representatives from other Karate styles who had come to pay respects. Because there were so many people, we combined the four 1-hour services into two 2-hour services. Both Ted and I gave speeches at the service.

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The last time I saw my brother was in the early summer of 2014. Earlier that year, my closest friend since childhood had died. That event prompted me



# My Brother Soshu Shigeru Oyama

to make an effort to see my friends and family while we were still healthy and able to talk, eat and drink together, and enjoy each other's company. So I called my brother in New York to tell him I was coming to see him. He sounded excited. I also called his son, my nephew Ted, and said I wanted to see him too.

I asked my wife to come with me. "I'll go with you," she said, "on one condition."

"What's that?" I asked.

"I want to see a Broadway show." I'm more into movies, and don't get really excited about plays and musicals, but I figured it was a reasonable condition, so I agreed.

Our hotel in Manhattan was very small and very expensive. I called my brother and told him where we were staying so he could come meet me.

"I don't think I can come," he said.

I couldn't believe it. He told me he couldn't really get out because of his back and knees. "Well, then I'll come to you," I said.

"No, no, no. That's OK. I'll come to you," he insisted. "But I can't drive."

So, I called Shihan Sakataka and had him pick up Soshu and bring him. When I saw my brother I was taken aback at first. Before, he had always exuded power. His energy was so strong that you could feel it just by looking at him in the distance. But now, he looked old. He had lost a good bit of weight. It nearly made me cry.

Soshu, Shihan Sakataka and I went to a Japanese restaurant near the hotel. We ate gyoza (steamed dumplings) and edemame. Soshu used to drink hard liquor, but now he just wanted hot sake. Shihan Sakataka and I drank beer. While we ate

and drank, Soshu's spirit started coming back. It became strong again while he talked and I felt better.

When we finished, Shihan Sakataka took Soshu back home. As he was leaving, I told Soshu that he and I needed to take care of ourselves; we were still young.

After I returned to Alabama, Soshu and I kept in touch by phone. Then, in the summer of last year, he had a heart operation. Patricia and Ted called me and said it was a serious operation that lasted over 7 hours. At that time, I tried to keep calm, but also prepare myself for the worst. But he's a strong man and somehow survived. Even the doctor was surprised. The doctor said that Soshu was highly susceptible to infection after the operation, so we needed to be careful. Patricia stayed with him at the hospital while he recovered from surgery. Ted's work schedule was very busy, but he was able to visit too.

A few days after surgery, Soshu was able to eat apple sauce. "That's great!" Ted told him, "That means you're getting stronger."

"The apple sauce is alright," Soshu replied, "but I'd much rather have sashimi and hot sake!"

Ted and Patricia laughed when Soshu said this, but also scolded him since the doctor said that he wasn't supposed to have anymore alcohol after the operation. For a few months after that, Soshu continued to improve and recover, but then he contracted an infection. Once again, he was back on the operating table, this time for 4 hours. Again, I prepared myself for the worst. But Soshu pulled through. The doctor commented that it was quite remarkable and we told him that Soshu wasn't a regular guy.

After the second operation, he began to recover

# My Brother Soshu Shigeru Oyama

over the following months. We kept in contact by phone (although he often didn't answer the phone and his voice-mail was always full). I was glad that he was such a strong survivor.

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I have so many memories of my brother, each one precious to me, that it's hard to know where to begin. But, first and foremost, he was a very powerful man. Also very pure. In Japan, there's a proverb that goes, "Bu-wa-Sugata-Nari". "Sugata" has many meanings, but it's used here to say that just by looking at someone, you can tell if they have power or not. Whenever people saw my brother, their first instinct was to look down. That's the kind of energy he had. He and I did many demonstrations (at the World Championships, All-Japan Championships, European Championships) with a razor sharp sword. Sometimes we did demonstrations with tonfa or bo or did Kata. Whenever we did a demonstration with perfect timing, no mistakes, we didn't say anything afterward, but just kept grinning at each other. If we made any errors, like our timing was off, we would just shrug to each other, as if to say, "we screwed up a little bit, but oh well".

When we did clinics, whether with 500 people or a thousand people, whenever Soshu entered, everyone went quiet. Even spectators would hold their breath and pay attention. He didn't even need to say anything. He could just walk in and look around. Everyone would wait in quiet, tense, anticipation—thirsty to learn whatever he was going to teach.

When he started training, whether it was Basics, Kata or Kumite, everyone followed each move he made. It was like he cast a spell and held everyone's attention in the palm of his hand. I've never seen anyone else with that kind of energy and charisma. The sight of him in his dogi and Black Belt was such a perfect fit, as if Leonardo DaVinci had

painted him as the ideal "Karate Man".

During his lessons, the students forgot everything in the outside world. Job, family, stress, everything was shut out and they focused entirely on Soshu and his teaching. As class went on, he would push students hard to give their best and maximum effort. "C'mon, harder! You can do better, more, more!" he'd shout. But whenever somebody did well, he was also quick to jump in and let them know. He would be equally energetic with his pushing and his praising. He gave people the gift of confidence and belief that they could accomplish anything they attempted.

At the end of class, students would feel like they were coming out of a trance. "I really did all that?" they'd wonder, "... I guess I did. Wow!" During class, Soshu didn't give his students any inch. There was no chance for them to escape the intensity of focus he demanded. But after class, he was so sweet and gentle that they couldn't believe he was the same guy. The same powerful, mean Supreme Grand Master that had been pushing them so hard during class, turned into a loving, gentle and approachable person afterward. That huge gap in his in-class and out-of-class demeanors made people fall in love with him.

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Soshu made many World, All-Japan, All-European, Canadian, American and South American champions. People from all over the world knocked on his door to take lessons from him. In each one, he planted his Karate seed. He nourished their seeds by sweating and punching and kicking along with them until each student's seed grew into a tree strong enough to withstand storms, hurricanes and tornadoes. Directly and indirectly, he spread his influence across the globe and his legacy will live on forever in his students, his students' students and so on.

# My Brother Soshu Shigeru Oyama

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Soshu planted a Karate seed in me as well. When I was 14 years old, my oldest brother, Hiroshi, showed me Pian Kata and basic punches and kicks. But we didn't practice regularly. It was more like something fun we did together every once in a while. When I was 15, I lived with my mother. My parents divorced when I was 8 years old, and I didn't want to live with my father, so I escaped and ran away to be with my mother. Like many people in Japan during that time, we had very little money. My mother worked 2 jobs and even did side jobs to try and make ends meet. She would wake up in the morning and prepare my breakfast, lunch and dinner before she left for the day. She didn't return until late



at night. In 1957, I was 15 years old. Only very few rich families (definitely not ours) owned TV's. We had a very small radio, but it didn't work very well. So, I tried to stay outside on the streets as much as possible after school. Often times, I skipped school to stay out on the street all day.

A couple other kids from my neighborhood and I made a group. We'd always be getting into trouble. Some adult oversaw us and gave each group territory to take care of. Part of our territory included a Pachinko parlor. Pachinko was and still is a very popular game in Japan (you can find out more about it on the internet). The best way to describe it is a blend of a slot machine and pinball. However, the payouts are in prizes, not cash.

One day, in early fall, I was standing outside the Pachinko parlor (I think the name of the parlor was

"Las Vegas") with my buddy. He was 3 years older than me, a high school drop-out. He got hungry and went to a nearby ramen shop to eat. I, of course, didn't have any money, so I stayed outside the Pachinko parlor. Two guys in their early 20's came by. I could tell they were in a gang by the way they acted and the nice clothes they wore. I didn't recognize them, so my instinct was to protect our territory.

As they came to the entrance, I stared at them with hard eyes. To them, I must've seemed like a little kid trying to be tough—more annoying than menacing. They just ignored me and went inside. I was so tense. I felt I had to do something. I watched them inside. I couldn't hear anything, but I could tell by their body language that they were losing and getting mad. I smiled to myself about that, "Serves

# My Brother Soshu Shigeru Oyama

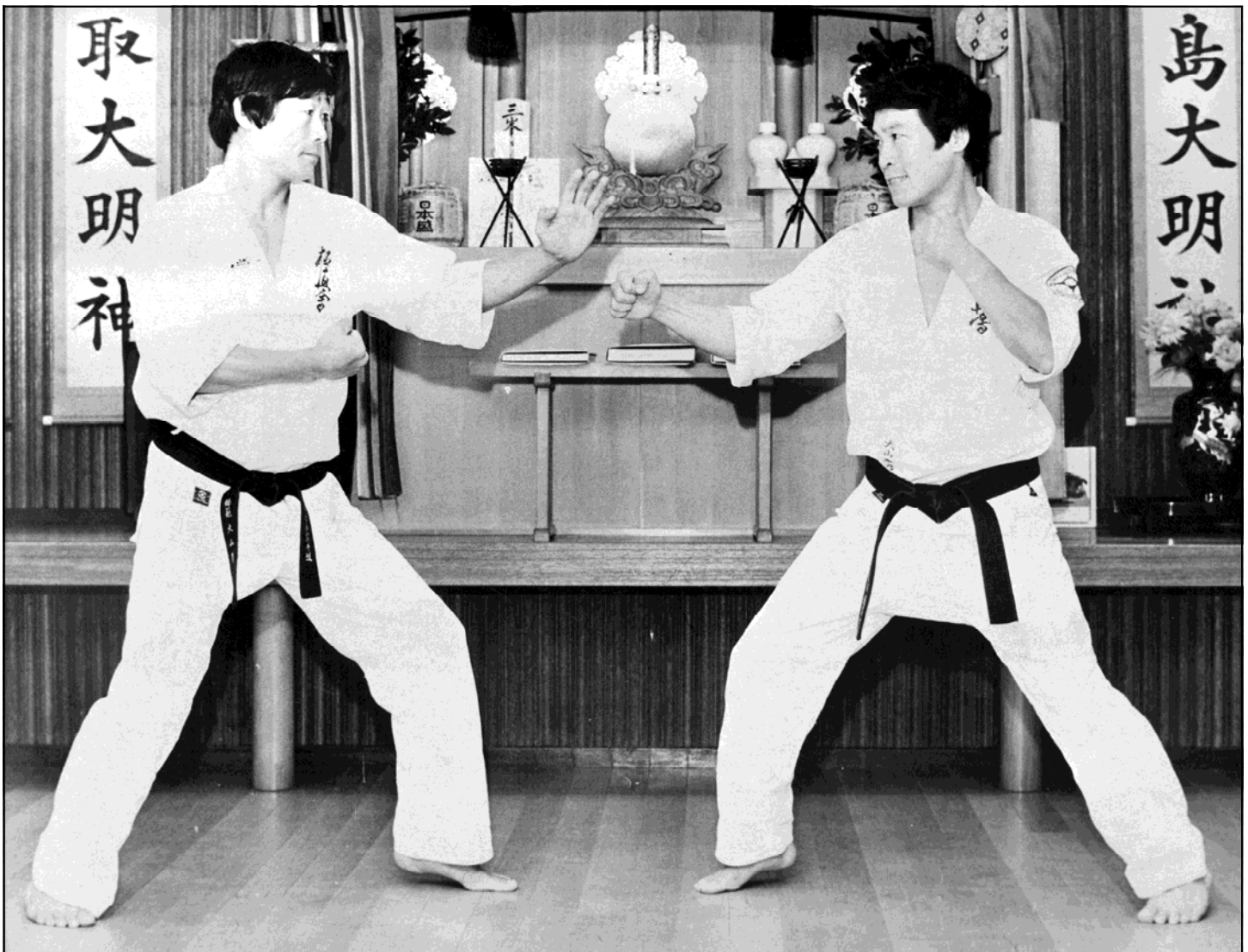
them right". When they came out, I again looked at them with hard eyes. They looked at each other, then grabbed me and pulled me to the bicycle parking lot in the back of the building. I was so scared.

When we were out of view, one guy held onto my left shoulder with his right hand. He told his buddy to keep a look out. The other guy lit a cigarette and chuckled. But before the guy holding my shoulder finished speaking, I punched him straight in the face with my right hand. It opened up a cut over his left eye. Everything seemed to go in slow motion. He fell to the ground. The lookout guy's cigarette dropped out of his shocked open mouth. He ran towards me, but there were bikes in his way. As he

tried to run over the top of them, I kicked him in the groin as hard as I could. He screamed and fell. I started running. I was so tense, that I felt like I could barely move.

I ran to my buddy at the front of the Pachinko parlor and told him what happened. We ran off to find our seniors so they could come see these guys. But by the time we got back to the bicycle parking lot, they were gone. There was still blood on the ground from the cut I opened up over the first guy's eye. "You really did that??" my seniors asked. "I guess I did," I answered.

For the next couple days, I was shaken up. Then a



# My Brother Soshu Shigeru Oyama

couple weeks passed, then a month, then 2 months. In late fall, I came home one day and saw a brown envelope in our post box. We hardly ever got any mail, so I was curious what it could be. I looked at it and saw it was addressed to me. When I read it, I froze. It was from the police. They were asking that I come to the station to answer some questions. "This is obviously a mistake," I said to myself. I tore the letter up and threw it in the trash a couple blocks from our apartment.

About a month later, there was another brown envelope in the mail. Again, I read it and saw it was the police asking me to come to the station. I racked my brain, but couldn't figure out any reason why the police would want to question me. So, again, I tore up the letter. This time I threw it into an industrial river further away from our apartment.

One night in late November, my mother and I were finishing dinner and getting ready for bed. There was a knock at the door. When she opened it, two men in suits with stern expressions were standing there. One was middle-aged and the other about mid-20's. As soon as my mother opened the door, the younger one poked his head in and looked around (our apartment was so small that you could see everything just from the front door).

"Excuse me?" my mother said.

"Hi, good evening. Is that your son, Yasuhiko Oyama?" the middle-aged one asked.

"Yes..." my mother said. The two men then showed her their police badges.

"We sent a couple letters requesting you to come to the station and you never responded. We're here to see why."

"I don't know anything about that," said my mother.

"We need you both to come in tomorrow to answer

a few questions."

"About what?" she asked.

"We'll tell you tomorrow," they said and left.

Once they were gone, my mother turned to me and asked, "What did you do!? Tell me! What's this about?" But I honestly had no idea what it could be about and that's what I told her.

The next day, they put my mother and I in a small room, just like on TV. The two detectives came in. The middle-aged one sat across from us at the table and the young one stood in the corner. The middle-aged detective put two mug shots on the table in front of us. We looked at them, but neither of us had any idea who they were. "You know them?" the detective asked me.

"No, I've never seen them," I answered.

"Yes you have."

"No, honestly, I haven't."

"These two guys," the detective continued, "were arrested for burglary. They're now in jail." He pointed to the stitches over the left eye of one of the guys. "When we asked him how he got this, he said a gang attacked him."

Suddenly, I remembered! I told them that was a lie, that they had taken me behind the Pachinko parlor to beat me up and I had to protect myself. My mother chimed in and asked them if they didn't have more important things to do, real criminals to catch.

"Calm down," the detective said, "we don't want to arrest your son. The leader of his group is a bad guy. We just want to warn you."

"I appreciate it," my mother said, "but aren't there

# My Brother Soshu Shigeru Oyama



more serious criminals you need to catch?"

"Yes, ma'am, but we also need to look out for the young kids and keep them safe."

When we left the police station, my mother told me I had too much free time. She called my brother, Soshu Shigeru Oyama, and asked him to please do something with his precious little brother.

So, Soshu took me out to eat ramen and dumplings. My mother and I only ate out maybe once or twice a year, so it was a big deal. Soshu told me, "You know, you're such a talented athlete. You have great coordination, speed and strength. I bet you would be great at Karate."

"Really?" I asked, basking in the compliments.

"Oh sure. Karate is hard for regular people, but I bet you would catch on really quick. I'm a Black Belt, so I know."

I was interested. "Would I need to break roof tiles and bricks and stuff?"

"No problem for you!"

"Won't I have to fight?"

"If you take lessons for a couple months," Soshu said, "I don't think even I would be able to fight you." I kept eating the ramen and dumplings, but I still hadn't made up my mind. Then Soshu said he'd give me an allow-



# My Brother Soshu Shigeru Oyama



ance of 50 yen/month to take Karate. I felt like I'd won the lottery. For 10 yen, I could buy a Kope Pan, a small bread loaf. But for 20 yen, I could get imitation peanut butter put on it. For 30 yen, I could have deep fried potato put in it. But for 40 yen, I could get deep fried ground beef in the Kope Pan. One bite of that was heaven. I was always hungry in those days, so as soon as Soshu said "50 yen" I thought about the wonderful food I could buy with it and I agreed to start Karate.

Soshu gave me my first 50 yen right then and smiled. His smile, though, was sly like a fox. Behind it were Mas Oyama and a dojo full of mean Black Belts waiting for me. One night, he picked me up and took me to the dojo. Class was from 5:00 – 9:00 p.m. Somehow, I ended up wearing a Judo dogi, which was much heavier (and hotter) than a Ka-

rate dogi. At the beginning of class, everyone made a circle. A couple other white belts and I were put in the middle of the circle. We started punching and kicking. It went on and on, for 2 hours. There was nowhere for me to escape, and Mas Oyama was standing right in front of me, so I had no choice but to keep going and going and going.

During the 3rd hour, we did Ido Geiko (basic techniques while moving). After that we did Yakusoku Kumite (pre-determined fighting drills). That part was kind of fun. The end of class was free fighting. I sat in the corner and watched the senior belts fight. I was terrified. The fighting in those days allowed for anything and everything—punching and slapping the face, head butts, groin kicks, poking the eyes—everything. It was like a slaughter house; so bloody and primal. I watched my brother fight a

# My Brother Soshu Shigeru Oyama



guy who was younger but taller than him. He had a mean face full of pimples. Soshu hit him with a Shotei (palm hand) across his face and blood went flying to the floor. I was shaking. There was no way I could do this. It was just my first day!

After a while, the senior Black Belt, Mr. Yasuda, pointed at me and said, "Yasuhiko, stand up!"

I looked left and right at the other white belts, then up at the ceiling and back down to the floor. "You!" Mr. Yasuda shouted, "I'm pointing at you!"

I stood up. My whole body was frozen in terror. I walked slowly over and Mr. Yasuda had me stand in front of the tall, mean and pimply-faced guy. He was like Godzilla, and I was just a tiny ant. I knew I shouldn't open my mouth, but I did anyway. "I don't know what to do," I said, "it's just my first day".

Mr. Yasuda looked at my brother, and my brother said, "You fight all the time in the street, right? It's just like that." He was smiling and at that moment I knew... He had tricked me. I'd been set up. The whole thing was a trap, but it was too late now. My heart was pounding, my body was frozen. I could hear, "Kamaete, Hajime!" ("Fighting stance, begin!") off in the far distance. Suddenly, the pimply guy hit me hard across the face. The inside of my mouth was cut open and I could taste blood. I fell to the floor in a daze. It was like being struck with a 2 x 4. Godzilla picked me up, then kicked me in the stomach and sent me flying across the dojo. "You're OK," he said and picked me up again. It went on like this for I don't know how long. He'd slap my face, kick me, send me to the floor and pick me back up again. When I think about it now, though, I realize that he must've been using control, otherwise I'd be dead.

When we finished, I started to go sit down again, but Mr. Yasuda stopped me. "You're not done yet," he said. He put me in front of the next guy—my brother. Soshu was smiling. I was in a panic, tears running down my face. Soshu knocked me around repeatedly just like Godzilla had. At one point, I was on my hands and knees. I couldn't breathe. I was so terrified that I clawed the floor to the point that one of my fingernails came off.

# My Brother Soshu Shigeru Oyama

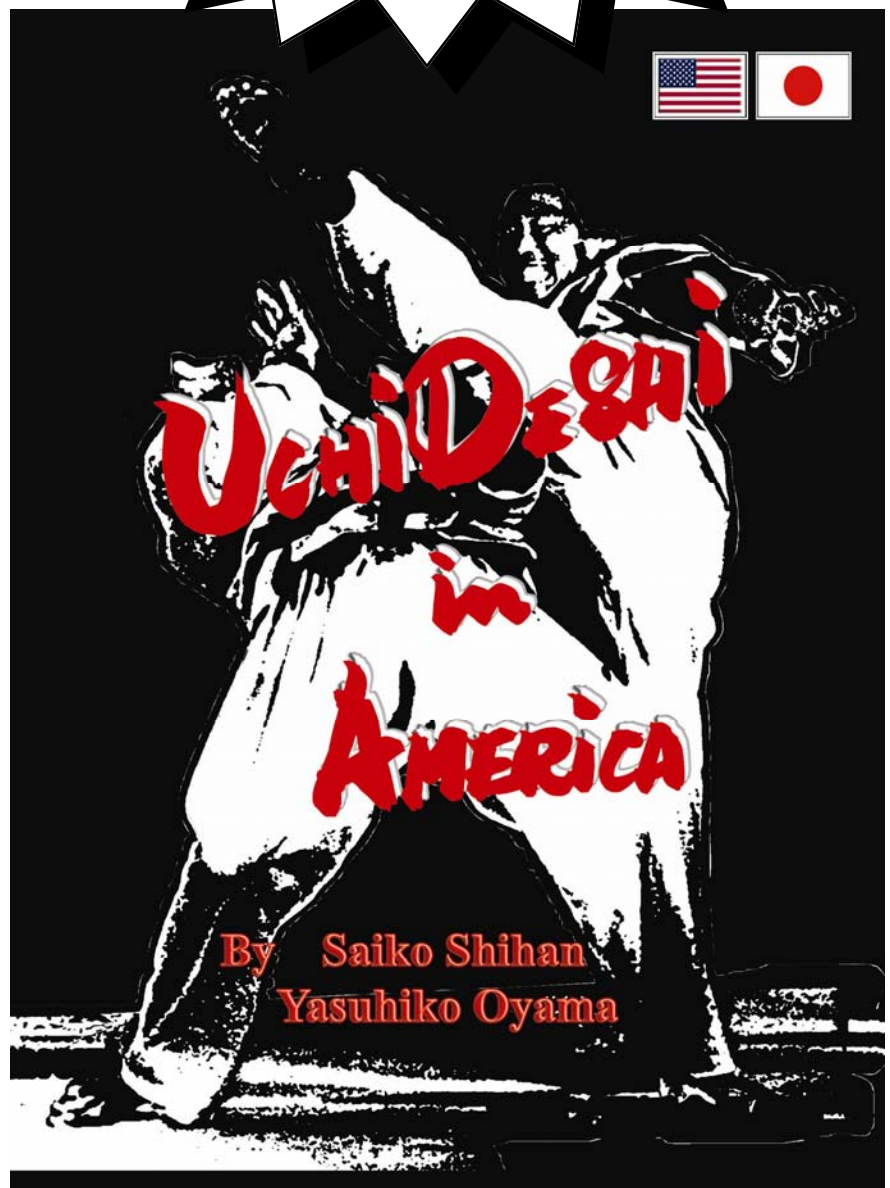
On the way home, Soshu and I didn't say a word. When my mother opened the door and saw my beaten face, she shrieked. "What had you done to my son?!"

"Oh, he's fine. He'll be OK," Soshu answered. I didn't say anything, but just went straight to bed. I laid there with tears streaming down my face and decided that I would get revenge. That was the beginning of my Karate journey, the seed that Soshu planted in me and what led me to start training. I struggled in the beginning, I often dreaded going to the dojo. I had to fight myself so many times. I'd always try to think of an excuse not to go. I could be more creative and elaborate than Hemmingway, Dostoyevsky, or Shakespeare when it came time to make up excuses. But in the end, I always ended up going anyway. Karate training left little time for me to run the streets with my old friends, so my life began moving in the right direction.

Now, I'm still here training and teaching. I love Karate. It all started with my sweet/mean, monster/angel brother and the seed he planted in me. My job now is to continue to nourish that seed and make my tree ever bigger with unshakeable roots and to share my knowledge with people as long as I'm still able. That's my duty to my brother. I'm lucky to be healthy and able to keep training, so I'm working hard. I love my brother, may he rest in peace.

OSU ! - Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

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# WORLD OYAMA KARATE CHAMPIONSHIP



## SATURDAY, MAY 7, 2016

### BAREHAND, BAREFOOT KNOCKDOWN CHAMPIONSHIP

**TICKETS AVAILABLE**

**WORLD OYAMA KARATE  
SCHOOLS**

**1804 29TH AVE. SOUTH,  
HOMWOOD  
205.879.4841**

**CHELSEA COMMUNITY  
CENTER  
205.879.4841**

**ALL DAY - \$20**



**Samford  
University  
Gym**

**Tournament  
Starts  
@ 10:30 a.m.**

**PROCEEDS TO BENEFIT JDRF RESEARCH**



## New Kata DVD Volume II is Coming Soon !!

### It includes Kihon Kata #5 - #8 and Weapon Technique



We All  
Will Miss  
Soshu S.  
Oyama

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