

*Mrs. Judo:*

Be Strong, Be Gentle, Be Beautiful

a film by Yuriko Gamo Romer

Contact:  
Yuriko Gamo Romer  
Flying Carp Productions

[www.flyingcarp.net](http://www.flyingcarp.net)  
[info@flyingcarp.net](mailto:info@flyingcarp.net)  
(415) 641-4232

# Mrs. Judo:

## Be Strong, Be Gentle, Be Beautiful

### Logline:

**Mrs. Judo: Be Strong, Be Gentle, Be Beautiful** tells the inspirational story of Keiko Fukuda's lifelong journey, spanning four continents, nine decades, and two distinct cultures, to overcome adversity and become the highest-ranking woman in judo history.

### Synopsis:

Throwing thousands of years of tradition to the wind, Keiko Fukuda chose to follow her own destiny and become the highest-ranking woman in judo's history. **Mrs. Judo: Be Strong, Be Gentle, Be Beautiful** tells the inspirational story of Fukuda's lifelong journey, spanning four continents, nine decades, and two distinct cultures, to overcome adversity and ultimately transform into a living legend.

Fukuda was born in Tokyo in 1913, where two generations earlier her samurai grandfather was the first martial arts master to Jigoro Kano, who went on to found judo in 1882. In 1934, Fukuda was invited by Kano to join his new women's division, a progressive idea at a time when males dominated the sport. Judo's black belt has 10 degrees, but gender discrimination dictated that women hit a ceiling at 5th degree, until 1974. (Later in her judo career, Fukuda herself was frozen at 5th degree for 30 years, while her male colleagues advanced.) Facing her own struggle for independence as a young woman, Fukuda bucked tradition, choosing not to marry when she realized that as a wife she would have to give up her beloved judo. Her teacher, Master Kano, charged his students with the responsibility to spread judo around the world, and after Kano died in 1938, this became her life's vocation.

Throughout World War II, she traveled daily through the burning embers of war-torn Tokyo to practice and teach judo. After the war she began teaching abroad, first in Australia and the Philippines, then in the United States in 1953. The martial art was formally introduced to the world at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, where Fukuda was invited to demonstrate judo kata (choreographed forms). It was during those Games where Fukuda first met Eiko Shepherd, then a young girl judo champion, who had no sparring partners but boys. Shepherd joined Fukuda's judo journey and for over 46 years has participated in her struggle to achieve recognition and full inclusion for women in judo.

In 1966, Fukuda left Japan to accept a teaching position at Mills College in Oakland, California. Her move coincided with the height of the women's movement. With the initiative of some of her students, in particular Bay Area NOW (National Organization for Women) President Shelley Fernandez, Fukuda proceeded to crash through the glass ceiling of judo. At that time, Fernandez also became Fukuda's lifelong friend and housemate. In 1972, Fukuda was granted U.S. citizenship and has lived in San Francisco ever since.

Shortly after arriving in San Francisco, Fukuda established an all-women judo dojo, Soko Joshi Judo Club, which is still flourishing today. Even now, at 98-years-old, Fukuda still teaches judo three times a week. After 77 years of practicing judo, Fukuda now holds judo's highest rank - 10th dan - and she is the last living disciple of Master Kano and the only living link to judo's origins.

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### Characters:

#### Keiko Fukuda

10th degree, Judo Instructor



Fukuda was born in Tokyo in 1913, where two generations earlier her samurai grandfather was the first martial arts master to Jigoro Kano, who went on to found judo. In 1934, Fukuda was invited by Kano to join his new women's division, a progressive idea at a time when males dominated the sport. Judo literally translates as the "gentle way" and, as most martial arts, began as combat technique. During peace times it was cultivated as a spiritual practice. Judo's black belt has 10 degrees, but gender discrimination dictated that women hit a ceiling at 5th degree, until 1974. Fukuda herself was frozen at 5th degree for 30 years, while her male colleagues advanced.

Facing her own struggle for independence as a young woman, Fukuda defied tradition, choosing not to marry when she realized that as a wife she would have to give up her beloved judo. Her teacher, Master Kano, charged his students with the responsibility to spread judo around the world. For Fukuda, this became her life's vocation.

Today, Fukuda, at 98-years-old, less than 5 feet tall, and weighing barely 100 pounds, is still a force to be reckoned with. She continues to teach judo several times a week at her dojo in San Francisco. After 77 years of practicing judo, Fukuda now holds judo's highest rank - 10th dan – and is the last living disciple of Master Kano and the only living link to judo's origins

#### Shelley Fernandez

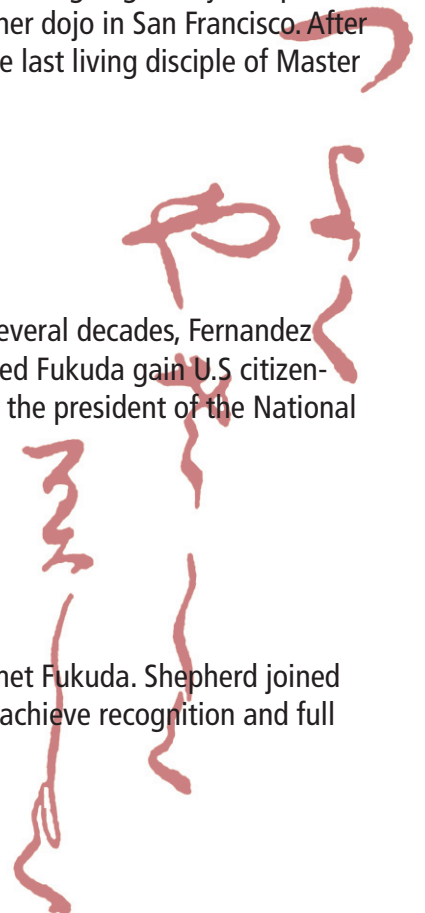
Fukuda's Dear Friend, Women's Rights Activist

Shelley Fernandez has been Keiko Fukuda's dear friend and advocate since 1966. Over several decades, Fernandez has fought for Fukuda's deserved recognition within judo's ranking system and has helped Fukuda gain U.S citizenship. Fernandez has been a lifelong women's rights activist and has previously served as the president of the National Organization for Women (NOW).

#### Eiko Shepherd

7th degree, Judo Instructor

During the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, Eiko Shepherd, then a young girl judo champion, first met Fukuda. Shepherd joined in Fukuda's judo journey and for over 46 years has participated in Fukuda's struggle to achieve recognition and full inclusion for women in judo.



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### Characters:

#### **Kaori Yamaguchi**

6th degree, 1988 Olympic Medalist

Kaori Yamaguchi is a 1988 Olympic bronze medalist in women's judo, and a former Japanese women's national team coach.

#### **Hal Sharp**

9th degree, Judo Instructor

Hal Sharp first traveled to Japan in 1942 as a young soldier during the US occupation of Japan. He fell in love with Japan and returned to live in 1953 as an accountant for the US Navy. There he studied judo and first met Keiko Fukuda. His rare home movies and photographs reveal an intimate portrait of postwar Japan rarely seen in the West.

#### **Toshihiko Koga**

two-time Olympic medalist (Gold in 1992; Silver in 1996) and four-time World Champion in judo.

In 2000 he retired from competition and became the head coach for the All-Japan women's judo team. He also founded the Koga Juku, a judo school for young children.



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### Director's Bio:

Filmmaker **Yuriko Gamo Romer's** film *Occidental Encounters* won numerous awards at film festivals internationally, among them a Student Academy Award, The Jimmy Stewart Memorial Crystal Heart Award and a Silver Apple. She recently completed *Friend Ships* a short historical animation about John Manjiro, the inadvertent Japanese immigrant rescued by an American whaling captain. Romer has also directed, produced and edited *Dancing with God*, was a producer for *Virtuoso: the Olga Samaroff Stokowski Story*, and was an editor for *On Common Ground: The Life of Howard Thurman*. Her short films include *Reflection*, *Kids will be Kids*, *Sunnyside of the Slope*, and *Fusion*. Romer is Japanese American, born in Japan, raised in the United States, and is bilingual. She holds a master's degree in documentary filmmaking from Stanford University, a BFA from UCLA, a brown belt from World Oyama Karate and lives in San Francisco with her husband and son.

### Director's note:

My life is a melding of Japanese and American, my two cultures. As soon as I met Keiko Fukuda four years ago, I knew that it was my calling to make this film. Fukuda's wisdom, inspiration and tenacity have moved me through my own struggles in making this film. Keiko Fukuda has lived her life according to her motto: "Be Strong, Be Gentle, Be Beautiful." I hope that in seeing this film, the viewers will be inspired by Keiko Fukuda to lived their own dreams.

Thus far my films have been mostly short essays, and my last ten years have mainly been spent working on other people's films and developing videos for various non-profit entities. Embarking on this film marks a new point in my life as an artist to invest myself into a project of this proportion and depth. It is also a chance to take advantage of my Japanese culture, language and sense.

I plan to move forth from this project to develop and grow myself as an artist challenging the medium of film. I feel that my connection to Japan will also continue to play an important part in my work.



(c) Monica Lee Photography



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### Crew Bios:

**Cinematographer Emily Taguchi-Klingensmith's** credits include *Silk Grandmothers*, *Days of our Tortuga*, and *The Unforgotten War*. She has also shot and produced stories for Spark, KQED's weekly arts magazine, and for ABC Now, CBS Newspath, CNN's Anderson Cooper 360, Current TV, KQED Public Television, PBS Frontline & World, GOOD Magazine, and The New York Times. Ms. Taguchi-Klingensmith was born and raised in Japan, then was educated at Tufts University. She lived in San Francisco for 10 years and now resides in Paris, France. She is also a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism.

**Cinematographer Monica Lam** most recently was producer and principal camera for *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, and its adaptation into an opera. Monica Lam has produced several international reports for the PBS series FRONTLINE/World, including *Paraguay: Sounds of Hope*, *A Message from the Sea*. Lam has worked to document the lives of young sweatshop workers in southern China for China Blue worked as a line producer on *Bolinao 52*, a documentary about Vietnamese boat people, and explored the aftermath of apartheid in the tragic, Academy Award nominated story of a young South African photographer. Lam is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism.

**Consulting Editor Nathaniel Dorsky** is an experimental filmmaker, documentary film editor, and preeminent documentary story doctor and editing consultant. Dorsky has been the recipient of many awards including a Guggenheim Fellowship and grants from the National Endowment of the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, the LEF Foundation, the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, and the California Arts Council.

**Composer Mark Izu's** compositions are characterized by his seamless integration of jazz with other music traditions and his mastery of cross-cultural instrumentation. Particularly relevant to this project is his career long study of gagaku, the oldest classical music form in Japan. Izu has composed scores for film, live music concerts and theater. His film scores include Steven Okazaki's Academy Award-winning *Days of Waiting*; Wayne Wang's *Dim Sum Take Out*; KTEH's Emmy-winning documentary, *Return to the Valley* and James Kulp's PBS documentary, *Westward to China*.



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Keiko Fukuda made history and news, on July 28, 2010, when she became the first woman ever to be awarded the pinnacle rank, 10th degree black belt in judo. She is one of four alive today holding this rank and one of less than 20 ever to be awarded this rank.

### Press:

10/1/2011 - AARP Magazine - Black Belt Judo Pioneer: 98-year-old woman achieves highest martial arts honor

09/16/2011 - espnW - 98-year-old woman reaches highest echelon of judo

08/28/2011 - Today.com - Accomplishing amazing athletic feats - in their 80s and 90s

08/22/2011 - Sports Illustrated - Go Figure - 98, Age of Keiko Fukuda Shihan, the sole surviving student of judo founder Jigoro Kano and the first woman of 15 people to attain the sport's highest rank, 10th-degree black belt.

08/19/2011 - Frankfurter Neue Press - Höchste Auszeichnung für 98-jährige Judokämpferin

08/19/2011 - NZZ Online Zurich - Die Übermutter der Powerfrauen: Höchste Auszeichnung für 98-jährige Judokämpferin

08/16/2011 - TimeOut Tokyo - Keiko Fukuda: Judo 10th dan at 98 years old: Original judo queen's life is the subject of new documentary

08/15/2011 - Huffington Post - Keiko Fukuda Becomes 98-Year-Old Black Belt (VIDEO)

08/14/2011 - Time.com - 98 Year-old Woman Earns Highest Degree in Judo

08/13/2011 - The Rafu Shimpo - Fukuda Promoted to 10th Dan — First Woman to Achieve Judo's Top Rank

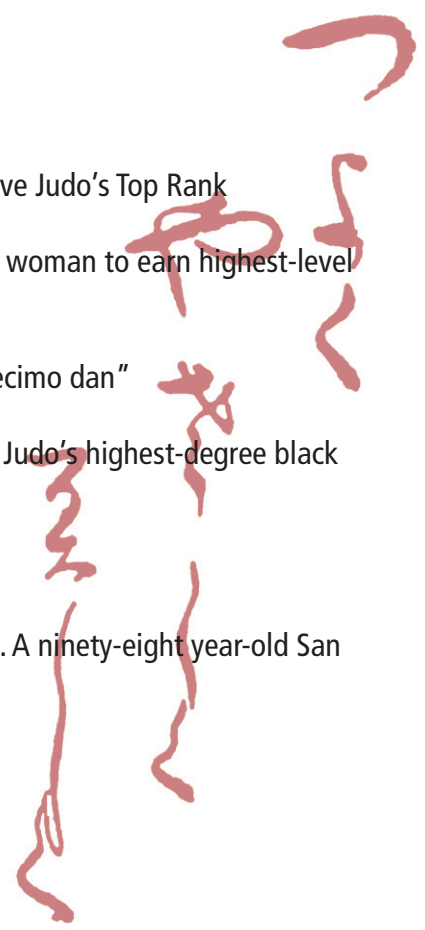
08/13/2011 - Daily Mail - Don't mess with Keiko! 98-year-old Judo master becomes first woman to earn highest-level black belt

08/13/2011 - laRepluclica.it TV - Judo, super-cintura nera a 98 anni: Keiko ottiene "il decimo dan"

08/13/2011 - Shine from Yahoo - 98-year-old woman becomes first woman ever to earn Judo's highest-degree black belt

08/12/2011 - BBC Radio Global News - Judo Pensioner (18 mins. into podcast)

08/12/2011 - CBC Radio, As it Happens - She's still getting her kicks — and giving them. A ninety-eight year-old San Francisco judo master becomes the first woman to earn a tenth-degree black belt.



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## **Press Continued:**

- 08/11/2011 - ABC News - Keiko Fukuda, 98, Becomes First Woman to Earn Highest Level Black Belt
- 08/10/2011 - The Daily Telegraph Australia - 98 year old woman Sensei Keiko Fukuda gets judo black belt
- 08/09/2011 - NPR - Nonagenarian Earns Judo's 10th Degree Black Belt
- 08/06/2011 - San Francisco Chronicle - Judo master makes 10th degree black belt
- 07/25/2011 - San Francisco Chronicle - Keiko Fukuda - Judo master - doc in 2012
- 04/26/2011 - Rafu Shimpo - A Banner Year for a Judo Pioneer
- 04/05/2011 - Nichi Bei News - STRONG, GENTLE AND BEAUTIFUL: Judo master Keiko Fukuda's legacy
- 01/06/2011 - Rafu Shimpo - Strong, Gentle, Beautiful





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### Photos:

\*Please note: All of the following photos can be downloaded in high-resolution on the film's website: <http://www.flyingcarp.net/be-strong-be-gentle-be-beautiful/>



2009 Japan shoot, at the Tokyo cemetery paying respects to Fukuda's ancestors. © Flying Carp Productions



Keiko Fukuda surrounded by the women of her San Francisco judo club, Soko Joshi Judo © Flying Carp Productions



2009 Japan shoot, at the opening ceremony of the All Japan Judo Kata Tournament at the Kodokan in Tokyo © Flying Carp Productions



Kagami Biraki, Fukuda's annual judo New Year's celebration © Flying Carp Productions

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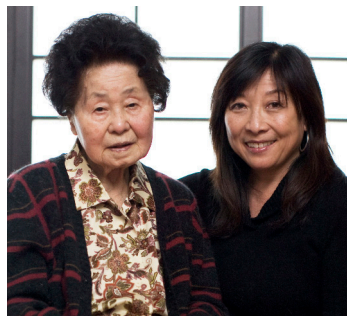
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Portrait of Keiko Fukuda in front of her painted portrait © Zdenek Mlika



Smiling portrait of Keiko Fukuda  
© Flying Carp Productions



Keiko Fukuda and Yuriko Romer  
(filmmaker)  
© Zdenek Mlika

