

OBITUARIES / Ansei Ueshiro, 69, Shorin-Ryu Karate Master

By Christine Sampson. STAFF WRITER Newsday
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A pioneer and influential teacher of Shorin-Ryu karate who was once described as having a warrior's spirit and a gentleman's candor, died May 7 at age 69.

Ansei Ueshiro was born in Okinawa, Japan, and studied martial arts from childhood with his father and with a Shorin-Ryu hanshi, or grand master. Shorin-Ryu is a discipline of karate that originated in Okinawa centuries ago.

In 1944 during America's invasion of the island, Ueshiro's parents were killed, and his hands were severely disfigured during a war-related fire. Determined to rehabilitate his hands, he delved deeper into karate and took up weaponry as well. Later, he would tell his children that it wasn't what happens to you or why it happens that's important, but rather how you work around it. Ueshiro, who became a grand master of Shorin-Ryu karate and a four-time world champion, had a stroke May 4 and died three days later at South Nassau Communities Hospital in Oceanside. He had lived in Farmingville since 1972.

"He felt martial arts wasn't just a sport," said one of Ueshiro's sons, Ando Ueshiro of Kamakura, Japan. "He thought that martial arts was more a way of life, that it helps people find themselves."

Ueshiro taught karate to American servicemen stationed overseas in the 1950s before immigrating to the United States in 1962 with four consecutive world championship titles and intentions to teach. He started out working for the import/export company Nippon Express, eventually opening his own business in the same industry.

He married his wife, Hiro, in 1958; the couple had five children, three of whom were born in Japan. Ueshiro's life was "very well balanced" between teaching karate, running a business and raising a family, his son Ando said. He described his father as a spiritual man who believed all living things deserved respect.

A martial arts history published in 1993 identifies Ueshiro as the pioneer teacher of Okinawan karate in the United States. In 1970, he founded the Shorin-Ryu Karate USA group and established 16 schools, including locations in Hawaii, Israel and Hong Kong. Students and family members said at least 100 other schools in the United States have ties to Ueshiro's teachings.

Ueshiro became a U.S. citizen in 1986 and retired from his business in 1989 to devote more time to Shorin-Ryu. Shorin-Ryu is distinguishable from other types of karate by its emphasis on

more traditional forms, exercises and self-defense rather than competition, according to Michael Mackay, a student of Ueshiro for 23 years and chief instructor at Midtown Karate Dojo in Manhattan. "The whole premise of Master Ueshiro's teaching is that there is no first attack in karate," he said. Mackay described Ueshiro as having both a warrior's spirit and a gentleman's candor. "It was always an interesting paradox to me that he could demonstrate both those qualities," Mackay said, though "there was no mistaking how formidable he could be."

In addition to his wife and son Ando, Ueshiro is survived by a brother, Tsurok Ueshiro of Okinawa; a sister, Mitsuko of Miyazaki, Japan; son Angiro Ueshiro of Holbrook; daughters Yoko Ueshiro of Port Jefferson, Yuko Ueshiro and Yasuko Ueshiro of Farmingville; and three grandchildren. Services were at Dodge-Thomas Funeral Home in Glen Cove Saturday. Burial was at Locust Valley Cemetery.