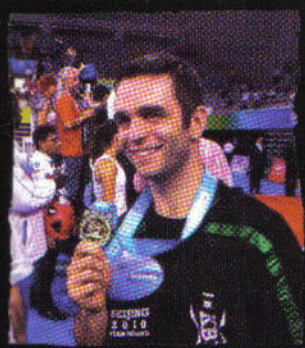


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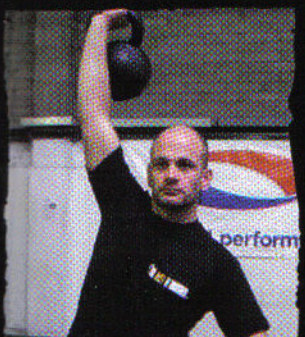
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● **GEORGE CANNING –
A LIFETIME OF
MARTIAL BENEFITS**

PICTURE: EFA CORWELL

MARTIAL ARTS • JUDO • BOXING • WRESTLING • MMA • HEALTH & FITNESS

GEORGE CANNING – A LIFETIME OF MARTIAL BENEFITS

BY PAUL J. O'BRIEN

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IT BEGAN WITH A right cross in 1965. That's if you believe the legend. George Canning had just been honourably discharged from the British Army Royal Engineers, having severed six years (1959-1965). During that time, Canning had developed his boxing skills as part of his military combat training, and he had the unfortunate opportunity to put those skills to use soon after his return to civilian life. It was this incident that led Canning to discover what precisely he would devote his civilian life to.

At the time, the once fit and able Canning, had let his military discipline slide, and working as a one-man taxi service, had piled on the pounds, becoming soft and unfit. After that incident Canning felt he needed to regain his fitness and develop more rounded skills, to be capable, not just with his fists but his whole body – and he found his answer in Westmoreland Street, Dublin where he discovered one of the earliest Karate dojo in Ireland, focusing on the Japanese style of Wado-Ryu Karate-do. From this point on, Canning would define himself as a martial artist.

Politics and opinions

During his early months of training Canning came across a number of talented Karateka, among them Peter Suzuki. At Canning's invitation, Suzuki opened a small dojo and taught Canning and a number of other students directly. A keen martial artist and keen businessman, by the stage he was a Wado-Ryu green belt Canning was already running and promoting a number of clubs around the city for Peter Suzuki, who was, at this time, working under the association of Tatsuo Suzuki.

As is common in the martial arts, politics and opinions led to a split in the organisation with Peter Suzuki leaving Tatsuo Suzuki's standard. Canning, however, remained with Tatsuo Suzuki rather than follow his instructor and he graded successfully to his 1st dan black belt in Wado-Ryu Karate in 1973. Canning continued his training and continued to promote and develop the art for about three and-a-half years, until he too left Tatsuo Suzuki's organisation to develop and promote his own body – the Irish Karate Federation (IKF).

The Federation was already in its infancy under Dublin black belt Brendan Kelly when Canning moved his support to this domestic organisation. The goal, for Canning at that time, was to promote Karate in Ireland and give students greater access and opportunity to develop and explore the martial arts.

The most progressive

Canning became president of the IKF shortly thereafter and opened one of the first full time dojos in Ireland back in 1978. His 'Irish Academy of Martial Arts', at the cross-roads of Phibsborough

Road and the North Circular Road ('Doyles Corner'), took up two floors of the building and at the time was the most progressive and busy full-time martial arts studio in the country. Within a year, the organisation grew from one club to 40. Meanwhile, Canning had continued to train and develop his martial arts skills, receiving a 5th dan rank from the Irish Karate Federation (IKF) in 1980.

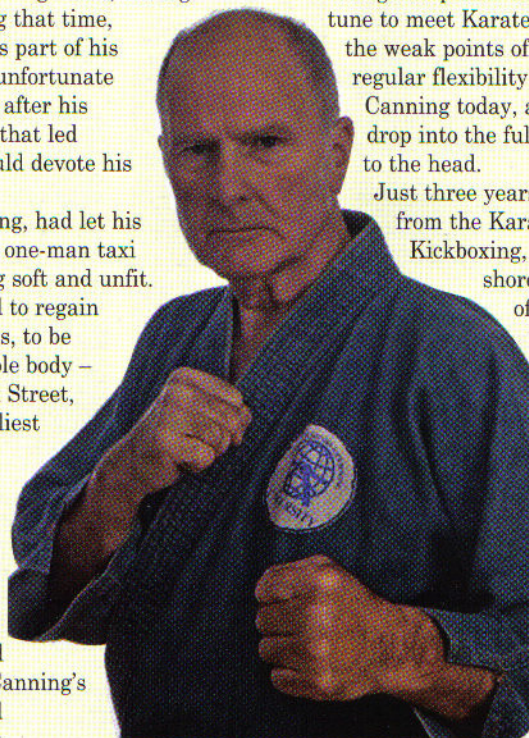
During this period of development, Canning had the good fortune to meet Karate expert Meiji Suzuki who advised him on the weak points of martial training and introduced him to regular flexibility training – something that stands to Canning today, as despite being 72-years-old he can still drop into the full side splits, and launch quick snappy kicks to the head.

Just three years later, in 1983, Canning had stepped back from the Karate scene, and was developing a system of Kickboxing, which he was first to introduce on to Irish shores. The system he developed, with the aid of Igor Zedun, was based on efficiency in competition, switching traditional Karate for the more fluid movements of Kickboxing. Canning named the system 'Mugendo', meaning 'Unlimited Way'.

Free flowing movements

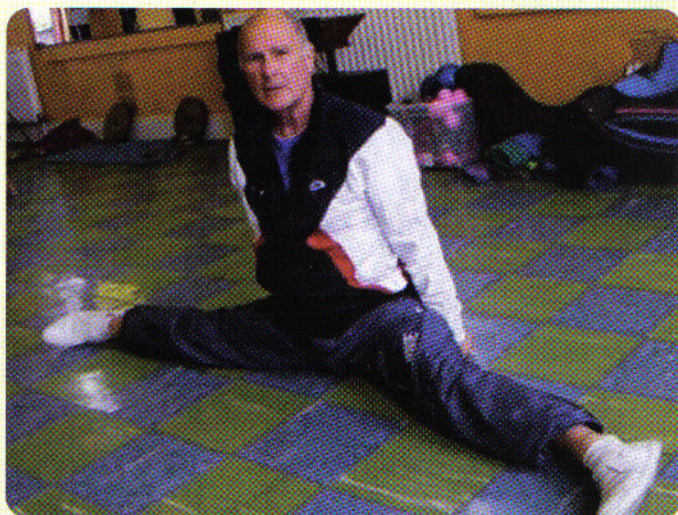
Similar in many senses to Bruce Lee's removal of the cluttered mess of traditional martial arts with Kung-fu in his formulation of Jeet Kun Do (JKD), Canning's new system advocated the use of free flowing movements as opposed to traditional static techniques. The new system also introduced new rules of sparring, including multiple three and five minute rounds.

Claiming to have created a modern martial arts is by no means



Dublin martial artist instructor George Canning, who recently beat bowel cancer, is now fighting fit and is back teaching and training regularly.

PICTURE: EFA CORWELL



At 72 years-of-age Irish martial arts legend George Canning can instantly drop into the full side splits and launch quick snappy kicks to the head. He regularly spars with students half his age at his Mugendo Kickboxing Club at Xavier's Hall on Dublin's Dorset Street.

a unquestionable claim, and in the Irish and international martial arts circles, if you're in anyway progressive and determined to strike out on your own, to be outspoken, you'll be a lightning rod to critics. And Canning has been no exception. In the early days of his training there were political financial allegations made by the Japanese Karate associations at the time. In addition, during his early promotion of the Irish Karate Federation (IKF) he was accused of handing out grades and giving them away, something Canning readily admits to, claiming it was to encourage the development of his students.

At this time, Canning - in conjunction with Dublin black belts Sean Dent and Fillipo Fusco - organised the Irish Kickboxing Federation (IKF), of which Canning was made president with Fusco as the vice-president and Dent acting as general secretary. The purpose of this organisation was to highlight and promote full-contact Kickboxing across Ireland and to organise teams to compete on both a national and international level.

To compete internationally

They succeed in doing this and quickly expanded the new sport bringing over America teams and hosting several competitions as well as taking Irish squads to compete internationally, always returning with medals and awards.

Shortly thereafter, Canning would take a small sabbatical from the martial arts and Mugendo, instead focusing on developing other areas of interest including bio-energy therapy, which he studied in Yugoslavia. He returned to the martial arts during 1989 and approached his training with a different view than previously, based upon his experiences in Yugoslavia. Today, Canning still teaches and trains in Mugendo Kickboxing, the art of his own creation, where he continues, in his 70s to spar with students half his age.

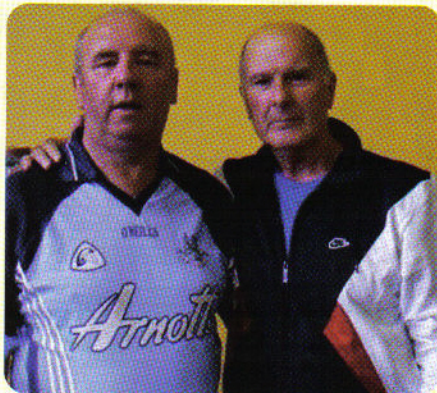
Recently however, Canning has been fighting a different kind of opponent, one he recently beat. Bowel cancer. When I met up with Canning, regardless of his previous accomplishments and claims, I can safely say the man looked to be in remarkable health. His eyes were clear and sharp, he was lean and energetic and still capable of his legendary flexibility – something he demonstrated by means of a light glancing roundhouse kick to my head – his way of shaking hands!

A cancerous polyp



Mugendo Grandmaster George Canning (centre) with some of the students from his Mugendo Kickboxing Club which is based in Xavier's Hall on Dorset Street, Dublin.

Canning said that after fighting things privately for six months, he decided he best confirm things via the western medical route. The doctor discovered a cancerous polyp in the bowel. Dr. Grogan in oncology, and Dr. O'Neill in radiotherapy, were in charge of his care during the six weeks of chemotherapy and the six weeks of radiotherapy. During that time the can-



George Canning (right) with his friend and martial arts colleague Barney Coleman.

cerous tumour reduced from 4cm to 1cm.

Following that, he went in for the surgery in St. Joseph's Hospital in Raheny, Dublin to remove the last remaining traces of the cancer. The operation was a complete success, and he woke in St. Luke's Ward with his family around him. Canning praised the medical staff that assisted his recovery and gives great credit to western medicine.

I've met few men in their 70s that are as

fit and vital, as capable and fluid of movement as George Canning and a huge part of his successful recovery, and his current state of excellent health, is very much in part to his long time training in the martial arts. I can think of no better motivation to continue training diligently in the martial arts than to enjoy the same flexibility, energy and fluidity that George Canning enjoys when I reach 72 years-old age.

- Paul J. O'Brien is a fully qualified acupuncturist and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioner. He is also certified in Western Clinical Medicine and Oriental Body Balance, and holds additional qualifications as a fitness instructor, personal trainer and Whole Body Vibration trainer. O'Brien is currently a Reality Based Combat instructor and dedicated martial artist having studied Shotokan Karate and other martial arts for over 15 years. He is the author of 'The Secrets of an Energetic and Abundant Life' available free to download from his website.
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