

Certain Victory



By **Robert Ott**

Could you actually apply the philosophy of Pil Sung after a life altering tragedy? The phrase is easier said than done...

It seems like yesterday but it was many years ago when I found myself reading an article in *Tae Kwon Do Times* titled "Pil Sung." Pil sung translates in English as "Certain Victory" through strength, courage and indomitable spirit. It is a philosophy created and developed by Korean martial artists many years ago. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I would exemplify this philosophy nor that I would live my life by its meaning.

I put on my first dobok at age six and by age 11, I was a true student studying Tae Soo Do Chung Do Kwan. Through the teenage years I competed in many tournaments winning both state and regional championships. By the age of 15, I earned my first-dan in Tae Kwon Do via the Kukkiwon. It was not too long after this that I started training at the Dragon Gym in Exton Pennsylvania under Grandmaster Goh Chae Teok studying Mun Moo Kwan. During this time of study, I began to realize that I was someone who is able to teach with a spirit that touches students. I guess I really began to realize that I was a teacher.

In the following years, I became the office manager and chief instructor of the Dragon Gym. In my spare time, I traveled weekends to study Kuk Sool and Hapkido under some of the best grandmasters in the world. In 1989, I opened the Traditional Martial Arts Institute in Somerdale, New Jersey, where I taught Korean martial arts to stu-



Whether in a business suit or a dobok, when Mr. Ott presents his seminars, it is to help blind and sighted people "open their eyes and see..."

Pil Sung

Certain Victory

LEFT: Presenting a seminar in N. W. Seattle. **RIGHT:** Before he was 21, Mr. Ott was Head Instructor at MacKenzie's TKD school in New Jersey where the photo was taken.



Overlooking the Gulf of Mexico, Robert meditates on a cliff at the Temple of Kukulkan in Tulum, on the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. The temple is in a walled city (Tulum) built around 1200 AD; Mayans lived in this area from as early as 300 BC.

dents of all ages. My school was one of the few in the area that offered its students more than just block, punch and kick. People came from all over the Philadelphia-New York area to study at my school.

This part of my life was so dynamic and spiritual yet it was also a time that I found myself lost, lonely and without a purpose in life. I had achieved so much and yet felt that I was far from my purpose. One evening I had gotten together with a friend and went out for a cocktail. We had arrived at the bar and had only been there for no more than 15 minutes when a large group of people came in who were, without question, heavily intoxicated. It was not long before one of the men from the group approached my female companion and

At a recent martial art demonstration in Tacoma, Washington



me. He wanted to spend time with my friend and told us so in a belligerent and confrontational manner. Needless to say, my friend drew closer to me so that he was aware that we were together. From there it all seemed to move so fast. My companion walked away while I put my jacket on to leave the bar. Then I said to the intruder, "You have had just a little too much to drink!" As I turned to leave, he pushed me from behind. The next thing I knew, the bar's doorman was escorting us both out the door. There in the foyer the fight broke out and when it was done he was gone and I was tucking my shirt back in and staring straight at my friend who went out with me to enjoy the evening.

I could not believe that I had just been in a confrontation. Having studied martial arts for so many years I was someone who tried to avoid these situations.

All of a sudden the door cracked open. The man put a gun to my head and pulled the trigger. It was at this point that my whole life changed in a horrifying, painful, traumatizing way. The bullet went through the left part of my skull, passing through my left temporal lobe of my brain, cutting the nerves to the left eye and then exploding into my right eye.

I spent the next 17 hours in the Cooper Trauma Center in Camden, New Jersey, with death being inches away. A

Certain Victory



With training partner Robert Cohn. Mr. Ott was only 21 when an act of senseless violence took his sight and almost his life in 1990.

nurse came in at the change of shift and while she was checking my chart, I grabbed her hand. She instantly ran to the neurosurgeons, letting it be known that I am moving and something must be done. The doctors told her that it was just a nerve reaction and that there is nothing they can do for I am going to die.

Apparently this nurse was not happy with their decisions nor did she believe that death was going to be the only answer. On her own, she called a well-known neurosurgeon, Doctor Luis Cervantes. He arrived within less than an hour and went to work. Through that nurse, that doctor, a loving family, and the strength, courage and indomitable spirit of "pil sung," I survived.

All of my fellow martial artists, students and grandmasters stood by my side. Grandmaster Goh Chae Teok came to visit me in the hospital along with Grandmaster Kenneth P. MacKenzie. Every time they came, it gave me the strength to get to the next day. It was not until two months after the incident happened that I realized I was blind. My special mother, Ann Damerau, told me that the first thing I said when I awoke was "How is my school?" My first concern was my dojang.

It is hard to imagine that it has been over 15 years since that day in the bar when my life forever changed. Today I hold the rank of sixth-dan from the Korean Hapkido Association (Sin Moo Hapkido) under Grandmaster Ji Han Jae and teach martial arts to people all over the country. I have held over 130 seminars in the United States, sharing my story and showing others what a true warrior is in today's world. I work with the young, old, disabled, and blind as well as other martial artist who are curious and amazed at my



LEFT & BELOW: At a recent seminar in the Pacific Northwest. Blindness has not hindered Robert Ott's sense of humor. When asked how he ended up in Washington State after living on the East Coast all his life, he said, "That's what happens when you drive blind!"

ability to teach and perform with no vision. Some have called me the "Flowering Warrior" who pulls the golden energy from the class and projects it back to the students in a growing form of enlightenment on "Certain Victory."

Teaching and lecturing on martial arts is my avocation, it is my calling that I do part time. Vocationally, I am the President/CEO of a business that feeds Fort Lewis, Washington. The business is called Certain Victory Food Services, Incorporated, and has well over 500 employ-



Mr. Ott believes he has a gift and a responsibility to teach others whether it is through the martial arts or through his personal experiences.

Certain Victory



The author hopes that his seminars give others strength and the motivation to move forward with their own lives.

Mr. Ott and Mr. Cohn. Robert Ott's professional success has not caused him to forget others with disabilities. He has hired over 32 workers throughout his career with disabilities; his current administrative assistant is legally blind.

ees. Furthermore, I am a proud husband and father of two beautiful women by the names of Kimberly and Savannah. Today I am building on a dojang to my home that will have its own library, workout studio, and bathroom/shower facilities. I will name this place "The Temple of Certain Victory." During all this, I am into the sixth month of writing my biography and producing a filmed documentary on my life with a fabulous co-writer by the name of Bob Olson. Through martial arts, I have learned how to take a horrific tragedy and turn it into a prime example of "Certain Victory."

Soon I will take my first trip to Korea for the championships of the World Kido Federation under Chairman In Sun Seo, one of the most respected grandmasters in the world. Together with the National Korean Martial Arts Association and the North American Sin Moo Hapkido Federation, this will be an experience of a lifetime for me. I am sure that there will be plenty that I will be able to see through the eyes of my spirit. Often it is said that "Seeing is believing" but for me I say, "Believing is seeing!" ●

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