

## ***Be Strong, Be Gentle, Be Beautiful***

A film by Yuriko Gamo Romer

### **Logline**

In a world steeped in male-dominant tradition, 97-year-old Keiko Fukuda is the highest ranking female judo master and the last living link to its origins.

### **Paragraph (100 words)**

In a world steeped in tradition, 97-year-old Keiko Fukuda is the highest ranking female judo master and the last living link to its origins. Fukuda was preparing for marriage when she met the founder of judo and radically altered her life path. After attaining the top rank open to women in Japan, Fukuda exposed the gender bias in the male dominated system when she accepted a job teaching judo professionally in the United States. Ultimately, Fukuda would sacrifice marriage, family and homeland to bring judo to a global community of practitioners—inspiring generations of women to transform the world of martial arts and pursue their dreams.

### **Synopsis (under 350 words)**

*Be Strong, Be Gentle, Be Beautiful* tells the story of Keiko Fukuda's lifelong journey to become the highest-ranking woman in judo history. In exploring the life of this diminutive but determined and visionary 97-year old master, the documentary tells an inspirational story about following one's dreams, while charting the often forgotten women's struggle for equality in martial arts and the modern world. In 2006, the Kodokan – judo's founding organization – awarded Fukuda the coveted ninth dan (9<sup>th</sup> degree black belt) to honor a career spanning four continents and eight decades. The film frames Fukuda's remarkable story with her 2009 trip from California to Japan for a ceremony to celebrate her achievement. Scenes from the trip cue moments from Fukuda's rich life, conveyed through a combination of on-screen footage and voiceovers featuring Fukuda, her friends, and judo colleagues; verite; rare archival footage and photographs; and a soundtrack that intermingles music and instrumentation from Fukuda's two homes, Japan and the United States. A supporting cast of characters includes Fukuda's female colleagues, and Hal Sharp, an American who fell in love with judo when he was a soldier stationed in postwar Japan. His rare home movies and photographs reveal an intimate portrait of postwar Japan rarely seen in the West. The film's tone pays tribute to Fukuda's spunky character, while at the same time revealing her pain at the personal sacrifices she had to make as a woman and a judo master. Fukuda's unique journey offers a thematic exploration of broader shifts in Japanese postwar society and the altered status of women on both sides of the Pacific. The film's visual style echoes and honors Fukuda's motto, which is also its title: in judo (literally "way of gentleness"), gentleness is the flexibility to move with the energy of the moment. The film's pacing is at times methodical and meditative, while at others it picks up speed and bursts of energy. It will flow like judo's *randori*, when two people are sparring, rolling or throwing, and at time dancing slowly in concert.