

The Perils of Open Hand

by Coe Douglas

There are worse things than getting your ass kicked by a 12 year old Puerto Rican kid. This was exactly my thinking as he stood over me, his pre-pubescent screams sounding like a baby Bruce Lee, preparing to finish me off.

Then, I passed out.

I came to and learned I had two broken fingers on my left hand, a hyper-extension and a nasty middle finger sprain on my right. This was the catalyst for my realization that I was not cut out for Karate.

“What were you thinking?” asked Sensei Tony Moretti, head of Sensei Tony Moretti's Karate Dojo and Meditation center. I was sprawled out on purple mat in the middle of the dojo. From my back I could see banners of snakes, tigers and dragons, fluorescent lights, white walls and a twelve year old black belt standing over me looking pretty pleased with himself.

“You don't block kicks like that. You had open hand!” screamed Sensei as he rushed into view above me, biceps bulging, nostrils flaring, causing the young black belt to finally back off.

“I did not have open hand,” I screamed back.

“Open hand! Look at those fingers. That doesn't happen when you block with fist. Lie back, I must reset your fingers.” I was fully aware of the pain now. My head fell back onto the purple mat—I think my eyes watered a bit, but not because of crying I swear—as I extended my left hand so Sensei Tony Moretti could adjust my mangled fingers. I turned slightly to the side as if to turn away from the pain.

“Heeeeeee-yaaaaaaa,” Sensei screamed as everything else went

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black. The next thing I remembered I was at home on my couch, both hands generously bandaged. The twelve year old that kicked my ass was sitting next to me on the couch.

?“What happened?”

“You had open hand, dude.”

“Enough with the open hand! I mean how did I get here?”

“Well, you began to scream and then passed out. Sensei said that the sounds you made when he fixed your hand were the most horrible thing he had heard in all his years.”

“Both hands,” I murmured, looking at the swollen white stumps in my lap.

“Then, you passed out. Sensei brought you home. I wanted to stay with you to make sure you were okay.”

We both fell silent for a moment. My fingers were throbbing. The kid was still wearing his white dobok and oversized black belt. He looked to be drowning in the outfit. He was also wearing black Converse.

“Yeah, you punched and I kicked and counter kicked and you did a good job blocking them both, but not with an open hand. Your fingers will get messed up every time.”

“Enough already about fucking open hand!”

“Broken fingers don't come from closed fist, dude,” he said.

To be honest, I didn't know if I had open hand or not. Didn't really care. “Well, I think this ends my Karate career,” I said. “What's your name anyway?”

“Julio.” ??

“Thanks, Julio. Thanks for sitting with me, too.”

