

# Love kicked in quickly for couple

Fitness studio owners  
fell for each other  
when they first met

By KAKI HOLT

Special to the News-Press

CAPE CORAL — The first time Marlene Fuchs laid eyes on her future husband, there were more than sparks.

"There was lightening at first sight," said Marlene, who lived in her native France when she first met Hilmar Fuchs. "The first time I see his blue eyes, my knee was a little weak."

In the 16 years since that first electric meeting, Marlene and Hilmar Fuchs practiced their martial arts together throughout the world. This past fall, they chose to settle in Cape Coral and open a martial arts/aerobic studio here.

As a karate coach on a student exchange with his team in 1982, Hilmar had been assigned to stay with a French family who didn't speak his native German.

"I spoke no French so we were just sitting in the dining room. It was too awkward, so they went to get their neighbor to translate," said Hilmar, who was 33 at the time. They fetched Marlene.

But Marlene was so struck with the dashing man that she almost couldn't act as an interpreter.

"My German was also a little weak all of a sudden," said Marlene, who was an Air France stewardess at the time.

"That night I lie awake thinking about how to see Marlene again," said Hilmar, who left France early the next morning but was cagey enough to leave his address and phone number.

Within a year, the couple had married and settled near Frankfurt, Germany. There they opened a health club where he continued to teach martial arts and she taught aerobics. Eventually, they expanded their club by adding weight training and injury rehabilitation. The couple also traveled to Asia.

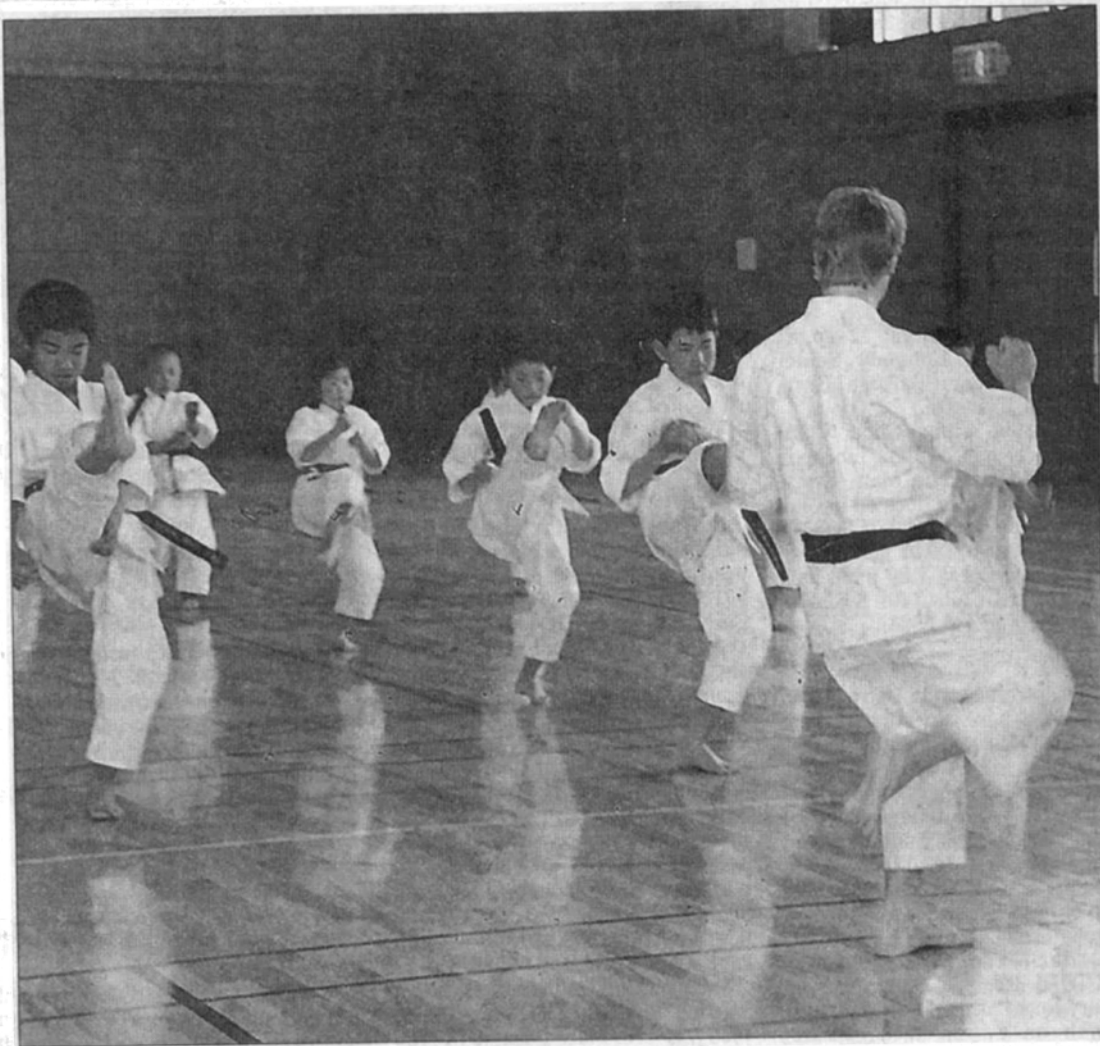
"We studied in Japan to learn the roots of karate. It's not just fighting, it's a philosophy of discipline, harmony and respect," said Hilmar, who's attained a sixth-degree black belt. "It's living in harmony with nature and each other."

Eventually, though, the nature of German winters overwhelmed Marlene.

"Every time I returned to Frankfurt from my parents in the south of France, I had tears in my eyes," said Marlene, 47. "So Hilmar said we could move back there or to Florida where we had come on holidays."

"My parent's home was close to Nice and Monaco, but it's not a safe area any more. Too many burglaries," she said. "For me, Florida was safer. And Americans are so friendly."

So six months ago, the couple



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**IN CLASS:** Hilmar Fuchs, now of Cape Coral, has taught martial arts classes around the world. This class was in Gifu, Japan.

moved to Cape Coral and opened M-H Sport & Health Care.

"Our business in Germany was successful, but we needed a new challenge," Hilmar said. "We've taken two steps back and we're starting over again."

"We're starting small with tai chi, karate and aerobics," said Marlene, whose first exposure to aerobics was through Jane Fonda's videos. She's a first-degree black belt in Kobudo karate, which uses weapons.

Hilmar teaches about 20 tai chi students and four karate students in his studio. He also teaches for the city parks and recreation department.

Currently, he's setting up an exchange between Cape Coral and Japan.

"It's very helpful for young people to experience other cultures."

Meanwhile Marlene is making sure that their work lives don't overwhelm their private time.

"Maybe later we'll add weight machines," said Marlene, who enjoys walking on the beach. "We want a life outside the club."

Part of that life right now is perfecting their English. They both take classes at Cape Coral High adult ed two evenings a week.



**ON TOUR:** Marlene and Hilmar Fuchs, right, seen here with friend Noda Seuses, left, during a visit to Japan, have traveled the globe in the 16 years since they first met.

"They are gracious and charming, as well as dedicated students," said Audrey Acouti, their English for Speakers of Other Languages instructor.

"They're the kind of people we need in our country."

— Kaki Holt is a Fort Myers-based freelance writer.