

What Karate Means to Me

The first time Karate entered my life was in 1992- I attended my older brothers Karate grading to watch- at Sho to Kun karate school. I couldn't sit and watch- I had to join in. I stood on the sidelines (as an annoying younger sister does) and attempted to mirror the moves of the class, with kicks and punches flying in every direction. It was love. I knew then and there that I must learn this new activity called Karate.

Dad was already a student with Hanshi at Goju-Ryu karate school and he suggested I come along and try it out to see if I liked it. I didn't like it- I loved it. Every week dad and I would attend Hanshi's classes- full of motivation, determination and willingness to learn. We graded together numerous times, and our training regime increased to 3 days a week. Karate was fun although I was too young to appreciate the benefits that karate brought to my life. I remember running through the play ground in primary school punching my friends in the stomach telling them they must tense their stomach to avoid pain- and explained to them the concept of the sun-shin stomach. Throughout my life I have taken concepts from karate and Hanshi's teachings into my life and explained to people the merits of karate- but as a child I did this without even meaning to. Karate was my life and my life was Karate.

As I hit teenager years Karate fell from my priority list to my chores list. I lost enthusiasm and determination as hormones and life experiences drained me of any ability to focus. My training at karate became lazy and lacked spirit. I began missing classes and finally withdrew from Karate training. Numerous times I would return but the motivation was not there.

Through the past 2-5 years I have been working on my spiritual wellbeing through meditation and raja yoga. Refocused and replenished I knew karate was to once again become part of my life. My dad relayed that Hanshi had asked for me to return to finally achieve my Shodun- I knew this was the call I was waiting for.

To me - Karate is Hanshi. Hanshi has been in my life since I was a child and a constant master figure. His words and wisdom have been etched in my mind- and I have realised that it is indeed Hanshi's words that sit in my subconscious and remind me of the good life, the spiritual life, the focused life, the happy life, the karate life. Hanshi also attended our annual Violin concerts and was a part of my life outside of karate. He taught me Judo as a child and Shesochin as an adult. Hanshi is master and mentor.

To me – Karate is spirit. The pure energy and focus I feel when practising Karate adds dimensions to my life. You cannot win a fight with skills or techniques if you do not possess the spirit of a karate warrior. This applies to the entire spectrum of karate- you cannot practice without intent and you cannot master techniques when your spirit is not there. Spirit is crucial in Karate and this is what Karate has taught me.

To me - Karate is discipline and focus. Without discipline you cannot progress in Karate and I have learnt this the long and hard way- sitting on 1st kyu for over 10 years. Focus of not only every technique practiced- from where it begins to where it ends- to the focus of the mind. Karate is about clearing the mind and focusing on the "here and now".

To me – Karate is peacefulness. Peacefulness in the energy shared in the dojo; the peacefulness shared in the mind and the peacefulness in other elements such as the quietening of ego and devil. Although we are trained to fight and kill; we are also taught the peaceful way- to avoid conflict and not afflict pain on others. Karate is peace.

To me- Karate is confidence. As a female it is constantly stressed from the day we are born that it is not safe for us. We are the weaker gender and should constantly be on watch for people wishing to harm us. As a karate student from a young age- I have been full of confidence, not only in my safety on the streets and in aggressive situations- but I believe Karate gives me confidence in myself. Hanshi's teachings have not only provided confidence physically but also spiritually- which translates to a successful life and successful relationships.

To me – Karate is family. My dad introduced me to Karate- and has been the glue in the continual return to Karate. Dad is constant and my eternal link to Karate practice. It was Dads disappointment that I feared when missing a class or discontinuing practice. Dad is very committed to Karate and the reason for me practicing through my life. All of my brothers have also attended Karate through the years and even my older sister has practiced in class with Hanshi. Karate is not only my immediate family but the family of the dojo- the many people that practice together and share the common love- as well as those that have passed through the school through the years. None will be forgotten and we as the karate family are always hopeful they will return again.

To me- Karate is love.

Michelle Wilson 8 June 2012