

My Karate Journey, Part 14 -- The Pandemic: Tossed, Turned,

but Still Standing!

HSK was rolling smoothly along and, believe it or not, was actually gaining speed and momentum after more than 36 years! Senpais Cliff and Ray, along with Paula and myself, were just at the end of a spectacular Big Island golf trip when the SKY BEGAN TO FALL! Heading to the airport we witnessed HUGE lines of customers waiting with carts outside of COSTCO to get in. The panic-buying and hoarding had started!!! Luckily we were able to board our plane and return to Honolulu BEFORE the travel ban was mandated!

Back home on Friday, March 20, 2020, you could feel the tension and anxiety in the air, as people were confused as to what steps to take to prevent contracting the virus. Although Hawaii had been spared the major brunt of COVID's wrath, more than a million people have died throughout the US. And IT'S STILL NOT OVER!!! As one form of the virus wanes, another more deadly or transmissible variant takes its place.

Before we left the Big Island, I had texted Senpai Scott to cancel ALL classes. Do we wait COVID out, or do we try to train during this pandemic? This was my dilemma! I had heard of Zoom, the app where you could do online discussions and meetings, and told myself, "That would NEVER work!" However, a couple of my members, Michael Ng and James White, wanted to give it a try and asked me to continue teaching karate online. With hesitation, but encouragement from my daughter Remy, I agreed.

On April 2, 2020, we held our very first Zoom class. The class was small, less than a dozen, but the members present were eager and excited. There were no Senpais to help me except Remy, but that was fine. Communication between me, the Senpais, and the members was at a standstill. Yet, I understood the situation and resigned myself to that fact.

Although initially I had felt that teaching karate online would never work, I was pleasantly surprised to find that I actually ENJOYED it!! I told our members that there would be no cost for the training, and that I was grateful that so many of them wanted to keep it up. Word of our online training spread, and soon there were close to 20 members training with us!

To tell the truth, the time I spent teaching online reminded me of when I first opened the Manoa dojo — I felt a VERY close bond AND responsibility to our members for their success since I was the ONLY one teaching them! Classes continued to grow, and after 4 months on Zoom I informed the members that I would once again start collecting tuition in August. Curiously, all the Senpais decided to return at that time!

What I thought would be a temporary “bump” in the road that would soon smooth out turned into a worldwide pandemic that has taken millions of lives ... and STILL lingers! Although COVID still claims 15-20 lives a week in Hawaii, the mood here has changed from worrisome panic to cautious acceptance that it may be here to stay. And our temporary “bump” has been a PERMANENT one for more than TWO years ... AND COUNTING!!!

Earlier this year (2022), we decided that it was time to return to the dojo. However, Shinshu Kyokai Mission was no longer available for rental, and the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii had just raised its rental rates. With our now small enrollment of students, I knew we

would NOT be able to afford the rental costs, so we needed to find another venue. We issued an alert to our Senpais and members to be on the lookout for an affordable rental space. Fortunately, we were able to secure use of the judo dojo at Manoa Japanese Language School (MJLS), and have been training there on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays since April 2, 2022.

Our dojo and training regimen have been completely overturned! We require ALL members to be fully vaccinated, and our older members boosted. They have to sign a COVID waiver, pass a temperature check before each training, and wear a mask while in the dojo. I also cut the kiai (yell) and kumite (sparring) in June to further keep our members safe, although we have, since, returned to partner drills.



Our general class working hard with masks!

Eliminating the kiai, in my opinion, has had the biggest NEGATIVE effect on our training regimen — yes, even MORE than wearing a mask! Karate without kiai is like walking through a lush green forest and not hearing a single bird singing happily and sweetly!! You quickly realize that something vital and important is missing!! I plan to teach our beginners

to kiai soon, and to reinstate this essential element of training to ALL our classes in September. More about the positive unexpected effects of kiai later.

MJLS has been a great venue for our training, although a bit cramped. The judo room, however, has mats on the floor that are not very conducive to our type of training. Karate training is best done on a solid, wooden floor. Fortunately, we were able to negotiate a move to another building at MJLS, which has asphalt floors and a bit more space and ventilation. This has been our home since August 9, 2022, and WE LOVE IT!!!



HSK Senpais in our new hard-floored dojo!

Our 31 years at Noelani Elementary School in Manoa, just a couple of blocks away from MJLS, proved to be a mecca for potential karate students. MJLS seems to have the same type of attraction! We recently held a new beginners registration in May, and over 20 new members registered for classes. The more than two-year COVID isolation has definitely unleashed all the frustration and anxiety stored up in them, as they have taken to karate like a fish takes to water!!! The effort, focus, and attitude this group of beginners has displayed have been truly phenomenal! Even after registration ended and classes began, I have been getting phone calls and inquiries from many more people about starting. Unfortunately, I have had to inform them that classes are full and the next registration will be in January of 2023.





Our amazing beginners — focused and determined!!!

Although our search for a larger venue close by continues, we are pleased with the facility and MJLS staff that we work with. It feels great to be back in the dojo doing two of the things I love most about karate — **TEACHING AND SOCIALIZING!!!**

Alan Sekiguchi, September 04, 2022

