

My Karate Journey, Part 15 -- The "FIRE" Returns!

Although many restrictions have been lifted and cases have decreased, COVID will likely be with us for a long, LONG time!! Our trainings at MJLS have been going quite well, undoubtedly due to the caring and deep concern of ALL our members to keep everyone safe!! We have been training here since April of 2022, using masks and temperature checks to assure the safety of everyone.

I knew our old-timers would have no problem following HSK's strict protocols when we first returned to the dojo. My concern was with the new beginners who started in June – what would THEY be like? Thankfully, they have also toed the line without a complaint, and have transitioned into HSK's Ohana seamlessly!

My Senpais believe that this group of beginners is the best that we have had in years, and I agree! I also think that they are the most UNUSUAL! “Best” because almost all of them train regularly, are super focused to do well, and are great listeners. “Unusual” for me because most parents start training with their child for the child's sake. They believe that this activity will help their child develop character, focus, behavior, respect, and attitude. Their initial plan is to start with them, then step away to watch them bloom and develop. If their child decides to quit, they leave the dojo and look for something else, which is expected and USUAL!

I am positive that this group of parents had the exact same intent. However, like my Dad, once they tried karate they were captured – hook, line, and sinker!!! Our beginners' group has FOUR mothers who have continued to train even after their child and family stopped!! I am convinced that they found the challenge and benefit they were seeking, much like my Senpais have. In addition, another mom decided to keep her child in karate instead of signing him up for baseball, as she felt strongly that HSK would do a better job of guiding her son in developing his focus, respect, self-discipline, and overall character!

Our beginners' program started in June and ended in August. Because my goal was NEVER to make money in karate, my speech to them as they ended their program was quite frank – “Karate is NOT for everyone! Hopefully, these three months have shown you what amazing potential you each have, and have given you more confidence to try new and different things! Those of you who decide not to continue, find your passion and pursue it. Best of luck to you. Those who decide to continue will NOT regret it. Karate NEVER gets easy, no matter how many years you train, and that is how it SHOULD be! You will ALWAYS find new challenges – new hills to climb. BUT, you also will develop more confidence to explore and push your limits and to set higher ones so you can realize your full potential!”

It has now been more than 3 months since our beginners started their training, and they have just taken their first practical exam for belt promotion. In all, 19 have taken the

exam, and I am pleased to say that they have ALL passed! Five students took a make-up exam a few days after the scheduled exam date due to unforeseen circumstances. We normally do NOT give make-up exams but made an exception for this “special” group.

I have already started teaching the class the new techniques and stances that they will need to demonstrate in their next exam 4 months from now. I told them that the last 4 months found them learning one stance and one kick, and in the next four, they will be learning 2 kicks and 2 more stances. They are eager to do well, and soak up the lessons like a sponge! WHAT A JOY TO TEACH!!!

Meanwhile, our advanced class has trained diligently to get back to their pre-COVID form. This core of students has been remarkable! Returning to in-dojō training from Zoom is like accelerating from a 2 push-up routine to 20 the next day!! They KNOW the pain involved, but also know the GAINS that they will achieve. This, they realize, is GOOD PAIN!!! We now have a group of 8 brown belts, a splash of purple and green belts, and a slew of blue belts! As of now, our total training enrollment is over 50, including 7 Senpais and myself.

Our return to the dojo has rekindled my love and joy of in-person teaching. More than 2 years on Zoom from home left an emptiness and a feeling of isolation from personal social contact. It made me truly realize and appreciate the importance of face-to-face interaction. Although COVID still lurks in the shadows waiting for another opportunity to spread its evil, I am confident that our Ohana will remain vigilant in its fight!! THE “FIRE” HAS RETURNED!!!

