

My Karate Journey, Part 19 -- A Home Away From Home!

Before COVID hit, HSK was rocketing through space on ALL cylinders. Our classes were huge with a steady flow of new students, a large and close-knit veteran group who led by example, and dedicated instructors who considered HSK their home! When the pandemic hit, the whole world came to a stop! Fear and uncertainty struck, as neighbors, friends, and family caught this deadly disease — many dying!!! Our members and instructors, understandably, ALL disappeared. It was like HSK being wiped off the face of the earth!!

My family and I were just as fearful as everyone else, and also chose to isolate. I had NO idea what would become of HSK, and often contemplated its end. Thankfully, two of our members figured out a way that we could maintain our training while keeping each other safe — ZOOM!!! I owe MIKE NG and JAMES WHITE my deepest appreciation for their efforts to keep HSK alive!! Without them and their persistence in convincing other members to participate, HSK's doom would have become a reality!

Two years of Zoom training seemed like a lifetime! Yet, it moved quickly and smoothly, and, believe it or not, was quite ENJOYABLE!!! Soon we had more than 20 members training regularly. My initial resistance quickly gave way to the anticipation of seeing and chatting with everyone, even if only online.

COVID struck Hawaii in March of 2020, and we started Zoom sessions the following month in April. We continued these sessions until we were able to move into the Manoa Japanese Language School facility in April of 2022. It is now October of 2022, and we have more than doubled our enrollment of training students!!!

Every student enters the dojo for a myriad of reasons, AND leaves the same way. Yet, a few of them choose to stay, as the Senpais have, because of some intangible attraction not only to the art, but to HSK's "magic". They have found "something" that they could NOT find elsewhere, and LIKE what they saw! I believe part of that "magic" is my "angelic transformation"!!!

All kidding aside — as I have experienced, they have made life-long friendships with each other, and treasure the time they spend together in the dojo. Previously, the Senpais were responsible for the planning and execution of ALL the activities that we plan each year. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, and without any coaxing or "threats", a group of our brown belts took it upon themselves to take charge of our annual picnic and Christmas party! They planned EVERYTHING, including games, activities for the kids, prizes, etc.

For me, it was like a "Coming of Age" for this group, who saw the value and worth of HSK and what we were doing for the club and community ... AND wanted to be a part of it! I call this group "Cassie's Corps" for lead organizer Cassie Romero. Cassie is a kindergarten teacher with an incredibly creative mind, and husband Ramon can design and build ANYTHING!!! She, Ramon, and partners Susan Sawai, Ann Oda, Ciena Swafford, Gayle Lau, and Senpai Remy, along with others who no longer train with us, have taken over the reins for many of HSK's activities.

Hopefully, now that we are back in the dojo, many of our activities can resume for our HSK Ohana. For this brown belt group, I am thankful and so blessed that they chose HSK as their 'HOME AWAY FROM HOME!'