

My Karate Journey, Part 22 -- Breaking From Tradition!

You know the old saying, “familiarity breeds contempt”? In short, the more you know a person, the less you tend to respect them! This thinking was prevalent during my training years. My Sensei always kept to himself, rarely socialized, and made it a point NOT to get too friendly or close to his students. As Sensei, he was put on a pedestal for all to see and admire, but little was known about him. He would show up at the dojo, teach his classes, and leave as quietly as he arrived! After training with Asai Sensei for three years, I realized that I hardly knew ANYTHING about him.

In the martial arts especially, the Sensei would strictly adhere to this tradition. FORMALITY AND RESPECT ARE THE KEY INGREDIENTS TO AN EFFECTIVE DOJO ATMOSPHERE!! They felt that making friendships or getting too close to students would cause a breakdown in the teacher-student relationship. Formality and respect would begin to wane and cause them to be less effective teachers. You see, in martial arts, you are taught how to defend yourself against aggressors in life-threatening situations. As a Sensei, being able to instill some amount of fear in your students can be an effective teaching tool. That CANNOT happen when your students are also your good friends!!

When I started teaching karate, I found myself mirroring the same behaviors of my Sensei, and it felt very natural. The training was cold and very business-like. You come, you train, and you leave! There was very little interaction between and among members, or, for that matter, between the Sensei and the student! I carried on this tradition for many years, even after starting HSK, although I slowly introduced fun activities to foster camaraderie and socialization among our members. Thus, the “softening of Sensei” began!!

Curiously, it wasn't until around 2007 that my fear of "losing control" in the dojo was laid to rest. Does that date sound familiar? Yes, that is also the date that granddaughter Rylynn was born ... AND when my "amazing transformation" took place!!! I have taught SO many nice and truly wonderful people through the years that came and left, and realized that I never REALLY got to know them! I also realized that this was something that I was missing out on! Who wouldn't want to have MORE nice and wonderful friends?

After starting so many activities and events where our students could mingle and socialize with one another, I began to witness something quite extraordinary. Our members found reasons other than karate to return to the dojo — the friends they have made!!! So many close, strong and lifetime friendships were created at HSK thanks to my realization that karate can be SO MUCH MORE than physical it can also be the ingredient that can soothe and energize one's soul!!!

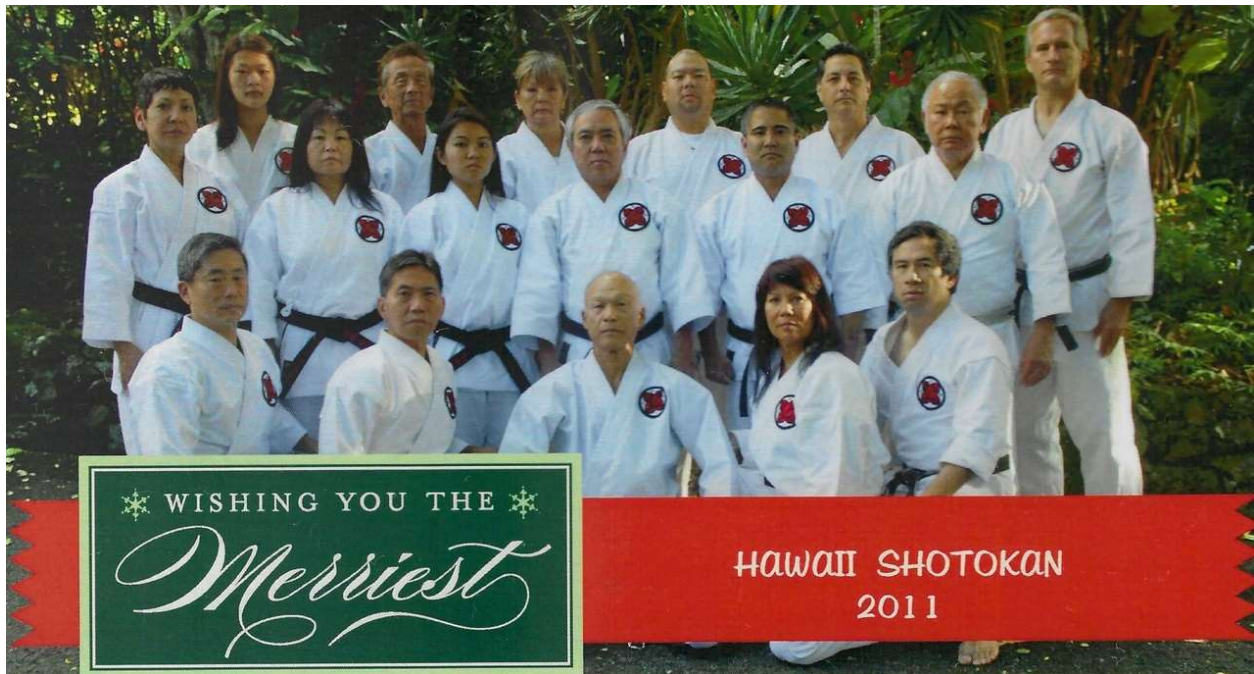
As for me, 2007 was also the time that my "softening" begin to accelerate. I recall overhearing a conversation between Senpais Cliff and Ray. They were talking about golf. Since I had "played" golf previously when I was much younger, I was curious. Talking to them, I found out that they would go to the driving range to hit balls. "Ahh!" I thought to myself, "What an opportunity to bond!!!" I asked if I could join them, and they agreed. I could see that they were a bit skeptical about having me join them. I guess that they were a bit worried. They must have thought that the amount of yelling at them that I did in the dojo would carry through on the golf course!!! HAH!!! We have been golfing together weekly now for about 15 years, with Senpai Scott joining us several years back. I recently cut down to just about once a month, now preferring to spend more time with my family and grandchildren.



Golfing Buddies!

Another HUGE tradition that I have discontinued is the photo on our annual HSK Christmas card that we send to our members, friends and families. When HSK first started, NO ONE was permitted to smile in the photo! Can you imagine receiving a Christmas card, opening it, and seeing a group of people looking at you with stern and serious faces, with the words “HAPPY HOLIDAYS” under it? Talk about a MISMATCH!! Well, that’s what our card recipients experienced for almost 30 years — until 2012, when our very first smiley card debuted!!!

Which do YOU prefer?



Christmas 2011



Christmas 2012

I have also invited the Senpais and “Cassie’s Corps” and their families, over for get-togethers to thank them for their help and support of HSK throughout

the years. Although COVID has put a stop to our gatherings, I plan to resume them when the conditions improve and the time is right! In the meantime, what a GREAT experience I am having with this AWESOME group of people!!!

I AM TRULY HAPPY AND GRATEFUL THAT I BROKE FROM TRADITION!!!

Alan Sekiguchi, November 04, 2022