

THE MARTIAL ART OF KARATE
A WAY OF LIFE THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

(Arlette T. Smith)

My journey with martial arts began in April of 2013. My personal trainer, who later would become my Sensei, began to encourage me to begin attending karate classes. I was at first hesitant, as I was under the erroneous belief that if one did not begin martial arts as a child or as a very young adult, then the window of opportunity was closed. How wrong I was. When I began attending karate classes, an additional erroneous belief on my part had to be deconstructed: the belief that martial arts was only about self-defense and nothing more. I was soon to experience the opening of several windows, each presenting different but equally important aspects of the martial art of karate, which has resulted in its having a physical, mental, and emotional impact on both my personal and professional life.

I. **Physical Aspect**

Physical fitness has always played a large role in my life, beginning with my school years straight through adulthood. It has enabled me to be relatively healthy throughout my life and has also played a major role in minimizing the stress and fatigue which I experience, not only in my personal life, but also in my crisis-oriented career as a Child Protective Services Social Worker. Karate places a large emphasis on conditioning and on fitness. When I do not maintain a regular regimen of fitness conditioning in my life, it automatically correlates with less physical stamina and endurance in my personal and professional life.

II. **Mental Aspect**

Focus and intent are two of the key words that come to mind when I think of the mental aspect of karate. Focus and intent are imperative

factors in the successful performance of every move found in karate, be it in a kata, self-defense techniques, drills, or sparring. The strengthening of my ability to concentrate through focusing with intent has proved beneficial by enabling me to more effectively and efficiently complete tasks in both my personal as well as professional life.

III. Emotional Aspect

I cannot overstate the positive impact that the practice of the martial art of Karate has had on my emotional life in that it has assisted me in being able to handle major crises in my life, both personal and professional. My entrance into the world of martial arts coincided with a period in my life that was extremely emotionally challenging: Within the prior four years, I had lost both parents, my spouse underwent major surgery, and I also had undergone a major surgery. Karate provided and continues to provide an emotional outlet which assists me monumentally in being able to process my feelings in a constructive and healthy manner. The resulting positive effects also transcend into allowing for optimal performance in my personal and professional life.

In conclusion, after four years of practice, I have come to realize that the martial art of karate is holistic in nature. To define its value as not extending beyond that of self-defense is an over simplification of what it truly is: A way of life which comprises physical, mental, and emotional aspects, thereby lending itself to practice not only in the Dojo, but also in the application of its principles outside of the Dojo in one's personal and professional life.