

How the Martial Arts has changed and influenced my life and how Martial Arts is for life.

Yondan Article by Kevin McDonough
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Soon after receiving the topic for my article I began reflecting on my life and what had led me to where I find myself today. My earliest memories and interest in the martial arts I can honestly say began as a boy although at that time I expect I wasn't even sure what a martial art was. Where I grew up there wasn't anyone offering lessons however in 1966-67 there was this short-lived TV series called the Green Hornet where I was introduced to Kato who we know today was Bruce Lee. This small, explosive, fierce actor really left an impression on me and in later years as did his movies. Although Jeet Kune Do is far cry from Shorinji Ryu, I can honestly say it was my first exposure to the arts.

In my junior and high school years I was introduced to sport and participated in many of them. I played team sports but found my comfort with one on one activities where unlike a team sport your success fell solely on your own abilities. I credit this preference to hold myself solely accountable for success or failure in sport to my approach of most everything I take on in life. Perhaps unknowingly this formed the foundation to what would become my martial arts journey. I've since come to think of martial arts not purely as a sport but as something much different. Those who know will understand this if you are fortunate to train long enough. For me the martial arts transcends sport as it encompasses mind, body and spirit.

My formal introduction to the martial arts came at a perfect time in my life although there have been times I'd wished I had started much sooner. Having a family life, career time balance is crucial if you are to succeed in any extracurricular activity as there is an expected level of commitment required no truer than in the martial arts. Only after having my first child an all but familiar bullying incident prompted me like many parents to enroll him in what else but a karate program at the YMCA, something I was never afforded the opportunity as a child. I thought back on my childhood and how my son might better protect himself. It may not have had the results I was hoping for as he was only five but for a time I lived vicariously through him, watching every class and helping him practice like I knew anything at the time. No adult program was offered but as fate would have it I was invited to come try a class at a newly formed karate club on the campus where I worked thus my journey began. As an adult taking that first step isn't always easy but I'm so glad that I did. Training began in earnest and I rarely missed a class. It was everything I thought and hoped it would be and soon became a dedicated part of my life. As a student I was so grateful for every lesson and always looked forward to the next class. There was so much to learn which made it a true challenge but that's why I enjoyed it so much. Twenty plus years later there is still so much more to learn.

In the spring of 2012 I was presented an opportunity to take over our Fredericton dojo else it would in all likelihood close due to my Sempai who was the Fredericton dojo head having to relocate for work. As uncertain as I was of the dojo's future how could I not step up and take

over as simply quitting karate was not an option in my mind. I may have a somewhat unique perspective being this was Sensei's first satellite dojo so felt I had a responsibility to my fellow black belts, our students, my Sensei and especially to myself to continue to build and propagate the Martial Arts through Sensei Fournier's teachings and through him those of O'Sensei Kim. I truly feel that what we do does have a positive impact and makes a difference in our students lives. I continue the same thought to this day.

Fast forward to now where I'm truly living the martial arts lifestyle. I've created a new home for the Fredericton dojo, built up our Black Belt ranks and continue to maintain a modest but thriving student base. My life has become fully entwined in the martial arts. If I'm not teaching classes I'm training myself or doing dojo business in some capacity. What began as fulfilling a boyhood dream has simply become such an integral part of my life that I can't image it any other way. The structure, discipline and commitment required cannot be taken lightly. The lessons you learn about yourself are invaluable. Your successes, your failures, setbacks and epiphanies all help build the person you are or will become. I admire the structure and discipline the martial arts offers which is something rarely found in today's society. Today I'm healthier and happier than I've ever been and attribute this to my training both inside and outside of the dojo. I'm proud of the karate ka I've become look forward to my future in the martial arts for many years to come.

It would be remiss of me if I didn't acknowledge the many friendships I've garnered over the years and the many wonderful experiences we have shared both here and away. Being a part of the Joe Fournier's Martial Arts family and larger Kokusai Butoku Kai organization is a privilege of which I am proud of and forever grateful for.

In conclusion I'm reminded of the Bushido code tenets we have displayed in the dojo representing Honour, Integrity, Loyalty and Time. We honour our teachers who have selflessly shared their knowledge with us. Without integrity no relationships can be maintained as trust is lost. Loyalty embodies the dedication and commitment expected of us all. Finally, only over time we will discover these tenets ring true. These are tenets I strive to live by in my day to day life.

Respectfully,

Kevin McDonough

