

How Martial Arts has affected my life.

There are too many ways to put into a thousand words of how martial arts has affected my life. It's not just affected my life; it's become my life. Karate is everything I think about and affects the way I do everything. I properly started karate at the age of 11. I had tried a few different styles of martial arts before, but never stuck with one. I started karate in the style of Shotokan, and quickly made it my passion and worked my way up to black belt by the time I was 13. In the 2 years it took me to gain my first black belt I'd already become a whole new person. I was diagnosed with ADHD when I was 7, and no one at that time knew I was autistic. I struggled a lot at school with my ADHD. I had no friends and was always the weird kid that sat alone with a 1:1 in the classroom. I had so much energy, and no concentration skills. Karate taught me to focus and concentrate. It was a discipline that challenged me in ways school couldn't. Karate taught me how to use my disability, as an ability.

When I was 11 and a half, at the grade of green belt I first discovered competing. It was something I'd never done before, and a few instructors had mentioned an inter-club competition coming up and encouraged me to have a go. I quickly found that it was the best feeling in the world. Stepping on to the tatami to perform a kata has a nearly unexplainable feeling. When I step on to the mat the entire room goes dark and silent, no one is allowed in my space and for a few minutes I am completely focused and not worried about anything but the kata I am performing. The nerves I felt for my first competition are the same nerves I feel at every competition. The nerves never change, but I walk up to the mat, take a deep breath and as soon as I step on to the mat, the nerves disappear, and I enter a state of complete hyper focus.

I started competing more and more. Training for competitions and upcoming gradings became part of my daily schedule. Until at the age of 15, when I became seriously ill with Crohn's disease, an autoimmune condition that caused my immune system to attack my bowels. I carried on with karate as best I could, and trained through the pain, determined to not let it get in the way of my progress. But unfortunately, my illness became so severe I ended up in hospital for many months. After months of failed treatment, I had emergency surgery and was fitted with an ileostomy stoma. It was shortly after my surgery that a doctor came in and told me I would never be able to do karate again. I took a year out of karate recovering. But being away from karate was too hard, and I came to a decision that no one can tell me what I can and can't do. I know my own body and its strengths and weaknesses.

Coming back to karate was a massive challenge, but the best decision I ever made. I started training with SESMA at school and learned a new style of martial arts. From training with SESMA once a week, I decided it was time for a change. I officially switched from Shotokan and started from white belt and worked my way up again to black belt in a completely new style. It was on the path to my new black belt that I found competing again. SESMA had a completely different competition path than I was used to, and I qualified for the World Martial arts Games. Training with team GB was a first step towards competition journey. After gaining loads of competition experience, I joined the elite squad competition team and explored new opportunities and pathways for competing. Being in the elite squad led me to the EKKA and the EKF side of competing. After competing in the World Martial Arts Games in July 2023, I hung my GB jacket up for the last time and took on a new path, the EKKA and EKF.

All my achievements so far, competing in the BKF, the EKF E1 Series, and Central England competitions, I could never have managed to accomplish any of this without my coach Sensei Will. He has put the most effort into helping me achieve all my goals, and I know that without him, I wouldn't be where I am today. I have managed to become a member of the National Para England

team, and I'm hoping that next year I will continue developing my karate and continue on my journey to become the best kata player I can be. Karate always has goals to reach, and once I've reached a goal then there's always a new goal to set. That's what I love about karate. I am continuously looking for new ways to better myself and find new challenges. Karate has taught me self discipline, respect, courage, focus, confidence. There are too many words to describe. Karate has changed who I am as a person.

Sensei Will is the best coach I have ever had. He is the most dedicated to my training and adapts his teaching to suit my needs. He motivates me to get up in the morning and train at 6am training sessions. He has been to every competition and supported me every step of the way. What I appreciate the most is that Sensei Will never tells me I'm good at something if I am not. What I mean by this is, if I go on the tatami and perform a terrible kata or have a day where I'm not at my best, Sensei Will is completely honest and tells me how it is. This makes it mean more to me when he tells me I have done a good job. Compliments from Sensei Will mean more to me than if he just said "well done, you tried your best" at every competition. I know that whatever Sensei Will tells me is his genuine honest opinion and inspires me to work harder and harder. The work Sensei Will has put in to get me where I am today is phenomenal, and whatever achievements I have or will achieve in the future, they wouldn't have been possible without Sensei Will.

Sensei Will has taught me to be proud of myself and encourages me to work harder continuously. It is never enough to say "I'm the best I can be" because there is always a chance to improve, and Sensei Will can find any small detail and show me how I can improve.

I can't forget to mention all of the other SESMA instructors that have helped me on my journey. Master Wayne is the reason I am at SESMA, from teaching me in my school and showing me a new style and believing in my abilities. Sensei Lynda has taught me so much, from learning my katas to teaching my basics, punches and self defence. Sensei Tom has taught most of my Korean lessons and has been the most supportive in the grading side of my karate. Without Sensei Tom, I would not be the grade I am today, and I certainly would not have thought about going for my 2nd dan grading.

I have also made some amazing friends along my karate journey. From the small child at school with no friends, I am now a small adult who has loads of friends!! My two best friends at karate are Rhys and Isabel. Rhys and Isabel make training even more fun. Isabel's quirks and personality make me so happy, and she has shown me that it is Ok to be myself. I am a very hyper and energetic person, but I hide this on many occasions. When I'm doing karate with Isabel and Rhys, I can be myself. My goofy, hyper and quirky self. It is Ok to be who I am when I am training. I do not have to put on this invisible mask and hide my personality. I have made true friends that accept me for who I am.

I could go on forever, saying how karate has become my entire life, my passion and the reason I have purpose in life. What I've written so far is just a small part of the ways in which becoming a martial artist has affected my life. I have made friends, had the most amazing opportunities and changed my perspective on how I do everything. I have had many barriers in life that have tried to stop me from reaching my full potential, but karate has been with me all the way and by being a martial artist I have the strength to push all barriers out of the way and show the world that I can take whatever life throws at me.

It was also through karate that I have managed to find a boyfriend!! I don't know how that happened but it is another way that martial arts has affected my life!

Written by Chloe Miller