



KAZOKU

Karate for a Lifetime

By Jerry Figgiani

One of the greatest lessons traditional karate teaches us is that our training must grow and change as we do.

When we are young, we often measure progress by physical ability. We want to kick higher, move faster, become stronger, learn the next kata, and push ourselves beyond yesterday's limits. There is value in that kind of training. It develops discipline, confidence, and perseverance.

But the karateka who continues training for decades eventually discovers another lesson: **Training harder is not always the same as training better.**

As an instructor, I am always looking out for my older students, whether they are beginners stepping onto the dojo floor for the first time or advanced students who have trained for many years. I remind them that the goal is not to prove what their bodies could do 20 or 30 years ago. The goal is to continue developing what their bodies and minds are capable of doing today.

I tell them: **Train smarter, not harder.**

That does not mean lowering our standards or making excuses because of age. It means developing a greater understanding of how we train.

As we get older, recovery, flexibility, and speed may change. Old injuries sometimes remind us they are still there. We have to listen to our bodies and understand when to push and when to adjust.

That is not weakness. **That is awareness.**

And awareness is also at the heart of self-defense.

Whether you are young or old, self-defense remains an important part of karate. It is not simply about how hard we can punch or kick. It begins with awareness - recognizing potential danger, trusting our instincts, understanding distance, remaining calm, and knowing when to avoid or escape a situation. As we age, these principles can become even more important. We may not rely on the same speed or strength we once had, so judgment, positioning, timing, and efficient technique become increasingly valuable.

When I look across the floor of my dojo today, I see an age range that stretches from teenagers to students in their 80s. Some have practiced karate for decades. Others discovered martial arts much later in life.

That tells me something important about traditional karate: **It can grow with you.**

The kata we practice when we are young can take on a different meaning as we age. We may depend less on speed, strength, or athleticism and begin to appreciate timing, distance, balance, breathing, body mechanics, relaxation, and economy of movement.

Instead of asking, "How hard can I do this?" we begin asking, "How efficiently can I do this?"

Instead of relying on strength, we look for proper position. Instead of unnecessary tension, we learn to relax. Instead of simply moving faster, we work on moving at the right time.

I have learned a great deal from watching my older students. Some train with physical limitations or past injuries. Yet they continue showing up, making adjustments when necessary, and refusing to allow age to become an excuse to stop learning.

Their example reinforces something I have believed throughout my years of teaching: **"The teacher always learns twice."**

When I help someone modify a movement, improve balance, or train within a limitation, I am reminded that karate is not about forcing every student into the same mold. Good teaching means understanding the person standing in front of you.

Someone should never look into a dojo at 50, 60, 70, or even 80 years old and think, I waited too long.

Traditional karate is not reserved for the young. The goals may simply be different. Success may mean improving balance and mobility, sharpening the mind, learning practical self-defense, developing confidence, or simply having something meaningful to work toward each week.

Longevity in karate is not measured by how hard you can train on one particular day. It is measured by your ability to continue stepping onto the dojo floor year after year.

No matter how long we have trained or what rank we have achieved, we remain students.

The body may change. The way we train may change. The reasons we train may change.

But the opportunity to learn - and the importance of knowing how to protect ourselves - never disappears. Train smarter. Keep learning. Keep moving. And stay the course.



www.SRKDI.org