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# Pirouettes to Round-House Kicks

There are events that shape our lives and change us, be it for better or worse. Looking back on the shy girl that I was before I started martial arts, I shake my head and wonder, “*Was that really me?*” The dramatic change that happened after I quit dance classes and started karate seems to have started life anew for me. The change was the best change of my life.

I was a shy and timid girl, who seemed very hesitant about making my way into the world. I danced in three different dance studios up until I was thirteen years old. The first dance studio I went to was very exciting! My dance troupe competed in many different dance competitions and one or two international tournaments. We brought home quite a few medals, but I had to switch dance studios because of certain “problems” within the studio. I went on to another dance studio and danced there for a year, but it wasn’t long until I moved to the Eastern Shore.

When I had lived in my new house a few months after my family’s big move, it was time to start dance up again. Luckily, there was a studio near my house and I immediately signed up for classes. Classes at the new dance studio were dull in comparison to the classes I had back on the Western Shore of Maryland. I wasn’t learning anything new and the other students in my class were constantly getting everyone in trouble. The girls’ incessant and ceaseless chatter earned everyone punishment in ankle rolls and painful wall stretches for their follies. Going to dance class soon became a miserable process for me and I grew to detest the girls there. Not only that, but I had been backstabbed by my new neighborhood “*friends*” and I soon found myself friendless and lonely.

I danced at this studio for two years and when the signups for the third year approached I refused to signup. I wanted something different, I wanted a change. Despite being a tomboy, I really did enjoy dance but I had always wanted to learn fencing. However, the nearest fencing club was too far away, so I settled for martial arts classes. Little did I know when I walked for the first time up the Denton Armory steps I was getting ready to take a giant leap forward in my life.

Karate was hard for me at first, the blocks and punches were confusing and it was an alien world to me. Dance was fluid and graceful whereas karate was strong and fast. I was very shy and reserved at the first few classes that I had, and I wouldn't talk to anyone unless I had too. Then one day while I was sitting at the far edge of the Armory gym, trying to remain inconspicuous, one of the ladies who was in the Advanced Karate Class motioned for me to come over. At first I was wary, "*Was I in trouble?!*" I wondered frantically. However, when I approached her she tapped the gym floor and smiled, "Sit down, you look lonely over there. You can stretch with us!" I looked down at the smiling faces of some of the green and blue belt students who smiled up at me warmly.

"Thanks," I mumbled as I attempted a smile. They smiled at me and introduced themselves; after that day my life changed forever. My self-confidence skyrocketed and it wasn't long until I earned my first colored belt. Sometimes, the lady that invited me to stretch with her will bring up the topic of the major change I went through.

"You've changed so much, it's like you almost changed over-night," she will sometimes muse when we practice together at karate class.

I will nod my head and reply, "I guess all I needed, was for someone break the ice."

Karate is my life now; I eat, sleep, and breathe Karate. It changed my life so much, and I made inseparable friendships with some of my classmates. I am a more social person and more confident in myself and what I do. I have competed in many different Karate tournaments and met all different kinds of people from all over the world. I am so thankful for the Karate class that I am part of, and I hope that the program will continue on. As of right now, I am a brown belt and I'm working very hard to earn my black belt.

In the future, I hope to be continuing my martial arts training through other martial arts systems in college. However, my home and roots will always be in Shotokan karate. I hope that one day I can run my own dojo and teach children and adults the art of Shotokan Karate. In the next year or so I will be doing lots of schoolwork and lots of martial arts training. I'm always excited to learn new things.

Finding my strength was very beneficial to me. Not only did it boost my self-confidence, but it also took me places I never dreamed I might go. Taking up Karate has changed my life forever. It turned me from a shy, lonely girl into a self-confident outgoing one. By learning perseverance through martial arts I am more confident in all areas of my life. Everyone should try and find their strengths; because without finding our strengths, how will we achieve?