

# THE WANDERING WARRIOR



## THE INTERVIEW

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**MSSD:** *What kind of shape do I need to be in BEFORE I start?*

**Sensei Tyler:** Any shape that you are currently in is the perfect shape in which to start. You can start today and you will improve from there.

**MSSD:** *Will I get hit/kicked in the face?*

**Sensei Tyler:** The chances are high. But, we require protective gear to minimize serious injuries. In the 12 years that I have been at the school, I have never seen a serious incident.

**MSSD:** *How much time per week? If I have a family and a job can I really*

## THE MARTIAL ART

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We were introduced to the world of Karate by Ray Hughes (Sensei Ray) and Tyler Warren (Sensei Tyler) at Scottsdale Martial Arts Center (SMAC). This is a traditional karate school that teaches the Japanese style of Wado-Ryu. According to the [www.SMACus.com](http://www.SMACus.com) website: "Karate is an extremely effective form of self-defense. This Japanese self-defense program teaches a valuable use of punches, kicks, blocks, sweeps, grappling and other important mental and physical techniques. It also includes knife and gun defense. Karate training develops proper footwork, balance, speed, strength, flexibility and the overall development of athletic movement regardless of the participant's age. The goal and philosophy of Karate is to disable the enemy as quickly as possible with the least amount of effort."

## THE WORKOUT

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The lovely woodwork and spacious rooms are not what you'd expect for the typical martial arts school. But, Scottsdale Martial Arts Center isn't just another pretty face. These guys not only know their stuff, but are gifted at sharing their knowledge with their students. Visiting SMAC was a true pleasure.

Tyler welcomed me within 30 seconds of entering their door. After I filled out my paperwork, I had a chance to watch a little of the other classes offered at the school. (In addition to Karate, they offer Kubudo, Jujutsu and Modern Ninjutsu TM). The beautiful school is divided into three classrooms and all three rooms were filled with thoughtful instruction and attentive students. Clearly, I was in for a treat.

### *have time for Karate?*

**Sensei Tyler:** Absolutely. Two times per week (2 hours) is enough for you to study and steadily progress.

**MSSD:** *What are the benefits of Karate for women?*

**Sensei Tyler:** Self Confidence! When it comes to Self Defense it takes years of training. You're not going to learn what you need overnight – the biggest gift you glean from Karate [almost immediately] is Self Confidence. You gain a mindset that if something happens I have options and things to work for my advantage.

**MSSD:** *Can women in their 40's start?*

**Sensei Tyler:** Absolutely! We firmly believe the majority of ages can begin Martial Arts training. We have a student that started when she was 64 and is now 75! God help the person that attacks her.

**MSSD:** *Are there tournaments?*

**Sensei Tyler:** Yes, we strongly encourage all of our students to participate in tournaments. Not for Gold Medals, but because competition is the closest way we can simulate a real life stressful situation. The stress you feel at a competition can't really be duplicated at the dojo. At a tournament you don't know your competition, there is stress, pressure and fear of the unknown, this helps you become a better martial artist and a better person.

**MSSD:** *What kind of health benefits/results can I expect?*

**Sensei Tyler:** The main benefits are weight loss, increased muscle strength, cardio balancing, flexibility. Karate works on an entirely different skill sets of muscles, balance and coordination than the typical workout.

**MSSD:** *How invasive is it on the knee joints?*

**Sensei Tyler:** Very little because we are not going to take someone with a physical limitation and expect them to do what other students are doing. We are all taking on our own personal battles.

**MSSD:** *What goals can I hope to reach?*

**Sensei Tyler:** That depends on what your goals are. What do you want to accomplish? ... earn your Black Belt, get more fit, do the splits, be a world champion? We can cater to whatever your goals you have.

**MSSD:** *How long till black belt?*

Ten minutes later we were bowing and starting the class. Sensei Tyler immediately captured his classes' attention and never let it go. Alternating between humor and firm instruction, Sensei Tyler guided us through our hour-long class. The week is broken down into two parts. The first half of the week's training concentrates on basics, forms and self-defense. The second half of the week concentrates on sparring drills, partner exercises and free sparring. I was able to attend a Thursday class, so we were focused on sparring and partner drills.

We started by loosening up our arms with forward and backward arm swings. We moved onto our legs, with toe touches and quad stretches. Once we were appropriately warm, Sensei moved us onto partner drills. My partner, Abby, was enjoying her second class at SMAC and had just decided to join the school. She was a lovely partner and it was fun to explore the world of Karate together. Sensei Tyler did a great job of starting us off with a basic move and then stretching our skill with the same technique throughout the night.

We started with a oi-tsuki (front jab). In my past martial arts experience this has presented as a fast technique you use for distraction, as it has "no power". By definition you are punching with the hand closest to your opponent and therefore cannot use your hips as thoroughly as you can with a reverse punch, which uses the hand farthest from your opponent. Sensei Tyler changed my impression completely. He asked the class where your power comes from in this punch. One of the students piped up

with "from your hips", Sensei acknowledged the correctness of this answer, but then went deeper. He said, "Good, but where does it start? (Hmmm, uh, I thought it started from your hips?) Much to my relief, I wasn't the only one who thought this. But, Sensei Tyler showed us that it actually comes from the ground. Much like a fencer lunges forward when they thrust their blade at their opponent, he had us strike off with our back leg and then just use our fist as the tool for impact. We literally used the power of the earth to drive our attack. Can't get more powerful than that! This not only allowed us to have much more power with our technique, but also to cover an immense amount of ground and quickly get inside our opponent's defenses. NICE!! We practiced this with our partner in place for a good 30-40 repetitions. Sensei continuously moved around the students adding an adjustment here or a change of position there, until he was pleased with our progress. Now that we had this down in a static drill we moved onto moving targets.

He moved us all to one end of the floor and had us practice the punch as our partner walked towards us. We were learning distancing, appropriate contact, retreating techniques, and hand foot timing all in one drill. We practiced this back and forth an additional 30-40 times and then reversed the process. Our partner walked backwards away from us as we attacked. With this new skill in our arsenal, we moved onto gyakusuki (reverse punch) A gyakusuki is when you punch your opponent with the hand farthest from them when you are in your kamae (Fighting stance) This is a very powerful punch as you are able to add the full power of your



**Sensei Tyler:** If you are an adult of 18+ years it is a minimum of 4 consecutive years of working out at least 2 times per week. To earn your junior black belt you need to be a minimum of 13 years old with the same time requirements.

**MSSD:** *Are their forms and one steps?*

**Sensei Tyler:** Yes, the students are graded on their knowledge of their Katas (forms). The higher they move up the ranks the clearer and more efficient their Katas must be. What makes Wado-Ryu unique is our focus on Ki hon kumite, which is the study of efficient body movement. The knowledge our students gain through Ki hon kumite allows them to defend themselves more efficiently and effectively.

**MSSD:** *What if the first class is too much for me?*

**Sensei Tyler:** Usually we separate the student away from the rest of the class during their first day. We would just ask them to politely tell us if they are feeling overwhelmed in anyway.

**MSSD:** *What respectful behavior is expected of me?*

**Sensei Tyler:** Just remember the good manners that your parents taught you. Look others in the eye, don't talk while others are talking, listen to instruction, etc.

**MSSD:** *What if I don't want to go barefoot?*

**Sensei Tyler:** Normally, this is not a concern for people, but if it was they could wear socks. Or, if they really felt uncomfortable they could buy martial art shoes in order to protect our mats.

**MSSD:** *What if I can't perform as many drills as others? How will that affect my partner? Is it rude to stop?*

**Sensei Tyler:** All we ask is that you do your best. If you are practicing with a higher rank, it is their responsibility to make sure that they are getting enough of a workout from partner their drills. There are adaptations that they can make to insure that you are both enjoying a good workout.

**MSSD:** *What can a student do for homework in between classes? Is it good to do this on one's own?*

**Sensei Tyler:** We are firm believers in practicing at home. We don't expect you to do a full hour workout, but you can spend 5-10 minutes rehearsing a new Kata in your head. Or, perhaps sitting in a chair focusing on proper foot position or blocking techniques.

rotating hips to your attack. Again, Sensei Tyler emphasized that your power started from the earth and drove through your body to your opponent. We expanded our knowledge by starting with the static drills that kept us in place and progressing to moving up and down the floor with our opponent as our living target. Though we never supposed to hit our opponent with any power, Sensei Tyler demanded that we touch our opponent with our punches. He emphasized the importance of experiencing what it feels like to both give and receive actual contact.

He also brought up another interesting point. When we are in a life and death situation our skills drop dramatically. We will move slower, with less accuracy and with less decisiveness. Therefore, it is mandatory that we practice with fully developed, powerful techniques. So, when stress reduces our reactions, we will still have a formidable arsenal of defense at our disposal.

The next drill I got to do with Abby was a response to a punch. Abby would step forward and punch, it was my job to step inside her space, block her punch with my back hand and tai shouchi (palm heel) her chin with my front hand. The owner of the school, Sensei Ray was walking around the class by this time and reminded me that I should actually connect with Abby's face. Again, this was gentle contact, but practicing exactly where your target is and what it takes to touch it, is vital in a real life situation.

The last drill I got to do with Abby was an evasion drill. This was pretty fun. She would step straight forward and pretend like her hand was a knife. Her "knife" was coming straight at my belly. It was my job to evade her strike without moving my feet. This was not a natural skill for me and Sensei Tyler had to tweak a couple of my attempts until I did it satisfactorily. By rotating your hips and feet simultaneously you can evade the attack, but still be in position to offer a counter strike.

As before, we practiced the technique 30-40 times, which gave us ample time to integrate the skill into muscle memory. It was an excellent class and I left feeling like I had learned several techniques that could benefit me in the future.

With the lesson over, Sensei Tyler had us line back up at the back of the class. He announced several school updates including upcoming tournaments. He shared some wisdom, with which I strongly agree. He said the importance of tournaments is not to win, but to go through a stressful situation and survive. It is always nice to win a trophy or ribbon. But, the true reward you glean from a tournament is on the inside. You will be more prepared for life than 90% of your peers. Karate can prepare you for more than just a self defense situation; things like failing a test, getting dumped by a girl/boyfriend, or conducting a job/college interview.





## THE STATS

### Required Uniform?

Yes, a white cotton Gi.

### Nationwide price range?

\$100-\$175 per month

### What is the flooring?

Comfortable padded floor.

### Are there women in the school?

Absolutley!

### Can you accommodate physical challenges?

Yes, We work on a case by case basis to find the adaptations that are best for the student.

**How physically exerting is it?** On a scale of 0 to 10 (0 = sloths are confusing me for a tree and 10 = there may have been gasping)

**Age limit?** I forgot to ask you this, is there an age limit?

**Martial" versus "Art" scale between 1 to 10.** 1 = ART completely an internal art no combat 10 = This is down and dirty combat moves only.

7 – It was a nice flow of cardiovascular and muscular work.

These stressful situations won't have the power over you that they do over other people." They all bowed out and said, "Domo arigato gozaimashita!" which means "Thank you very much!". With that we were excused for the night.

It was a true pleasure to visit Senseis Tyler and Ray. I left SMAC with a deep appreciation for the art of Karate. Their school motto is:

**"We Teach the Ancient Ways  
to the Modern World."**

## NEXT MONTH

Where will you send me next?

-Jill Roth



*Jill Roth holds her fourth degree Black Belt with the American Tae Kwon Do Association, a Blue Belt in Kempo, a level 2 Reiki and an NRA Certification in Basic Pistol. She has taught Tae Kwon Do across the country. She studies different types of martial arts all over the state and writes about her experiences in her "Wandering Warrior" column.*

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Martial Arts Center