

# Everyone Has A 'Champion' Inside Them ... THE LATE COMERS

By JOSIE WYNN

I started karate training in October 1984 – I was 37 years old, a mother of four boys and holding a full-time job as warden of a Sheltered Housing Scheme. Why I started is quite simple really: I took my youngest son along to see if he would like to join a Karate club after seeing an advert in the local paper. I had never seen the art before, except maybe in the occasional movie and I had certainly never thought about it for myself. As soon as I started watching the class I was enthralled and totally fascinated – this was for me ... if I wasn't too old! My son, however, did not share my enthusiasm ... undeterred the next week I went along alone and started my training.

The club I started at only had two other ladies, both young and already graded to 8th Kyu. I thought they must be goddesses – they were red belts and I held them in awe. My family thought I had 'flipped' – comments like "a nine day wonder" and "the novelty will wear off – just give her a few weeks" were bandied about, but I was hooked. I started to ache in places I didn't know I had places but I certainly wasn't going to complain or let it show – I liked this Karate and I was going to stay!

I reached 7th Kyu (Yellow Belt) at this original club, but for various reasons I decided to move to a Karate Union of Gt. Britain (KUGB) club. I went fully confident in my grade but within the first few weeks at the *Ken-shinkan Dojo* I realised that I was nowhere near their standard. I persevered though and several months later I managed to scrape through a grading which confirmed my 7th Kyu.

It was at this point that it began to dawn on me that my age was against me and I also had a few physical problems. Years of nursing as an SEN, with the lifting of patients, had taken its toll on my right hip. A bad fall in my early thirties had also caused a condition which was later diagnosed as *Chon-*



Josie working on her favourite Kata 'Jitte'.

*dromlacia* and my *Achilles Tendons* were very tight due to wearing high heels for many years leaving me with very little flexibility left in the old ankles. Well, should I give up? No way! Surely it must get easier, I thought. My coordination was also a bit slow ... given even a short combination, my mind froze. Was I thick I asked myself? NO was my reply: I had always considered myself reasonably intelligent and again it dawned on me that I had not tested my mental/physical coordination to the full for many years. Exercise it! – that's what Karate would do for me, mental and physical exercise. It was also at this time that I made a comment that is still a standing joke with my teacher, **Ian MacLaren** 4th dan. After a particularly hard session I said to him; "If I could just get to green belt then I'd be happy, I'll stay at that level and be a really good one!" He just looked at me, laughed and shook his head in disbelief. After that, every time I took a grading or won a medal, he would grin at me and mimic "I just want to

be a good green belt".

I trained on and on, but then physical problems began to interfere with my training – my knee in particular started to cause me pain and would suddenly collapse during training. My GP was totally unsympathetic because of the sport that I did, but after much complaining he sent me to a specialist who gave me the advice that I did not wish to hear: "You must cease training at Karate – you are too old and if you do carry on you'll seriously damage the knee and not be able to walk properly". Anyone who trains at Karate as a 'Do' (a Way), as an art, will realise that you just can't give up. So I ignored the specialists advice and carried on training and tried to be 'sensible' with the injury. Through Ian MacLaren and the KUGB, I met **Brad Williamson**, the KUGB's senior medical consultant, and a top consultant in the field of Orthopaedics. He was much more sympathetic towards Karate and he

gave me constructive advice on how to build up the support muscles round the knee.

It is now nine years since my knee first started to give me problems, and it has done nothing but improve. I've been able to discard the bulky knee brace I was wearing and now just use an elastic support bandage. I still get the odd twinge, but I'm sensible and train around it.

I was that enthralled with Karate that I began entering a few open championships and even managed to win a few trophies. My mental powers had increased, not only in the dojo, but in my daily working life. I felt much more confident with people and able to deal with problems more efficiently. This in turn allowed me to deal with my professional superiors confidently and effectively. I also enrolled at a college and gained two 'O' levels, not only to improve my work status, but more importantly, to prove to myself that I could do it.

Three of my sons started Karate one year after I did – I think they felt

proud of me and "if mum could do it so could they". Sadly, only one of them kept up the training and he is now a *Shodan* (1st degree Black Belt).

During my Karate training I have sustained a broken wrist, broken toes, bruised joints, bruised ribs and a host of minor knocks, much to the horror of my GP. As we did not see eye to eye on the benefits of Karate, I simply changed my GP... I felt that what I was gaining far outweighed these minor injuries.

In October 1988, I gained my Black Belt – it had literally been blood, sweat and tears *but it was truly worth it to me!* That under-confident yellow belt who only wanted to be a 'good green belt' had found an inner spirit that had fired the will and given her the determination to succeed. I went on to train and study. Following my teacher, **Ian MacLaren's** lead – himself a KUGB Senior I regularly attend the Karate Summer Schools at Lancaster and the Spring Courses at Torbay, along with KUGB Black and Brown Belt Courses that I can learn from the Seniors. I have therefore received

expert tuition from **Master Enoeda** and **Senseis: Andy Sherry, Terry O'Neill, Bob Poynton, Bob Rhodes, Billy Higgins and Frank Brennan.**

Accompanying Ian on his F.A.I. 'assignments' (which also serve to further his own extensive knowledge of the history and development of Karate-Do) I have met and trained with the other Karate 'greats' as **Sensei: Tabata, Tsuyama, Kanazawa, Kawazoe and Yamazaki.** In September 1992, I successfully took my grading to become a *Nidan* (2nd degree).

I am still overcoming skeletal problems, particularly with my hips, but I have become more flexible and I am sure that with further training this will continue to increase. My only regret is that I did not find Karate in my youth. I know that I will never be a National Champion... but I also know that this does not matter. Karate-Do is



Josie with Master Kanazawa in 1990.

seeking perfection in one's self – it is finding the *Champion* in you; not unnecessarily winning against others or winning trophies. It is more to do with finding the *Way*, the truth!

Why have I written this? Why should the editor publish it? I hope he does, because I am interested in the development of Karate with age, particularly with people who started after the age of 35. I would like to know if you have had:

- a. Problems at the start.
- b. Improvements with time.
- c. Specific injuries.
- d. Negative attitude and barriers, especially from the Medical Profession.
- e. What you want or see for your future.

I would be pleased to hear from you and I will use the data to do a study of 'Age and Ageing in Karate'. Please write to me care of FAI – the editor will pass all letters on to me.



Josie does not only train with traditional weapons – here she is on the range trying out the Army new SA80 Assault Rifle.

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