

TESTIMONIAL; 15-01-2011

By: Erik Burger

In my youth I was an active and fit sportsman, achieved a Brown Belt in Judo, did gymnastics, became a swimming instructor, and even worked for a few seasons as a Beach Life Guard (think Bay Watch ;) in The Netherlands. Moving to the UK and starting a career in the Restaurant & Hospitality sector was my downfall as far as fitness was concerned: Too much booz, too many late nights, unhealthy food, working in smokey environments. By the time I was in my thirties I was severely obese, had asthma, and an underlying heart condition.

In my mid-forties I started working at it again and joined a gym where I met one of the co-founders of FFMA who invited me to join for a few trial sessions. Being a totally non-violent and non-aggressive person I was sure this club and this sport was not right for me. As a Licensee for 22 years I have seen my fair share of drunken behaviour and aggression but never to the point where I would even consider requiring certain 'fighting skills'. However, both my teenage sons were the victim of unprovoked attacks when out in town and couldn't fight off the aggressors - one of my sons ended up injured and in a coma in hospital. (It took 6 years to get the £50 compensation awarded!). And I have been robbed and injured by intruders at work, of which just one was prosecuted and fined £20. So far for Justice. These experiences were a factor in my decision to start Martial Arts again and introduce my sons to the sport. I was made very welcome, did feel great, and I started to notice some results- in strength, stamina and in particular in *confidence* and *self-worth*.

Apart from a few long periods of absence due to injuries (not relating to FFMA training) I have attended lessons typically twice a week for the last 3 years or so, and have been Graded for MMA up to the 8th Ky. The lessons are a tough work-out, but you can pace it, up to a point, to your own level. If you have a bad leg, or a sore shoulder, or whatever, you can still train and simply adjust your training. As a 50yr old I am proud to be training with people who are mostly half my age and who are often a lot fitter, faster and better at it – but not always! The atmosphere is not intimidating because the instructors and student are respectful and supportive and always encourage you to improve: Get better, get faster, fitter, adjust your life-style, and keep trying.

At FFMA we learn certain techniques that could be useful but hope you'll never need. The emphasis for me, and most other students, is on *fitness*, not fighting. The Martial bit of Martial Art is the Warrior in you – but the Art bit is not to use it if you can avoid it. The awareness of personal safety and your environment, for example when abroad, or in a foreign town, and the avoidance of getting into trouble is more important than the skill to drop someone.

The real benefit of FFMA for me came when a few students started hill walking with a back-pack with 60Lb of weights in it, up Cleeve Hill, the highest point in the Cotswolds. The first time you do it you think you would be happy if you could just stop, lie down and die. And I have seen men half my age, half my weight and with twice my fitness in agony, being sick or giving up. The training and encouragement made me get out of my comfort zone: A few years ago I wouldn't have considered climbing Pen-Y-Fan in Wales (part of the old SAS-Selection course) but with the team from FFMA we did it last year in mid-winter. I am still hill-walking with the 60Lb once a week and that is what really has improved my overall wellbeing – mentally and physically.

So this testimonial is written to say that you can join the training at FFMA without worries. Whether you are male or female, and even if you are 50+ or older, overweight, have an underlying health issue, are unfit and have no self-worth due to body-image, you should try a few sessions at FFMA and see how you get on, and you will be amazed by how much better you feel and how your confidence will increase, even in a business scenario or social situation. A Ninja I will never be but FFMA achieved for me what the gym never did.