

The martial arts are a wonderful part of any serious practitioners way of life. They can help heal you both physically and emotionally. They can help you learn to survive, not just a street fight, but life in general. Quite often it is proven that they can give you abilities that normal people never develop (heightened sense of awareness and wisdom). But they can also turn bad in some students. In this journal note I am going to examine some things that I feel are GOOD, BAD and just down right UGLY in the martial arts today.

The GOOD is easy as this is a wonderful path that leads to enlightenment of a person since they are completely balanced in their mind, body and spirit. I have seen people who had no confidence gain it. People who were out of shape and with severe health problems gain a new sense of purpose and direction in their lives thus helping them to regain their health. I have personally witnessed children who were bullied stand their ground and stop the bullying. The martial arts are wonderful and great, but there are two more sides that I have seen. Since most of you already hear about the great things of martial arts from me on a daily basis I will focus on the BAD and UGLY parts. This is not designed as a warning, but rather as a guide to help you from traveling what I commonly refer to as the "Dark Side" of the martial arts.

THE BAD - There are many stories I could write about about how students travel down this path in their training but I will only choose two that have directly affected me in my life.

1. I knew this one guy who was a great martial artists and good friend of mine. He trained at a "so so" school with a recognizable "unqualified" instructor. This student was at almost every event I competed in and he actually did very well in his studies. He was compassionate, honorable and very patient in his attitude. If he won, he won with respect and if he lost he never threw a tantrum and very humbly bowed to his opponent. Over the five years we competed against each we had become very close friends. Towards the end of our competition years with one another he began to change and had told me he was getting to learn all this "mystical" stuff from his sensei. He began to go in to long speeches on how he could destroy people with his "secret" teachings and that he was considering getting into more "real" fights to test his new found skills. No matter how hard I tried to convince him that this was a dangerous path to take, he eventually disappeared from the circuit. By this time he was no longer losing gracefully. He had become one of those guys who yells and screams and throws their gear. He was losing friends and respect on the circuit as a quick rate and was known to throw his "weight" around by acting very tough. I was concerned about him, but I understood that we all choose the path we must travel. Over the years I lost contact with him but I heard many really strange stories. Supposedly he opened a dojo in central Indiana and had a few students. It was rumored that he had become a major street fighter and was promoting the "fight everyone" style of karate through his school. About three years later I ran into him at a tournament in Indianapolis and he was very rough looking and looked like he had been hit one to many times. I watched him perform his kata and it was a disaster. During the fighting matches he was easily defeated by a lesser skilled (than he used to be) opponent. He looked sad and out of place. You could tell he had lost his balance in life and in the arts and was on a quick downward spiral. It really sadden me to see this once great martial artist become what he was that day. After the event was over I invited him to dinner. During dinner he told me how he learned all the "secrets" he had learned were not real and were not effective. He told me about spending a year in jail for fighting and how he had lost his school, his wife and his kids no longer wanted to see him because he had become abusive to them as well. Throughout the entire conversation all I could do was sit there and listen. It was prevalent that he had not learned the martial arts from a good sensei as his sensei had long since closed his doors after being sued for hurting a 16 year old kid...for no other reason than to show off to impress his other students. So I asked him what he was going to do and his answer was to "quit" martial arts. The only wisdom I shared with him that day was this..."quitting is not the answer, nor is continuing to make the same mistakes". I have never seen him since that day, nor ever heard what became of him. But to me this is definitely one of the BAD things in martial arts. In this instance it was his sensei who lead by example and he eventually followed down the same path. This should be a guidance to all of us to watch our Sensei closely and make sure they live what they teach and it is moral. If they are not...get away fast!