

Sword and Spirit

The Journal of Itten Dojo

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— Benefits of Budo —

Regardless of the times in which you live, or the circumstances of your life, success largely depends on things you can control:

- **Building a foundation of strong relationships in a community of mutual support and achievement.**
- **Forging a disciplined and positive mindset.**
- **Enhancing your physical health and capabilities.**

These are exactly the benefits membership in an authentic dojo provides.

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The Crucible

Things began to get real when the alarm went off at 4:30 a.m. that Saturday morning. A quick shower, a meal replacement bar and some cold brew coffee, and we were off to JMAC. Six members of Itten Dojo were in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to attend our first Crucible, a locked-in, 12-hour straight, intensive training session bearing the tag line, “Nobody Leaves Unchanged.” We had a very limited notion of what to expect—a degree of uncertainty is an intentional aspect of the experience—knowing only when we bowed-in at the door to the dojo that we would be testing ourselves. And quite a test it turned out to be.

Initially, just Christopher Migatulski and I were planning to go, with MaKenzie Cuthie volunteering to drive (especially on the way home). And then MaKenzie decided to register for the event. My daughter, Erika, with minimal lifetime experience in martial arts, was talked into registering by old and new friends while partying at the JMAC 18th Anniversary dinner in June. Subsequently, Charles Hudson and Bill Shellhamer signed-on to the expedition, as well. It was too late to rent our usual van, so two personal vehicles were needed for the trip.

The Crucible would run from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. We normally stay at a hotel very near the dojo, so it was easy to arrive at JMAC by 5:30 a.m. The instructor cadre and participants were already assembling. We would not typically do this, but we arrived partially in uniform to save time and decrease the crowding of the dressing rooms. After completing the inevitable release forms, we were issued our Crucible t-shirts and told to wear them for the start of the training.

We noticed a half-dozen or so small plastic buckets, each bearing the JMAC logo and with a blue towel hanging over the rim. Our thought was, “Oh, we’ll be scrubbing the mat after training.” Wrong. These were “puke buckets,” and the idea was if a participant had to throw up, but was able to get to a bucket first, he or she could keep the bucket as a souvenir. Evidently, past Crucible experience demonstrated that “recycled” red Gatorade (among other things) can’t be completely scrubbed from the carpet. This time, just one person needed/“won” a bucket.



In the spirit of maintaining some uncertainty for members of our dojo attending their first Crucible in the future, I'm not going to detail the training. Major areas of focus included Suino Sensei's "flywheel" striking method, karate, kickboxing, judo, jujutsu, and ground fighting, interspersed with sessions of "JMAC 18" conditioning sets (several of which were very intense), and quick breaks. Most breaks were limited to three minutes, with just one ten-minute and one 15-minute break scheduled over the course of the 12 hours. As it happened, the 15-minute break ended up being shortened to 7.5-minutes.

Aside from Suino Sensei, the instructor cadre included Richard Monroe (JMAC judo), Michael Mancini

(JMAC jujutsu), Randy Dauphin (Legacy Martial Arts and Fitness, karate), Sydney Dauphin (LMAF, karate and stretching), Cheyenne Hussey (LMAF, karate and stretching), Shaun Benson (LMAF, ground fighting), and Bernard Ladouceur (world champion kickboxer). I was able to get at least a little one-on-one training with almost everybody in the instructor cadre, in every case an experience that was in equal parts both humbling and inspiring.

Judging by the range of sore muscles, bruises, scrapes, insights, new skills, exhaustion, and yet a pervasive glow shared among the Itten Dojo contingent, it's very safe to say that none of us left The Crucible unchanged. 🌀

Before:



After:



Robert Wolfe, chief instructor of Itten Dojo, began martial arts training in 1975 while attending Bucknell University, where he earned a degree in Japanese Studies. Mr. Wolfe has taught since 1985, and with his senior student Alan Starner founded Itten Dojo in 1992. His articles on martial arts have been featured in numerous publications, including the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* and *Bugeisha*.

