



Many of us know you as a martial artist...starting at age 5 under Mr. John Pachivas, 3 Time National Champion, and well respected in the Shuri and Shinto Yoshin Kai community...but few of us know you outside of Martial Arts. We know Shihan Mike, but who is Michael?

I was born March 26, 1971 in North Miami Beach, Florida. My mother and father were divorced when I was 4. At that time, I continued living with my mother and I would visit with my father 2 times a week and every other Saturday. In November of 1976, my father, who was a Brown Belt at the time, introduced me to Hanshi John Pachivas and my life in karate began. I remember that classes were on Monday and Wednesday at 6pm and tournaments were held on Saturdays throughout the month. During the first 8 years of my training, my father and I traveled all over the United States for competitions and seminars. At the age of 10, I accompanied O'Sensei Trias, Hanshi Pachivas, Hanshi Bowles, Hanshi Abele and many other high ranking individuals on a trip through the Orient: China, Japan, Okinawa, Hong Kong, Taiwan and finally Hawaii. We were there to represent the United States as a team of Karate-ka. During the trip, we visited many dojo's, my favorite being Yasuhiro Konishi (92 at the time) and one of O'Sensei Trias's teachers.

At the age of 11, my mother and I moved to Los Angeles, California to be closer to my mother's side of the family. I stayed there 2 years before moving back to South Florida to live with my father. At the 15, I moved in with my grandmother, on my father's side, because of some extenuating circumstances with my father. I lived with her throughout my junior high and high school years.

What kind of student were you in school?

I remember in 6th grade being voted the Most Improved Student of the Year. Prior to that, I definitely wasn't a very good student. During 6th grade and all the way through high school, I was an A / B student, although I really had to work hard for those grades. In the 8th grade I was elected the Vice President of the Honor Society.



What about your high school and college experience?

My high school was a very diverse school. Primarily Hispanic, black, and white and definitely lower socio-economic level. We didn't have a lot of money. While I was in high school, I worked as a bus boy. I also started a business with my best friend Abe, washing cars, which didn't last very long, although a good time was had.

I graduated high school with a 3.3 and was accepted to Florida State University (FSU) in 1989 to study Business Administration. I lived on Campus in the Dorms for my first 2 semesters, during which I joined a fraternity (Phi Kappa Tau). I lived in an apartment for a semester and then into the fraternity house. I got a little too caught up in the social atmosphere and managed to return home a few credits short of my Associates Degree.

Soon after returning home, I regained my focus, redid some classes and received my Associates Degree in Liberal Studies from Florida State University. By that time, my mother had moved back to Hollywood, Florida and I moved in with her. While living with my mother, I worked as a Valet and a Bar Back on Fort Lauderdale Beach. I continued my education at Broward Community College by taking the prerequisite classes for the Physical Therapy Assistance (PTA) Program offered there.

After successfully completing the necessary classes, my name was put on a waiting list in order to enter the program (Estimated wait time was 2 years). At that time, June 1993, I applied to the Radiologic Technician Program at Jackson Memorial Hospital to further my education until something opened up with the PTA program. As part of the application process, I was required

to take a physical and it was at that time I discovered that I had Non-Hodgkin's Acute Lymphoblastic Lymphoma (A.L.L).

What went through your mind when you were told that you had A.L.L?

At the time I was teaching classes for Hanshi Pachivas and also teaching private lessons. Needless to say, outside of school and work, my life was Karate. When they told me I had A.L.L, I didn't really know how severe it was. I was simply of the mindset that this was something I had to go through but never doubted that I would overcome it. My attitude was, "What do I need to do to get through this" and "Let's get started!" I had no idea it was going to be 2.5 years of intense medication and severe limitations on what I could do physically.

Yes, but surely hearing the word "cancer" caused you to be at least a little concerned.

My mom and close family were the ones who knew more of the details than I did. It wasn't until recently that I found out that I only had a 15-20% chance of surviving. Evidently, the double diagnosis of (A.L.L) and Leukemia made my situation pretty severe.

I was given a half pediatric and half adult protocol of medicines because of my age, 23. What that means is that the doctors had to figure out a special blend of chemotherapies to administer via port and lumbar punctures (Over 30), which were the worse. I also had to receive a number of Cranial Radiations, which were not so bad.

How did you overcome it?

I had a very strong support network in place. After being diagnosed with (A.L.L) in Florida, my aunt from California, a pediatric cardiologist, had me seen by the doctors at Harbor General / UCLA for a second diagnoses. The doctors added Leukemia to my (A.L.L) which made matters much worse. The reason I bring that up is because if it wasn't for my aunt and uncle to have me see their doctors then I might not be here.

I had been dating Elana, girlfriend at the time and now my wife, since junior high school. She never stuttered in her support and love for me the entire time. My grandfather, on my mother's side, lived, traveled and cared for me throughout my travels between Florida and California. I lived with my mother, who cared for me and loved me more than I could imagine. My best friend Abe, Shihan Perez family and Sensei Bill Gansert were right by my side the whole way.

My daily routine, outside of receiving Chemo, was to try to sleep when I was uncomfortable or in pain, which was a good amount of the time. When I felt good enough, I tried to work out. I would go outside to get some fresh air, throw some punches and kicks and work some weapons. I could only work out about 5 or 10 minutes before getting sick. Other times, I would study my Pinnacle and begin working on my first manual. After a year and a half, I began a cycle of chemo pills and a reduced amount of liquid chemo. By that time, Hanshi Pachivas's dojo had closed and I felt it was time to try the dojo again. Shihan Perez, Sensei at the time, welcomed me with open arms, and actually asked me to give him a hand in constructing parts of his dojo. I

wouldn't have had it any other way. At first I couldn't stay in class for more than 10 minutes without having to excuse myself to run outside and be sick. As time went on and with the support of the dojo, I was eventually able to make it all of the way through a class and continued to get my stamina back from then on.

Can you tell me what it was like to go through what you went through, as far as the medications are concerned?

Please understand that my life as I knew it stopped. The 2.5 years were filled with daily and weekly treatments depending on what was on the protocol. I could not eat, sleep or function normally. There was joint pain, nausea, shakes, temperature fluctuations, hair loss, major fatigue and emotional outburst. Everything that I did was an effort and had to be planned out.

I am amazed that you decided to continue working out knowing it would make you sick each time.

I love Karate so much. The positive definitely outweighed the negative. I knew in my heart that Karate was the only way I could sustain. If I didn't work out I knew I wouldn't get any stronger. I knew it was going to be a hard road but Karate is one of the most important things in my life. First, there is God, then Elana and our daughter Sara, mom and dad ~ no specific order and then Martial Arts. These are the sources of my joy and Karate allows me to help others be as happy as I am.

Why is it important for us to support Children's Aflac Cancer Center?

One of the core values we have at TMACenter is perseverance. Regardless of the obstacle that may be in front of us, we must persevere by always focusing on the positive and not the negative. I have chosen Children's Aflac Center as an organization we should support because it is close to my heart. There are so many children just beginning their lives who are surviving cancer and I can identify with what they are going through. We must help them so they can persevere until they are healthy again.

Michael Hernandez