

Of all my friends, there was no one I spent more time with socially than with John.

I would train with him at least twice a week, for two or three hours at a time.

Punching and kicking each other week in and week out, pushing each other to get better and better, we developed a closeness that those who practise karate with the same level of dedication will instantly recognise.

John and I spent a ridiculous amount of time in the *dojo*, but we would easily spend double that time in the pub, dissecting the lesson we'd just had, discussing karate politics, or laughing loudly at his collection of funny YouTube clips, which he would show on his iPhone.

If we were in the Tollington after a session at the Sobell, he'd be munching on his favourite hot nuts to go with his pint of Fosters.

If we were in the Roebuck after a class in Hampstead, John would stick with the Fosters but would make do with some crisps until we went somewhere else for food (the spicier the better for John).

But no matter where we were, John was always the heart and soul of the party, telling jokes and recounting tales with his irrepressible energy and good humour.

We loved John because he always had time for you, always had a friendly word or two to say, and never put you down.

He went out of his way to do you favours, little acts of kindness like offering you a lift in his black cab or spending five minutes extra with you at the end of a karate lesson to help you with your technique.

Many of my karate friends have said that they wouldn't have started karate, or kept at it, had it not been for John's encouraging words. He had that kind of effect on people.

John was a larger-than-life presence and it's very difficult to imagine him not being part of the karate crowd.

It's fair to say that he's left a massive hole in our lives that will never be filled.

But John was a true *karateka* and he would've wanted us to carry on – to continue training hard, to continue having fun, to continue embracing life with open arms, just like he did.

Now, John's love of karate was evident in the seriousness with which he'd been training for his 3rd Dan blackbelt exam, which would've taken place at Sobell last month.

It was his dream to achieve this senior rank.

Having seen his karate grow, I have no doubt that he would've achieved his goal and would be training harder than ever now.

We like to imagine John up there in the *dojo* in the sky, training with his usual gusto, perhaps having a cheeky celestial Fosters or two with some of his karate heroes that have also left this world.

With that image, on behalf of all his karate friends, I'll say thank you for everything, John.

Thank you – and *oss*.