



Re-Boot Your Family After COVID-19

How these Black Belt Moms managed their families, professions, and health during the pandemic and came out stronger than ever.



The moms that train at the Dragon Gym have become known as the **“Mothers of Dragons”**. Here’s an anthology of stories from a few of them to share insight into how they managed 2020, the coronavirus pandemic, and the associated tumult that all of our families went through.



A note from Master Somnath Sikdar:

Like most parents, you're probably looking for positive and productive activities for your children. And if you're a mom, you're likely responsible for the physical health and mental well-being of the entire family.

2020 and now 2021 have been unusual to say the least. You're responsibilities as a parent have at least doubled. (As a parent of a 1 and 6-year old, I can safely say 5 to 10 times!)

You're always looking for something that will keep them engaged physically, mentally and socially. Something you know is good for the mind, body, and spirit.

In many ways, the institutions we've relied on to help bring up our children are now gone or fundamentally transformed.

But, you're still looking for something that will help ensure that they're happy, healthy and successful in the long run.

You need to make sure they don't fall behind and lose everything they've achieved till now. You're looking for something that will serve all of your familial goals.

Honestly, we don't know if things will ever get back to "normal".

While the situation has changed, the challenges that our children face haven't gone away. In a sense, they've increased.

So, it's up to us, as parents, to find the best, most effective, and the most enjoyable programs for our families, and do that right now.

And, that's not as easy as it first seems...

Of course, it's a complicated choice and an important decision. So, we're here to help. Reach out to us at any time and we'll help guide you through the process.

I hope you'll enjoy these stories from the "Mothers of Dragons". They share their experience and insights from the last year and more.

Sincerely,

Somnath Sikdar
President, Dragon Gym
"Be The Coffee."



COVID REBOOT

This is how it looked in my mind, like a whirlwind!!

Our family of 5, 1 dog 2 kittys

Our own little city.

At 1st just us, nothing more

I valued those days like never before.

But I had no idea what we were in for

Faith kept us in check, our knees bent on the floor.

We became inventors without a degree, cert. or title

Playing games like tag, cards and even starring in our own recital.

But even those moments become harder to maintain

We needed to escape but how, we must contain.

It's time it's time the curtain is a liftin'

One foot out the door the rest will be a sprintin'

DRAGON GYM

Home away from home

Different uniform, same at last, only difference

Our faces will don a mask

Friendships will resume, contact somewhat made, a moment in the dark

once a glimmer now a spark.

Reflection,

I see no chaos. I see creativity through positivity

So this is how it came to be

REBOOT through kindness, unity and Community

Master Kim Mukalian

5th Degree Black Belt

Dragon Gym Martial Arts & Fitness

www.dragongym.com



Managing life as a Mother of Dragons Post-COVID

As a student and as the mother of a student, the one thing that I value most about Dragon Gym is the sense of community, camaraderie, and family that we experience among all the instructors, students and their families. What makes this community special is the shared willingness to work together to help us each get better every day, to celebrate our successes and those of our children, and to help each other through trying times, both in and out of the gym.

The past year has provided more than its fair share of issues, obstacles and concerns. My husband and I both have demanding jobs that require our presence in person. We are parents to three children, one “grown and flown” who provided us a granddaughter at the beginning of the pandemic, one graduating college this year and one, a high school freshman, 2nd Dan Junior Black Belt and Junior Instructor at DG.

While my schedule allowed for brief periods to work-from-home, my husbands did not. I was grateful to be able to work from home for two weeks when schools were closed last spring, but was routinely called back into the office. Our son was 13 years old and for the most part, finished 8th grade with little parental support from the comfort of a new desk in our living room. Over the summer, we each took vacation time to spend more time with him and sent him to his grandparents for a few weeks while we continued to work.

Thankfully, Dragon Gym re-opened last summer and we finally had somewhere we could go to see other people and exercise. Like many families, we kept in touch with family and friends via Zoom and FaceTime and bought bikes and a blow-up kayak in lieu of travel and vacation.

When the school year began again, we were scrambling to figure out how to provide our son with the support he needed for an untraditional introduction to high school while we continued to work full-time. DG came to the rescue by providing a learning center! Our son attended 3 days per week from September through March. He recounted stories of speaking



French in the loft while other kids were also attending class, participating in his gym class in the front gym, singing at the top of his lungs for chorus in a separate, smaller gym in DG (much to the surprise of a few instructors).

Supplementing his hybrid school schedule with the DG learning center made all the difference by providing a set schedule, somewhere to go outside of the house every day, and a chance to interact with other children and teens. This community helped us through a very tough year and for that, I'm forever grateful. Now, I look forward to our next Mothers of Dragons happy hour in someone's back yard as the weather improves!

As a 2nd Dan black belt and the Mother of a Dragon, I just happen to be another white belt that didn't quit, who loves this art and is excited to stand barefoot next to my friends and their children on the mat.

"Keep your feet on the mat"

Dina Perreault
2nd Degree Black Belt – Tae Kwon Do



Notes on the Pandemic

Life came to a screeching halt and I don't know that I realized how badly I needed a break from the daily grind. I remember walking my dog the day after everything shut down and thinking that for the first time, I didn't have anywhere I had to go. Even with the daily horrors being broadcast on the news, I was supremely glad for a break.

Our family kept perspective through the pandemic by relying on each other, both by being ourselves and being a family. We learned when to give each other space for individual pursuits and when to come together to share a meal and conversation, to play a game, to plan future vacations, and to be grateful.

I am lucky enough to be in a job that helps small business owners handle their HR practices. The pandemic created many HR headaches and I was glad to be of service to my clients. I stayed busy and was grateful for it. My husband was laid off, and for the first time in 35 years, was able to sleep in, not field business calls, and relax.

My daughter had been having a difficult time at school with bullies, and the transition to virtual learning came at a time when she very much needed to be away from the other students in her class and reset. Our family was fortunate enough to be able to maintain our standard of living and to be able to share what we had with others who were struggling. We focused on what we had instead of what we didn't.

Since we couldn't go anywhere or do anything, we tackled projects at home that were on our "Get it done when we can" list. We divested clutter, we cleaned, we organized, we cooked together, and we got outside in the fresh air. I can honestly say that I never felt like I needed a break from my family time.

We were lucky; no one passed away or got seriously ill in our family-immediate or extended. We stayed in touch virtually as much as possible with extended family and did drive-bys to wave from the car or stand far apart in the yard and connect. Again, we were grateful and lucky to live in



a place that provided us the opportunity to get outside and walk or hike without exposure.

Olivia and I continued to connect with the Dragon Gym through virtual classes that enabled us to continue to progress and train—something that we both sorely missed. I was also grateful for Som, Lonnie, Chris, and Kyle who did a masterful (no pun intended) job of creating and uploading online content, for hosting Zoom classes, and virtual meetings to check in and make sure their community was doing ok. Because of their hard work, when the gym was able to open again, we didn't even miss a beat.

Each day, my husband, daughter, and I kept perspective by naming something we were grateful for. We had our health, a home, a community of people at Dragon Gym to connect with, food on our table, and time to relax and be together. As a mother, I relied on my DG community, Som and Lonnie's Wednesday live streams, and my fellow 'Mothers of Dragons' to help me keep laughing and moving forward.

I learned a lot of lessons in the past year—especially to value my community and my health. I learned it's okay to not feel like I had to do it all, to rely on others, and that slowing down is necessary. I learned that gratitude significantly impacts one's perspective. I would not say that I was a perfect mother through quarantine—I certainly could have done many things better. I can't say I would have changed my experience though, as I believe it made me a better, more grounded person.

Ultimately, the pandemic crucible gave me a new set of tools to shape our future with, and I consider that to be an amazing gift.

Alicia de La Torre, 1st Degree Black Belt – Tae Kwon Do



At each class I am welcomed and part of a great community.

I have had the privilege of being part of the Dragon Gym family for almost 15 years. My journey began as a parent watching from the balcony, as my children Peter and Ava attended class. I found the courage to follow them in their training and quickly realized that this was my path.

I can still remember putting on my white dobalk trying to follow along. At that point, I realized that the beauty of Tae Kwon Do at the Dragon Gym was the structure of the curriculum and the belief of the Masters in the students.

I stayed home with my children when they were younger and now am back in the workforce full time. While my kids are now in college and graduated, Dragon Gym has been a part of my life at each phase.

When my kids were young, I would drop them off at practice, drive to Dragon Gym for Kettlebell Class and then be there to pick them up.

When working, the Dragon Gym schedule is flexible enough to meet my training needs. I can attend a Tae Kwon Do class during lunchtime or an evening class. At each class I am welcomed and part of a great community.

I am so fortunate to have the Dragon Gym and the wonderful community as part of my life.

Jen Braccia, 3rd Degree Black Belt - Tae Kwon Do



Not only was the training at DG good for my physical well being but my mental health

Joining Dragon Gym and especially the Tae Kwon Do class was in an effort to be more healthy as I spent more time with my family, who started training there prior to me.

With the pandemic our normal lives were turned up side down. It became more evident as stress increased due to the strains of the pandemic that not only was the training at DG good for my physical well being but my mental health.

I am a married mother of 4 and Dragon Gym has been a beneficial aspect of family bonding. I work full time as a podiatrist and martial arts has been a positive influence on my physical well-being and the time I am able to spend with my family. All of us have been able to find a home in Dragon Gym!

Sandy Grulke, 2nd Degree Black Belt - Tae Kwon Do, Purple Belt – Brazilian Jiu Jitsu



This has been a long journey with a few bumps in the road.

I sat in the balcony at Dragon Gym for quite a few years watching my daughter advance from white belt to black belt in the children's program. I watched the adults train in taekwondo but did not really consider giving it a try myself since I belonged to another fitness center and worked out regularly.

As work and life got busier over the years and I was running to one gym and running my daughter to another gym, I realized something with that crazy schedule needed to change. When she became a junior black belt, I began to seriously consider taking classes at Dragon Gym myself. The class time for the junior black belts and the adult taekwondo classes were the same. It made sense for me to give it a try since we would both be taking classes at the same time.

I started as a white belt in October 2017 and will test for my first dan black belt in June 2021. This has been a long journey with a few bumps in the road.

An injury in 2018 and the 2020 pandemic set back my training schedule and slowed my progress. There were some days I was discouraged and wondered whether taekwondo was really for me. With the help and encouragement from instructors and fellow students, I continued to train.

The belt testing system in martial arts kept me motivated with each color belt promotion. Each color belt represented an achievable goal. Once that goal was achieved, it was time to re-evaluate and set new goals. With each color belt promotion, I was closer to my goal of earning a black belt.



Our family has found having a consistent schedule that we are committed to following works to keep our training schedule on track. We commit to going to the gym a certain number of days per week and plan around that schedule.

Many times, I remind myself we are at different phases in our lives with different skills and abilities. We may be at different stages in our martial arts journey, but we are all in this journey together.

Dragon Gym is a remarkable community of instructors and students. However, the community of lady black belts is truly something special. This is an elite group mothers, wives, sisters, teachers, and friends who support and learn from each other.

I look forward to earning my place in alongside these strong women when I test for my black belt.

With Gratitude,

Lauren Weldon, 1st Degree Black Belt *Candidate* – Tae Kwon Do



COVID certainly threw most of us for a loop and created a re-evaluation of life and family for many, our family included.

Very early on in the lockdowns, I realized that in order to meet the ever-changing needs of my family, ***I needed to make my own mental and physical health a priority.*** To that end, when Dragon Gym went online, I made it a goal to take at least one class a day - whether it be Zooming taekwondo or kettlebells. When possible and as the weather got nicer, I tried to take these classes outside to absorb in that wonderful vitamin D sun as well.

When Dragon Gym reopened this summer, I created a personal weekly schedule that continued to prioritize classes and being at the gym 4 to 5 days a week. I know that I am at my best when I make the space and time to recharge and refocus my energy on something other than my family for an hour or two each day. It makes me a better mother and wife in the long run.

Other changes that Covid brought to our family was the gift of time. A lot of time has been spent with one another! But we tried to make it fun. We've hiked as a family more this past year than ever, we've tackled more family home and yard projects than ever, we've cooked more together than ever, we've worked out together. And through it all, we've tried to laugh and make the best of everything.

A big piece of Covid was creating workspaces in my children's rooms - buying desks and office chairs and desk lamps to make sure that they had a quiet space to Zoom school from home. And then helping them navigate all-online learning and the shift to hybrid school and then to in-person school.

But besides this physical space, throughout Covid I have learned how to listen better to my children, to hear how they are struggling and what they need, and to be responsive to their requests. We've encountered some difficult situations over this past year, but are stronger as a family as we support one another through them and help each of us be as healthy as possible.

Liz Peck, 2nd Degree Black Belt – Tae Kwon Do



Getting back into the gym was a welcome respite

This has been a very tough time for all of us during this past year dealing with COVID. We had three family members that contracted the disease during the early phases of the shutdown in 2020; but they have thankfully pulled through it and are all doing well!

My faith in God has gotten me through this time and I continue to believe that He is in control and I don't take His blessings for granted!

We have not physically been in the company of our siblings, nieces, nephews and friends since Thanksgiving 2019 when we hosted a gathering of about 40 people. Over the past year we have "zoomed" for holidays, birthdays and other special occasions with our families but nothing can take the place of a face-to-face exchange! We are certainly looking forward to gathering together again very soon.

I have coped this past year by exchanging new and old recipes with family and friends and look forward to the phone calls to make sure we stay in touch. I have sincerely appreciated spending quality time with my husband and children; we made our holidays extra special this past year just because! Getting back into the gym was a welcome respite from being cooped up in the house for so long and a welcomed structural site from something other than the local grocery store!

Exercising has always been a big part of my life and getting back to Taekwondo classes and weight training at Dragon Gym has certainly helped me to relieve some of the stresses of this past year. Being able to see my fellow classmates and catching up with them has truly been a bright spot in my life that I look forward to on a weekly basis!

Karen Dabney, 2nd Degree Black Belt – Tae Kwon Do



How do I cope during this pandemic, as best as I know how.

Most days, I'm just going and going. Then once in awhile I'll have a day where I just want to be alone to veg out and binge watch some show.

March 2020, we started out okay working remotely for our jobs and school. At the time both my husband and I worked for Vanguard, which they were well prepared to have most of the employees work from home. Jackson also started remote learning which his current school started preparing for well before the state lockdowns.

Then Jackson's grandparents got the virus. They were both in a nursing care facility and Covid spread like wildfire, as it did in other care facilities. In April we lost both grandparents to the virus on the same day. The following month my husband had to get biopsied to check for cancer, it came back normal. Shortly after, he came down with the Shingles.

By then it was summer and Jackson was able to go to the camps we signed him up for. His favorite summer camp is at Dragon Gym. It was a relief to have him out of the house for our sake and his.

At this time, we still kept public indoor places to a minimum. I was thankful for mask mandates. I would only food shop once a week during off hours. When the gym opened back up, I wasn't ready to come to TKD class. However, I was okay with going to yoga because of the small class size. After being stuck in my house with the same two people every day, I needed the escape. Yoga has been great at helping me physically and emotionally through this pandemic. It's not just the practice of yoga but what Jess brings to her students every session. I've also been able to come once in awhile to Christa's noon class.



We have been spending a lot of time with our neighbors whose daughter had a heart transplant the year before. She is a long-time classmate of Jackson and the two have become best of friends during this past year and a half. Her mother and I have been leaning on each other through all of this. I would consider her an honorary DG mom. Not only has she had to deal with her daughter's health issues, she's also a nurse that has been working hard during this pandemic. She works from home organizing Covid testing and getting people vaccinated.

Right before summer break we decided to enroll Jackson into West Chester school district for fifth grade. The plan was to start him in middle school, but West Chester was offering a new cyber school program. We weren't comfortable with in-person or hybrid school, and we didn't want to pay SS Peter & Paul tuition for remote learning. While he was still at SSPP in fourth grade, he didn't like the idea of changing schools for 6th grade. The cyber program has been a great way for Jackson to get comfortable with a new school. He has made a few new friends this year and he is looking forward to middle school this fall.

As moms, most responsibilities fall on our shoulders, we typically manage our families and households. This pandemic has been a harder burden on us especially mothers with jobs outside the home. Most days I not only have to try and focus on my work, but keep Jackson on task for school. I do get some help from my husband with this, and a few chores, but it was challenging when he was sick with the Shingles. I try to stay organized by planning things out weekly. One thing is meal planning, figuring out dinner for each day for the coming week. I make up my food shopping list accordingly and keep track of prepared meals I keep in the freezer. I try to do most of the cooking on the weekends, make a big pot of stew, or roast a whole chicken. Most weeknights we eat the leftovers with some added veggies or a salad. Having premade meals has helped me plan time for myself, so I can get out for a walk or to yoga class.



This past fall I left Vanguard, but not on my own terms. About 1300 Vanguard crew members were transitioned to another company called Infosys. Financially the move has been good, but I'm not happy with the new company. I still do the same work with many of the same people, but the culture is not for me. The only way for me to continue with this career path is to learn new things in software development, which doesn't interest me anymore.

Both my husband and I will continue to work from home until about September of this year. We are also planning on Jackson going to school in person this fall. We still nervous about him going into school, I'm hoping that the vaccine to be available for kids his age by that time. When we do return to the office in the fall it will be on a hybrid schedule. I will enjoy seeing some of my co-workers, however I enjoy working from home more.

Hopefully, I won't have to work in the office much as I am planning on retiring this November. I have had enough of this career and I'm looking forward to the next chapter of my life. My plan is to focus more on myself and wellbeing. I look forward to seeing more of my DG family. Also, there's a good chance that I'll be a trained yoga instructor by next year!

Jackie Bosler, 2nd Degree Black Belt – Tae Kwon do