

Behind Holy Molé's Rick Hotton

by Danielle Hope Hier



And now here is my secret, a very simple secret; it is only with the heart that one can see rightly, what is essential is invisible to the eye.
– Antoine de Saint Exupery

"Pay attention. The Universe is talking to you."

One never knows exactly where and when inspiration will strike. For Rick Hotton, it was in the break room of the Manatee Community College, in between classes.

"I was socialized differently," explained Rick, while we sat at the living room table in his Japanese zen-like home. "I didn't enter the main stream until I was 45."

Having spent over 31 years as owner and chief instructor for West Wind Karate, a traditional Shotokan karate dojo, Rick took his teaching in a slightly different direction in 2003 by becoming a math instructor for developmental students at MCC, while still maintaining his martial arts classes several nights a week. Presently, in addition to teaching, Rick has entered the art world as a cartoonist, featured in the *Sarasota Herald Tribune* and now *Positive Change*.

"Where did Holy Molé come from?" I asked. After all, when considering all of the potential woodland creatures around which one might center a comic strip, the mole would have – without a doubt – been my very last thought.

The answer came back – in so many words – as "by accident." When tutoring, before his students would sit and work through tough math problems, he'd have them make a little nonsensical doodle or quick squiggly mark on a piece of paper and hand it to him. Then, the student would go to work. Not wanting to stare over a student's shoulder in an intimidating manner, but still making himself available should the pupil need assistance, he'd occupy his time by expanding on that doodle, creating varying drawings. The "prize" for each student was not only an education, but they would finish each session with a custom-made cartoon in their honor. Holy Molé (pronounced "mole-e") was a happy accident because the doodle decided to become a mole.

Somehow, word got out about Rick's cartoons, as little by little, all of these pieces of paper began gracing the break room refrig-

erator. Out of this was born: Holy Molé, Kool Kat, a zen turtle, a chicken, and a few absurd little penguins.

Ironically, like Hotton's character, the mole is a very spiritual Shamanic animal, introspective and blind to all but light. A mole is an expression of love in nature. Interesting is that our Holy Molé sees with a spiritual eye, as moles are almost entirely blind!

Through martial arts, math, and Molé, Hotton has captured the essences of working the body, the mind, and the spirit. The quest for knowledge is the thread that ties all three of these forms together, in what might otherwise appear as three completely separate entities.

Having worked and trained with martial artists for over 14 years myself, I was particularly impressed with Hotton's quiet energy. His Sensei taught him at the young age of 10: "Live half for yourself, and half for society," and he has kept with that belief.

"Cartooning in its best form is simple, focused, and direct, just like the martial arts," Rick explained.

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That's what one of his MCC colleagues told Rick, pointing to the room full of doodles that manifested into comic strips. It had gotten to the point where co-workers were asking when he was going to bring in the next cartoon.

As another happy accident, he decided to take a sample portfolio into the *Sarasota Herald Tribune* on a whim. The Features Editor asked if he was entering the contest.

"Contest?" Rick was confused. Apparently, the newspaper was running a comic strip competition, and he was the only non-syndicated new cartoon permitted to enter. Over 11,000 votes on his behalf later, he had won.

Finally, there was our happy accident, as Rick ran into PCM partner and Efest Director, Randy Moore, in Payne Park promoting Efest 2007, who had recently been talking about bringing in a comic strip into *Positive Change*. Rick had also been on the mind of PC's managing editor, Ellie Parnes, for nearly a year, after they first interacted about him sharing Holy Molé with PC's readers. The Universe is indeed speaking here.

"I wonder what made you choose a cartoon as a way of expressing elements of your own spiritual journey. When I think of someone brought up heavily believing in Japanese culture, I would have thought your artistic expression would be in calligraphy," I told him.

"Well, I do that, too," he smiled. "But for me, if you can get someone to laugh, even just for a moment..." He paused before rephrasing his thought. "Being joyful is a state of grace."

Find out more about Rick and Holy Molé by visiting www.holy-molecartoon.com. Visit www.westwindkarate.com or call West Wind Karate at 941-957-6480. View this month's Holy Molé strip on page 117.

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