

## My Taekwondo Journey So Far

Taekwondo is one of those things in my life that I happened into. I was always the kid watching bad, B-rated movies about Chinese and Japanese martial arts. Seemingly impossible feats of physical daring and mental acuity performed right before my eyes. I was amazed at these men and women, at what they could do, at their valor and spirit. It wasn't until I was older that I found out about trick photography and the like. While it did diminish the individual actions of the movie actors the overall lessons learned from these shows has stuck with me and was my first introduction to the five tenets.

My family, at the time, was not able to financially provide the martial arts training I wanted and so I had to be patient. Over the years and throughout school I became involved in other sports and activities and continued to put off starting any sort of martial arts training. Having gotten married and started my own family after I graduated college I had kind of given up learning an art. I thought I was too old and had too many other things demanding my time. By happenstance I was working in the yard one spring day when my neighbor came home still wearing his dobok. I was interested in where he was taking classes in town and after a quick conversation I was invited to Master Hall's garage dojang May 28, 2008.

I thought the first class was great! I had also taken my oldest daughter, Adara, to this class and she was thrilled to participate. I thought what a great way to spend time with her and do something I had always wanted to do. When I found out it was a non-profit organization and that monthly dues were very reasonable, we were in. As a white belt I was a little bit lost but was eager to learn and as the class was small we had a lot of individual attention. The class was great but participating with my daughter was awesome! I enjoyed every class a little more and became more intrigued with what I could do. As a trained scientist it is incredibly interesting how the techniques work to generate power and work in concert with natural body motions both offensive and defensive.

I would like to believe I progressed naturally within the system but right before my test for blue belt (we didn't have the high yellow and orange then) I had an accident after class in December of 2009. I had broken my ankle slipping on the running board of my truck in my own driveway. This happened Tuesday night after the last class before the December testing cycle. I was so disappointed in the situation! I had been working hard and was looking forward to earning my new belt and learning new things. I remember there was an ice storm that night in St. Joseph and I spent the night in my own bed, with my foot up on pillows to combat swelling, as the ambulance service was cancelled for non emergency calls. I made it inside crawling on my hands and knees and the first thing I had my wife do was telephone Master Hall and inform him I would not be at test. After that was done I made her promise to start going to class in my place so Adara could continue as I healed up. So began my wife's Taekwondo career.

I took a long time to heal, almost 10 weeks, and I had a week stay in hospital because of a DVT clot in my calf. Treatment and rest are about the only things to help those so I waited and tried to heal. I attended as many classes as I could on crutches just to watch and try to keep things fresh in my mind. I began participating in class again at the end of March 2009. I tested in April 2009 which happened to be the test in which Grandmaster Jung attended in Bethany. I believe I disappointed him in my performance as I could not twist on my right leg at the time and skipped all the kicks with the left leg. I was just happy to be able to participate again. Master Slatten asked questions as is customary at the end of testing. Her question to me was why I wanted to be a Black Belt? My answer was that I had started a lot of things in my life without finishing very many of them. I wanted to finish what I started, no matter what got in my way.

I earned my blue belt at that test and began learning the associated new techniques. I earned my high blue in August 2009. Many people had come and gone from our little group of friends in the garage but everyone still had fun and learned a lot from both Master Hall and each other. I think at this point we were about 18 strong in regular attendees. In October Master Hall began talking about finding a more

proper Dojang space outside of the garage. We debated for several months what was best and settled on the current location in December of 2009. I tested for my 3<sup>rd</sup> goup brown in Des Moines when Mr. Weddle and Mr. Pummel had their B Temporary Black test that same month.

Working on the Dojang became the focus of class and we didn't have an actual TKD class in January or the first couple of weeks of February. All the regular participants worked and donated their time and efforts to make it a reality. We had our first class in the new dojang the third Tuesday of February 2010. Participation by the core group of people remained high for the first couple of months but over time of the original 18 only about 4 of us remained. This was partly to the change of venue and partly to the change of belts as we had a large influx of white belt participants at this time. My wife and daughter stopped practicing in August of 2010 to allow Adara to start dance classes. That left 2 of the original group of us still going. Eventually Jamie started to have sporadic attendance and soon it was just Master Hall, me, and a class of mostly white belts. I talked with Master Hall and it was unofficially decided that we needed to concentrate on trying to advance the lower belts and build participation. To make a long story short I didn't advance to 2<sup>nd</sup> goup permanent until August of 2012 with about 220 classes in-between tests. Teaching has always been fun for me and I didn't mind the new role of unofficial assistant to Master Hall. I did miss my friends and family at class and having someone of my belt level to practice with though, and my enthusiasm for class started to wain also. I never succumbed to this desire and continued as I had before assisting as well as I could and trying to perfect my techniques as I had time.

Eventually students that started in the new dojang as white belts reached brown and I began to train again on my own curriculum to advance and remain able to assist Master Hall as well as I could. Over time I also learned that my original answer to Master Slatten's question wasn't exactly correct. After watching many of my TKD family drop away I realized that becoming a Black Belt is not a 'finish' per se. It is more of a plateau in a long climb up a mountain, it proves you have mastered, to the best of your abilities, the basic techniques of Taekwondo but there is so much more to learn, master, and teach.

Stopping after you earn your Black is a disservice to the amount of work and sacrifice you have put in. Learning and advancing to higher levels of Black, while important, is secondary to giving back what I have been given. Passing on the knowledge that has been invested in me to younger participants is the whole point of practicing this art and becomes the final symphony of those that have come before me, stretching back through time.

My Taekwondo journey has been long and there have been many obstacles placed before me by both circumstance and action. I believe I have tried my best to keep my composure, remain true to the ideals of the school and art in which I participate, and live a life loosely based on the five tenets. I appreciate all the time, effort, energy, instruction, belief, and trust my superiors have placed in, and spent on, me. I hope I will not let them down. I close with a big Thank You to everyone for all you have done for me through the years and I hope for many more in the future.

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