



My Tae Kwon Do Journey

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11/13/2009

My Tae Kwon Do journey started when one summer day my wife came home from teaching at the Graceland University Upward Bound program. That particular day Mr. John Meek brought his class to Graceland to do a demonstration for the Upward Bound students. When she came home, she announced that we all needed to try this Tae Kwon Do thing out. She thought it was so cool! We agreed that our two sons, then ages 10 and 6, and I would go observe a class and perhaps even try it out.

We started as typical white belts, completely out of shape and generally nonathletic. We were told the same things most white belts are told, that the first few weeks would be very confusing and full of lots of new information. But if we were to give it a chance, it would become more natural.

Through most of my life, I have given an adequate amount of effort for whatever I found myself doing, which was primarily academics. This has resulted in some success, but not the best I could achieve. As I became an adult, this attitude began to change. I wanted to get involved in various volunteer capacities, mostly for the sake of young children or youth. Professionally, I wanted more than the position I started in. Adequate effort was no longer good enough.

When we began Tae Kwon Do, it was with this relatively new sense of wanting to do my best. Tae Kwon Do became my new passion. Tae Kwon Do was not and is not the only thing going on in my life. My kids were and continue to be involved in various forms of musical performance, I have been directing a summer church camp for middle school-aged kids for the past few years, I led the board of directors for a local daycare/preschool facility (and continue to be an active board member) and I've participated in a council of people involved in youth ministry for kids ranging from preschool to seniors in high school. However, when I do Tae Kwon Do I do my best and that is what I encourage my family to do as they participate with me.

I recall first learning the tenets of Tae Kwon Do early in my training. Some of them were concepts that have been part of my life for a very long time; others were brand new to me.

Courtesy is something my parents have taught me from a very young age. Although I've not always been successful, their intention was always for me to be respectful of other people, their opinions and their values. My time taking Tae Kwon Do classes has only served to reinforce this value.

Integrity is a personal favorite. Although it is also something my parents felt strongly about, it isn't one they needed to drill into me. Integrity has been part of my personality and therefore my life for many years. Now I work hard to instill it into my kids' lives so it is just as important to them. I always expect the truth and honesty from them. Of course they are still young, so it is a work in progress.

Perseverance is the tenet that expressed itself most clearly early in my Tae Kwon Do training. As yellow belts, my boys and I continued our training with the goal of reaching orange belt. It was the next step after all. I remember Mr. Tom Strade, who occasionally taught our classes in Lamoni, telling me my boys and I should skip the next test because we weren't quite ready. Although we were progressing along learning our forms and one-steps, he wasn't quite satisfied with our progress in general technique and felt we should spend more time working on it before testing. For me this was a challenge to do better so we could test at the next opportunity. The perseverance was not wanting to accept "no, you can't test this time" for an answer.

Self Control has been an interesting challenge. I've never really had a problem with physical self control; I've never had the physical strength or prowess to warrant losing it. As my self-confidence has grown in my own ability to defend myself and my family, I find myself having to mentally take control of my emotions when I'm confronted by situations that make me angry enough to lose it. I suppose that means in my Tae Kwon Do life, self control is my double-edged sword.

Indomitable Spirit is the tenet that is newest to my experience. It isn't that I've ever felt like I've been conquered or could be conquered mentally or physically, but my exposure to this tenet has left me feeling as though protecting myself and my family is actually achievable. However, due to recent happenings in my work and personal life, which I cannot expand upon, I find myself realizing that indomitable spirit has as much to do with one's ability to face challenges far more difficult than physical confrontation. In fact, physical confrontation would be welcome compared to these new developments. I believe I can still rely upon my Tae Kwon Do experience and lessons from my excellent instructors and mentors to carry me, and my family, through these difficult times.

It seems appropriate to acknowledge a few people who have either helped me along my Tae Kwon Do journey or even made it possible. First and foremost I'd thank my wife, Jennifer, and my kids, Ryan, Tyler and Megan. They've all been supportive by making Tae Kwon Do our family's passion, not just mine. That means when I go to class, it isn't always about me, it's our family activity and brings me great joy to see them achieve their best. They have also been supportive when it has been just me making those regular trips to Bethany for additional classes. Further, I'd like to thank my parents and my wife's parents. When the kids were too young to participate or just didn't have the same motivation to go to class, our parents were there to take care of them and then show interest in our progress to keep our interest and motivation high.

I'd also like to thank my fellow classmates. While Lamoni will always be my home school, the students in Bethany have always treated me and my family as one of their own. Students in Lamoni, such as Mr. Ben Brenizer and his brothers, Michael Jordison, Clayton Hill, Matt and Gabe Denney and Scott Farnsworth, as well as my own family, have challenged me through the ranks to make me a better martial artist. Students in Bethany have accepted me as a senior belt and mentor as they continue to grow and develop in their own Tae Kwon Do journey.

Next I'd like to thank Mr. John Meek, my primary instructor in Lamoni. He was the first to introduce me to Tae Kwon Do and it has been through his teaching and faith in my ability that I not only got started, but kept going to where I am today.

Masters Terry Hall and Peggy Slatten and Mr. Tom Strade, all in Bethany, MO, have made it possible for me to reach this stage in my journey. Mr. Strade has made trips to Lamoni when Mr. Meek wasn't always available and has always challenged me. Master Slatten has provided a gentler but firm encouragement for me to achieve my best at every turn. She has been a wonderful source of information and counsel throughout my Tae Kwon Do journey. Master Hall has been a rock. Although my interactions with him have been more limited, I know he's, along with those who came before him, provided the foundation on which I can solidly build my Tae Kwon Do experience. I've had the privilege of seeing him work with Mr. Gary Hall as he prepares for his 5th Dan test, but also with a variety of white and colored belts as they begin their own Tae Kwon Do journey and struggle with one challenge or another.

There are many other black belts within Two Rivers Martial Arts, primarily those who teach in Trenton and St. Joseph, MO, who I've also grown to respect. I've only been able to take classes from them when they've occasionally come to Lamoni to substitute for Mr. Meek or Bethany to teach a Friday night Brown and Black belt class, but in those experiences I've come to respect them as instructors and individuals who exemplify the tenets of Tae Kwon Do. Additionally, many of the black belts who teach and train at the hub, such as Masters Clinton, Samuelson, Williams, Ferguson and Hammer to name a few, have provided my family and me with new and interesting experiences to incorporate into our Tae Kwon Do journeys.

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge Grand Master Woojin Jung. I know only a small portion of his story, but what I do know is an example worth following. I've been privileged to test under him both at the hub and in Bethany on different occasions and it is always a memorable experience. Given what I know

of the heritage of Two Rivers Martial Arts, I certainly appreciate the opportunities that put me in his presence. After all, without him, it seems likely that my Tae Kwon Do journey would never have started.

And so it is with great honor and respect that I thank these individuals for their contributions to my journey in Tae Kwon Do.

As I've journeyed through the colored belts, the biggest thing I've learned is that my Tae Kwon Do journey has only just begun. I see the achievement of a black belt as permission to truly begin learning Tae Kwon Do. Under the tutelage of my instructors, I hope to make it a very long and productive journey for me, my family and, if it is within my power, for Tae Kwon Do.