

***EXPLAIN YOUR HISTORY AND LIFE IN TAEKWONDO AND HOW YOU CAN  
INFLUENCE OTHERS IN BECOMING A MASTER SUCH AS YOURSELF***

**My Taekwondo History**

My Taekwondo journey began in 1996 when my son Ryan expressed an interest in martial arts. As a young boy he really enjoyed watching the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and the Power Rangers on television. When we moved to Avon Lake from Garfield Heights, Ryan met a boy in our new neighborhood by the name of Donovan Flynn and they became great friends. Their friendship continues even to this day.

Donovan had begun his Taekwondo training at the Kim's Martial Arts location in Avon Lake. Since they were friends Ryan wanted to join too. I remember the first day I took Ryan to the school and we met Master Kim. Ryan was a little shy at first but Master Kim was very encouraging and motivating which sparked Ryan's interest even more. He started taking classes and I was the doting mother coming to watch every class he had taken; never imagining that one day I would be a Taekwondo student let alone a Taekwondo Master.

Shortly thereafter my son asked my husband, Bob, to take classes with him as a father/son activity. Bob complied and they embarked on the journey together. A few months later my daughter, Lauren, expressed an interest in Taekwondo as well and wanted me to take class with her. At the time I thought no way, I'm not cut out for this. I had been working out regularly but I didn't think that the martial arts were for me. At the same time I had a friend whose daughters were taking Taekwondo and she and her husband wanted to join. We decided we would all join if the others joined.

I'll never forget my first class. At the time I didn't have a uniform yet so I felt very uncomfortable in regular workout clothes while everyone else was in uniform. I can remember trying to learn Basic One and thinking I will never get this right. Eventually my skills improved the more classes I attended. Since this had become a family affair Bob and I began taking the family class with Ryan and Lauren. Taekwondo was a great family activity. We diligently went to class two to three times per week. At this time the Kim's school family was not very big and the classes were small but we met a lot of interesting people and made a lot of new friends.

When I was a brown belt I became a member of the SWAT team (Super Winning Attitude Team), which consisted of high-ranking color belts that would assist in classes. My husband and son were also on the team. We wore a patch on our uniform that had the word DELTA on it, which stood for dedicated, enthusiastic, loyal, teaching assistant. I have always enjoyed doing forms and I was able to help many of the other students in the class learn their forms. I also began teaching Cardio-Fit Kickboxing at the school as well. When I first started teaching I was a little nervous because I wasn't used to talking in front of a group of people but over time my confidence improved.

Three years after I started taking Taekwondo I tested for my first-degree black belt along with my husband and son. My daughter tested the following year. We became one of the first families to all achieve the rank of black belt under Master Joe Kim. I also tested for my first Dan with Donovan Flynn. Believe it or not I have taken all of my black belt tests with Donovan and we will be testing together for our fourth Dan.

Black belt had been my goal ever since I started classes. It was hard to imagine that I had finally met my goal. Master Kim had a formula called the Black Belt Success Cycle. The definition went like this: know what you want, have a plan, review your progress and renew your goals. I followed that cycle and had achieved black belt. Now

it was time for a new set of goals. My new goal at this time was a second-degree black belt. As I continued my training I also began to assist more and more in the children's classes helping Mr. Brady and Master Kim. I found that the more I taught the more I learned and the better I became at Taekwondo.

In 2001, I tested for second Dan. Upon achieving second Dan I continued as an assistant instructor but also began teaching the little ninjas, little dragons, juniors and some adult classes. In addition, I began assisting Master Kim in preparing Cho Dan Bo students (Black Belt candidates) for their black belt test. Having to prepare students for their black belt test was a demanding but rewarding experience. Some of the candidates knew their material very well while there were others that needed extra help. Some of the students that I helped test for black belt I had been teaching since they were white belts. I enjoyed working with the students and I was proud when these students tested for their black belt as I felt that I had helped them achieve their black belt goal. It was amazing to watch them progress and blossom into strong black belts. As a second Dan I also assisted at color belt tests. It was interesting to watch students at all color belt levels test and move up the ranks. I could see a little bit of myself in each student when I was at their level.

The rank of third-degree black belt was achieved in 2004. As a third Dan I added more teaching responsibilities and in 2006 became the main instructor for the Cho Dan Bo classes. Being the instructor of this class required a lot of responsibility. The performance of these students at their black belt test reflected on my teaching and also reflected on Master Kim, so obviously I felt pressured to prepare these students well.

As an instructor I have found that not only am I an instructor but I am a student as well. I consider myself a student because even when you are instructing class you are also learning from that class. You actually learn better when you have to teach which in

turn makes you a better teacher. Which kind of seems backward but it really is true. Therefore, I will always consider myself to be a student of Taekwondo.

As our school transitioned from Pal Ge forms to the new Tae Guk forms I felt like a white belt all over again. Not only did I have to learn eight new forms in a hurry but I also had to adjust to changes in the stances. Having done Taekwondo for so long with stances being wide and deep my muscle memory was programmed to keep my stance wide and deep. This has been very challenging to me but it has also been great to learn something new. Most students have a lot of time to learn each new form but as an instructor I had to cram learning all the forms in about three weeks time. The internet videos were very helpful in this regard and our school's new website was a great resource. In addition to learning the forms there was a whole new language of terminology to learn.

Recently this year we have added a white belt introductory class on Mondays for first time students. Over the years I have done many intro lessons and it is always interesting to see what a variety of skill levels students of all ages possess. It's a tremendous responsibility though to teach these students because you are that student's first experience with Taekwondo and their first introduction to new techniques. It's very rewarding to see the smile on a student's face when they do something correctly. One of my favorite moments is the look of shock on a white belt's face when they are at their yellow belt test breaking a board for the first time and it actually breaks. They are so amazed. Their expression is priceless.

I am proud to say that since 2006, I have prepared 108 students for their first-degree black belt test. The next Cho Dan Bo class that will begin in January 2010 will be a very challenging experience as I try to help the candidates learn all of the new Tae Guk forms but experience has shown me that I am up to the challenge.

## **My Taekwondo Life**

The life skill words that we teach to our children in class not only apply to Taekwondo but have guided me outside of the school in my daily life. Taekwondo has given me the confidence to not only get up in front of a group of people and teach but gives me the ability to face any challenges that come my way by helping me to believe in myself instead of doubting myself. When you truly believe in yourself you know that you can accomplish many things that you may have thought were not possible.

A life skill that Taekwondo embodies in a person is perseverance, which means to never give up. Before taking Taekwondo I may have given up more easily with the challenges that life throws our way but by forging ahead and not quitting I have found that I can better accomplish challenging moments and adversity in my life. One of those moments has been learning to live in an empty nest as my son has graduated from college and is now in the United States Air Force and my daughter is a sophomore in college in Virginia and will probably be living there over the summer. With a never give up attitude you realize that you can make it through any challenge whether it is on a personal level or on a training level.

One of the most basic fundamentals of Taekwondo is respect, which we are taught from day one of our training. Not only have I learned to respect my instructors and fellow students but, I have learned to be more respectful to myself as well as people outside of the dojang.

As I began writing this thesis I looked over my three previous thesis papers and my previous black belt applications. I came across a question on one of my applications: "Comment on how you follow each of Grandmaster Kim's nine guidelines". I had forgotten about these but they further reminded me that Taekwondo is more than just a

sport but is also a way of life. These are the nine guidelines set forth by the late Grandmaster Kim: “*do your best, be proud, be honest, be sincere, be patient, be humble, be diligent, be happy and self-control.*” As I reflect on these guidelines I realize they provide a great outline to living your life. You can never go wrong when you do your best. When you can be honest with yourself by being the best you can be by being diligent in all aspects of your life. Be proud of your accomplishments yet not brag about them by being humble. Be patient when faced with challenges and have self-control when something angers you. Be sincere in all you do by walking the talk, i.e., doing and meaning what you say. But most of all be happy. A positive attitude goes a long way especially if you appreciate all of the good things that are in your life.

## How can I influence others to be a Master in Taekwondo?

As a Taekwondo Master I hope that I can encourage others to become a master like me. A Master instructor in Taekwondo needs to be very familiar and up to date with the curriculum. This includes expert knowledge of all of the forms and basic movements. A Taekwondo Master has the responsibility of keeping the traditions and teachings of Taekwondo alive. Without Masters the art of Taekwondo would eventually fade away and become a dim memory.

It has been said that “once a black belt, always a black belt”, which is very true. However, that statement implies that once you get a black belt you stop training, which should not be true because it has also been said that “black belt is just the beginning”. On one of the walls in the main classroom of the school the following statement is posted: ***“THIS IS A BLACK BELT SCHOOL. YOUR GOAL IS BLACK BELT.”*** The initial goal in Taekwondo is black belt but that is just the tip of the iceberg so to speak. Skills continue to be developed and built upon. But the only way to continue on the journey is to have instructors to teach. Where do these instructors come from? They come from within the Taekwondo school itself.

As a Master I would try to encourage other black belts to become more involved as instructors. Initially the black belts could be an assistant in class. Our school has several junior black belts as assistants but I would like to encourage more of our adult black belts to assist in class and eventually have more adults teach classes once they gain confidence and experience with teaching. I would try to get them involved in helping with the Cho Dan Bo classes too. As mentioned earlier instructing is demanding because you really need to know the material, but you actually learn the material better when you have to explain and demonstrate the techniques. Hopefully,

this would demonstrate the importance of passing on the traditions of Taekwondo and would influence these black belts to continue on their black belt journey and someday become a Master too.

I would hope that I could be a role model for these black belts by being a good instructor myself. The word master implies being an expert but there is always room for me to learn more and to improve on my technical skills and teaching skills. To improve my skills I need to continue taking classes. When taking class I can influence others by being a good leader through working hard, being enthusiastic and trying to do the best that I can with my abilities. By continuing my training and demonstrating a strong work ethic I can improve my own skills and be a role model to other black belts. In addition, I always look for ways to improve upon my teaching skills. I like to use the color belt tests as a gauge not only of the students' abilities but also as an evaluation of my teaching techniques and make adjustments accordingly.

As I prepare to become a Taekwondo Master by testing for my fourth degree black belt I look back over the last thirteen years and realize just how far I have come since that very first class as a white belt when I was very intimidated. Recently, I came across the following quote: *"The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step."* My Taekwondo journey has been a long one and it began with that single step of taking the courage to try something new. With a lot of hard work, dedication and perseverance my journey so far has been very rewarding. I look forward to continuing that journey and watching the students that I have helped to become first degree black belts continue on their journey one step at a time to the higher ranks of black belt and maybe someday they can become a Taekwondo Master like me.