

My Journey from White Belt to  
Black belt.

Lessons learnt in relation to  
The Tenets of Taekwon-Do

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I started on a journey when I joined the Taranaki Taekwon-Do club as a white belt almost four years ago. I have almost completed a big step on that journey, and all going well, I will shortly grade to Black Belt. I have learnt several lessons along the way, and I will share these lessons in relation to the Tenets of Taekwon-Do. The tenets of Taekwon-Do are one of the first lessons I learnt as this is contained in the Student oath which we say at the start of each class.

"I shall observe the tenets of Taekwon-Do".

The tenets are: courtesy, integrity, perseverance. self control and indomitable spirit.

As General Choi states: "that ...the success or failure of Taekwon-Do training depends largely on how one observes and implements the tenets of Taekwon-Do which should serve as a guide to all serious students of the art." (Taekwon-Do Condensed Encyclopaedia, Explanation of Tenets. pg13).

Before I started my journey I was privileged enough to share another journey with my husband Brent on his road to Black Belt and to meet some of the people who had supported him. Brent joined the Taranaki Taekwon-Do club in 2003 along with our son Daniel. They trained together and it soon became apparent that Brent had found something he was very passionate about, (our boys would say obsessed!) Daniel was to give this up when he reached yellow belt. After some time, Joshua, our younger son also joined the club, he too recently gave up when he reached red belt. I would come along as a spectator and attended many gradings and other events organised by the club. I was always impressed by the atmosphere at these events, which was always very positive and supportive, There were a wide variety of people involved, both male and female, of different ages and backgrounds, they were all united by a common interest. Brent had said to me several times over the years that I should join and in February 2008 when the time seemed right, that is what I did.

## White Belt

Tenets associated with lessons learnt: Courtesy, Perseverance and Indomitable Spirit.

I remember my first class; the courtesy and respect everyone demonstrated on entering the training hall (do jang), they bowed before entering. They then bowed to the instructor and other senior members of the club in greeting. I felt very conspicuous, standing at the back of the class, as I was not dressed like everybody else, but was soon put at ease by Ms Copeland the Black belt who worked with us juniors. Brent had jump started my training over the summer holidays by teaching me the first two fundamental movements, so this was very helpful. I found this very challenging and it required lots of perseverance to get this right. The classes continued with new skills being learned, basic movements, three step sparring, self defence and free sparring, as well as theory. Before long my first grading took place. I was very nervous and this required indomitable spirit to get up in front of the class and other people to achieve this. The support of Mr Livingstone, my instructor and Brent helped immensely with this.

They were good teachers and did not mind my questions.

It also helped having other juniors who were also grading, as they were experiencing the same feelings as me.

## Yellow Belt

Tenets associated with lessons learnt: Perseverance and Self Control.

There were more challenges ahead, more theory, techniques and patterns to learn. Kicks were introduced into patterns, continuous motion and step turning, perseverance was required to master these.

As General Choi states: "Students should realize that it is extremely important for them to know thoroughly one single technique until it becomes reflexive before moving on to the next." (Taekwon-Do Condensed Encyclopaedia, Pg 41)

It was at this time that a small group of people including Brent, Glenwyn and myself started training on Saturdays at the dojang. This training was self directed but we did have assistance and support from Brent. Glenwyn was one gup ahead of me, this was of great advantage to my training as I was able to see what lay ahead. We partnered each other for step sparring and self defence, this required self control and many a time we ended up with bruises as we were both enthusiastic and keen, sometimes too much so.

## Green Belt

Tenets associated with lessons learnt: Perseverance, Self Control and Indomitable Spirit

Further challenges lay in promotion to next level, more complicated patterns

involving new techniques, slow motion and jumping. Perseverance was once again required to attempt to master these. My body was pushed to achieve more and working on flexibility was, and still is, a major challenge. A good sense of wellbeing resulted from this, it was a great physical and mental challenge. As General Choi states: The study of Taekwon-Do is particularly recommended for women because of the development of the lower abdomen, hips and inner thigh; areas which produce a youthful feminine figure for women of all ages." (Taekwon-Do Condensed Encyclopaedia, Taekwon-Do and physical fitness, pg 37)

It has been my observation that on obtaining the level of green belt, this is the time the student commits to continuing the journey to becoming a Black belt. While in the lower ranks there is some leeway accorded to junior students to ensure that they will continue training if encouraged. The serious student will decide this path is for them as training intensifies and more precision and accuracy is required, perseverance really starts to pay off. On reaching the promotion to fifth gup (Blue stripe), the Taekwon-Do student is halfway to Black Belt.

The Taekwon-Do games were introduced by Mr Livingstone in 2009, this was to encourage training in the younger students while fostering healthy competition within the club as each class member was placed into one of three Korean Kingdoms. Individuals earned points for their Kingdoms from various activities, including taking part in gradings. At the end of the year a trophy was awarded for the winning Kingdom and for individuals who had won their sections. It was a highlight that I won the Adult Female section after showing much Indomitable Spirit especially in the sparring competition.

During one of the class sessions we were working on turning kicks and I injured my left knee, not so severely that I could not continue to train. This injury did not settle and after seeing my doctor I was referred for physiotherapy, this helped to some degree. All this was taking place as I was working towards my next grading and I was able to successfully grade at the end of 2009 to fourth gup.

#### Blue Belt

Tenets associated with lessons learnt: Courtesy, Perseverance, Self Control and Indomitable Spirit.

I started 2010 as a blue belt, my knee was still giving me some trouble but I was still able to train, there were some techniques I could not perform on that leg and this required self control to stick to the advice I had been given by the physiotherapist regarding this. After several weeks the injury had not settled, so the opinion of an orthopaedic surgeon was sought and he advised me I required

surgery to treat a torn medial meniscus. The surgery was carried out three weeks prior to the next grading in April, so I was not able to take part. I attended the grading to support my fellow club members and this required indomitable spirit to watch others and not be up there with them taking part. Mr Livingstone, the Black Belts and other club members were encouraging and supportive during this time. Some of them had experienced injury themselves and were aware of the frustration of not being able to train. After surgery it took great self control and the help of the physiotherapist before returning to training. I was very motivated with my exercises and the fitness, flexibility and strength I had from regular Taekwon-Do training assisted me to return to full function with ease over a period of time.

Training was going well, there were new patterns and techniques involving foot shifting and stamping to learn.. Perseverance was once again required to learn and attempt to master these techniques. My strength was returning and I was on track to grade to third gup in August. During the pre-grading two weeks before the grading I sustained another injury. While free sparring an over exuberant high turning kick resulted in me tearing my left calf muscle. The disappointment was huge, all the training I had put in not to be utilised. Back to the physiotherapist for strapping, exercises and massage.

With courtesy I approached Mr Livingstone a few days before the grading about taking part in the areas I was able to manage with my injury. He was very understanding and aware of how prepared I was in my training towards grading. He allowed me to grade in a modified way, this required indomitable spirit on my part to complete this.

As General Choi states: "Soldiers are as strong as the general who leads them, and, in a like manner, students can only excel under an excellent instructor." (Taekwon-Do Condensed Encyclopaedia, Ideal Instructor, Pg 46)

## Red Belt

Tenets associated with lessons learnt: Courtesy, Perseverance, Self Control, Integrity and Indomitable Spirit.

The end of 2010 saw me grading successfully to second gup after persevering and overcoming the hurdles associated with the calf injury. It required indomitable spirit to return to full training when there is always the worry that injury may reoccur. The key is, to continue training and strengthening the area concerned. The mental conditioning that accompanies the physical aspects of Taekwon-Do was of great benefit in this area.

As General Choi states: "Constant repetition teaches patience and the resolve to

overcome any difficulty.” (Taekwon-Do Condensed Encyclopaedia, Taekwon-Do and mental effect, pg 39)

On to 2011, another pattern to learn, new challenging techniques including foot sliding and foot pulling. Training was progressing well, perseverance once again very evident. Brent was my partner for step sparring and self defence, which worked well as we were able to practice at home. One week before the grading he sustained a right calf tear and was unable to partner me. This caused a minor panic as who would be able to step in at short notice and learn the routines. Alex Lovell volunteered to partner me for step sparring, learning the attacks in record time. With the permission of Mr Livingstone, our son Joshua, who had stopped training five months previously, became my self defence partner. This resulted in a successful grading to first gup.

The big step to Black Belt was almost there, my enthusiasm saw me wanting to grade again in August for this momentous event. I courteously approached Mr Livingstone to discuss this, he had some reservations with the short time frame, but did not say this was not possible.

As General Choi states: It is of particular importance that the two aspects of Taekwon-Do, the spirit and the technique, must be taught together. Therefore a qualified instructor must combine the qualities of a scholar and a soldier if he is to produce pupils of noble character and outstanding skills. Such an instructor must possess the following qualities: ...3. Responsible attitude as an instructor. (Taekwon-Do Condensed Encyclopaedia, Ideal Instructor, pg 46)

After discussion with Brent, whose experience and knowledge I value, and reviewing the requirements and the amount of work and training involved I decided to wait. We also discussed the tenet integrity and this was another factor in the decision. Grading to Black Belt is a big undertaking and I wanted to do justice to all aspects of it.

So back to training, training and more training.

As General Choi states: Incessant training is essential to keep oneself in top form and physical condition. In training, all the muscles of the human body will be used. (Taekwon-Do Condensed Encyclopaedia, Definition of Taekwon-Do, pg 16)

Another pattern to learn with new techniques which include a flying kick. Perseverance and self control required for this. The intensity of training also increased, more step sparring and self defence routines to learn, master and perfect. These two areas show how the theory of power can be applied.

The revision of theory from both the syllabus and the encyclopaedia has consolidated my knowledge and given me more understanding of the art of Taekwon-Do. I find General Choi's vision and foresight inspirational. The teachings of the physical aspects and also the art aspect are very evident in the Taranaki Taekwon-Do club and this is due to the Senior Instructor, Mr Livingstone who is also very passionate about this. This passion is then passed down through the ranks to all club members.

I have covered some aspects of my journey to Black Belt and the lessons I have learned with regard to The Tenets of Taekwon-Do. The tenets also are applicable to everyday life and this has become more evident as I get closer to this goal and have had to sacrifice other things for my training and art to achieve this milestone. None of the above achievements would have been possible without the support, encouragement and perseverance of the Taranaki Taekwon-Do Club and for this I thank you. The Taranaki Taekwon-Do club is a very unique, supportive group of individuals united by a common goal. In no other club or organisation I have been involved with, do people of all ages relate so well together. The practice of Taekwon-Do crosses the boundaries of age, gender and race and creates an environment where differences are respected. I am proud to be a member of this club.

Thanks to:

Mr Neill Livingstone - V Dan, Instructor - for your inspiration, dedication and passion to Taekwon-Do, the Taranaki Club and the ability to pass this on.

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To all the other senior and junior members of the club who have helped me along the way with encouragement and support.

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Joshua - for partnering me for second gup at short notice, not too many boys' would like to have their mother throw them around in front of other people.