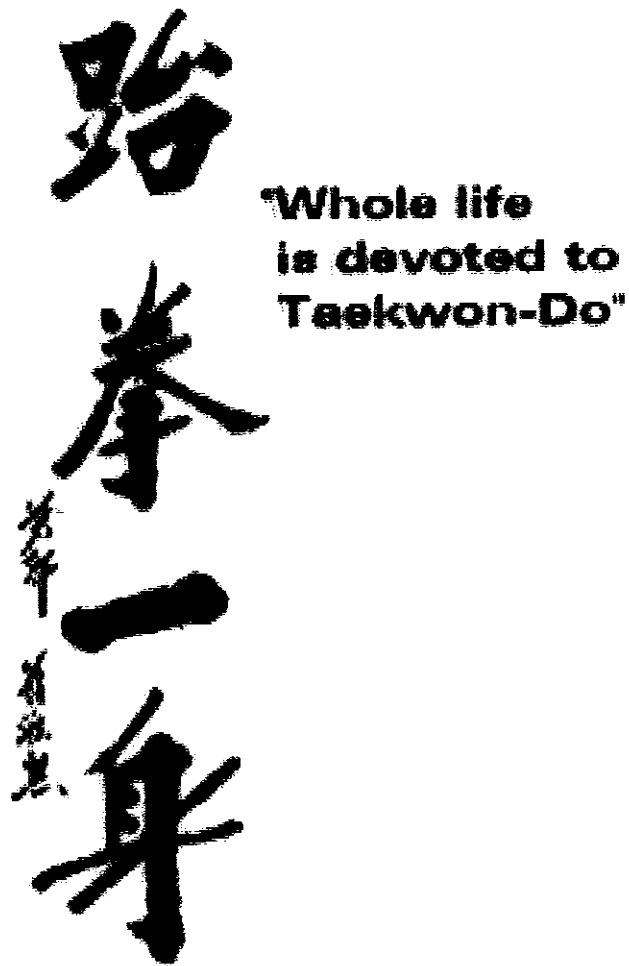


Taekwon-Do & Me

Essay for III Degree Grading Exam



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When I was told I had to write a paper on my philosophy and my experiences in Taekwon-Do for my 3rd Degree examination I had no idea where to begin. Since the written word does not come easy to me I decided to start at the beginning and hope that I might find inspiration by reliving my first few years in Taekwon-Do

I began my training in 1987 when I was 9 years of age at master Kirwoods School in Larkhall having done boxing for a year previously, at that time the school was affiliated to the TAGB and also boasted Grandmaster Hee Il Cho as its Chief Instructor. Master Kirkwood then a 2nd Degree Black Belt had been recommended by my fathers cousin who had been on the TAGB Scottish team With Master Kirkwood.

I can still remember my first lesson clearly. It was a Sunday, me and 2 friends decided to go along to watch the class to see what it was all about. When we entered the sports hall where the class was being held we were all a bit anxious and excited about what we would see. It was quite intimidating seeing all these big men in uniform warming up for the class (back then the kids trained with the adults). At the front of the hall was a man in blue uniform top and white trousers bouncing around performing high kicks and jumping spinning kicks as part of his warm up routine. I was mesmerised by this as the only martial arts I had seen up to this point was in Bruce Lee Films, And to see someone doing it without camera tricks was amazing to me.

My first lesson consisted of Sitting Stance Middle punch. Front Rising Kick. Walking Stance Low & Rising Block and Front Snap Kick. I must admit that these techniques did not come easy to me but by the end of the hour I definitely knew I wanted to know more. I wanted to be like the man at the front jumping in the air and waving my feet around. After the next three or four lessons the few techniques I had been given to learn were falling into place and starting to make a little more sense to me. The training compared to what I had done the year previously in boxing was totally different mainly I think to the fact there were more kids my age in Taekwon-Do than in the boxing club in fact when I come to think of it I may have been the only child in boxing club at that time. Therefore sparring was totally alien to me as I had only punched focus pads, due to the fact I was too short to reach the speed ball and the bottom of the heavy bags were almost at my head height.

The weeks past and before long I was learning Saju Jirugi 1 & 2 and the first grading was looming. The first grading I remember vividly, Eddlewood Sports Barn was packed with kids and men of all grades preparing for their exam. I was terrified, I had no idea what to expect and the only person I knew in the hall was master Kirkwood who was all of a sudden in collar and tie standing with all the other TAGB Scotland instructors which made the grading appear very different to my training, Where was the instructor in uniform at the front demonstrating techniques and giving advice? After what I felt was an eternity I carried on through a nerve wracking exam, When I was told that I had achieved my yellow tag the terror of the Grading turned into excitement and I couldn't wait to get to the next lesson to learn my new pattern and new techniques.

Before long I was talked into attending my first Taekwon-Do Tournament. The TAGB Scottish Championships held in Glasgow's Kelvin Hall. Where a few years later I would attend a seminar by Grandmaster Hee il Cho. TAGB rules then stated that students had to be yellow belt to compete myself and another yellow tag were given yellow belts so as to be able to take part. Again like that first grading it was a nerve racking experience. The Kelvin Hall is a huge place and the tournament was being hosted in a hall the size of two basketball courts. There must have been at least 6 to 8 areas it was buzzing with competitors and spectators who all seemed to take it all in their stride. Although competing in patterns and sparring that day I went home without a medal. I'd like to say that I didn't care about not winning anything but I was, I was determined to make sure it didn't happen again. Before long the competitions became easier and I began to win medals which only made me hungry for more. I think it was at this time perhaps a year or so later I knew for sure Taekwon-Do was definitely for me. And I haven't looked back since.

20 years on and I am still training in Taekwon-Do although having been diagnosed with epilepsy in 2007 I still compete. Although not being allowed to fight competitively is disappointing. I still enter the patterns divisions just to feel the buzz and hype of the tournament circuit.

My philosophy in Taekwon-Do to be honest is something I never really thought about. I trained I practiced and competed and for many years I was quite happy to do just that without any consideration of a training philosophy as when I was young my training was all for competition and trying to win medals. I don't think it was until I was in my early 20's I really found out how much Taekwon-Do had become such a major part of my life. Having trained under Master Kirkwood for 12 years and becoming a second Degree Black Belt, he asked me to become his Assistant Instructor and help him establish his Blantyre School, I felt honoured that he felt I was up to the task. At the time I had no idea of the commitment and dedication required to become an Instructor and the pressures of working full time and raising a family at the age of 21 I became disillusioned with Taekwon-Do and decided to take some time away from it. After a few months of not training I began to miss it and deeply regretted my decision to quit. Having felt I had let my instructor down I didn't feel I could return to train with Master Kirkwood at that time and began to study under the ITF with Grandmaster Rhee Ki Ha's UKTA. The ITF style was so different to what I had spent so long developing. The ITF training centres around a strict adherence to the stylised movement adopted by General Choi namely the Sine Wave motion. I believe it was my time in the ITF that may have rekindled my passion for Taekwon-Do but there was always something lacking in the training and never really felt like I belonged. A few years later after moving house the ITF School I was attending was too far to travel back and forth to on a regular basis. It was then I found myself back with the TAGB where I spent 3 years. It was with the TAGB I became a fully qualified Instructor and Referee and began to teach in Bellshill. Unfortunately once again I never felt able to settle within the TAGB I felt yet again there was something missing, I didn't feel there to be any challenge I was feeling my training become stale. It was around this time I plucked up the courage to go and see Master Kirkwood to ask if I could become a member of AImAA-Scotland. Now almost 2 ½ years later I feel that I am back where I belong my hunger for the training is as big as ever and feel that for the first time in many years that I am improving. The progressive approach to Taekwon-Do within AImAA is refreshing and as an instructor I feel I have more freedom to alter what I teach in class and divert from the syllabus from time to time.

Being diagnosed with epilepsy was perhaps the biggest set back in my life not just in Taekwon-Do but in everything I do. Losing my driving license, not being able to take a bath on my own or go swimming due to the risk of drowning. I can honestly say that Taekwon-Do has been the one constant that has got me through such a hard time. By focusing on Taekwon-Do while still awaiting a diagnosis helped divert my mind from worrying and gave me some sanity in such a trying time. Master Kirkwood has been a massive help to me in the last 21 months. His understanding and patience with me has been amazing while recovering and settling back into training, Without whom I don't think I would have found myself ready to take my 3rd Degree Exam.