

TAE KWON DO

What It Means To Me

by

Tom Strade

Several paths have led me to Tae Kwon Do. Throughout my years, sports have been a large portion of my life. In Jr. High, there was football and basketball. The same was true for High School. The only difference between the two was that I added track and golf to the football and basketball. Being the bull that I am, it was “go till you drop”. When you are that involved in sports and they make up such a big part of your life, you think about college ball and the pros. However, I knew that I wasn’t good enough, fast enough, or big enough to play on their playground. So, I played intermural, and church leagues.

Besides, there were always studies. There was the need to get good grades. During each season I concentrated on two areas: Football and studies then Basketball and studies then Track and studies then and Golf and studies. It was quite a balancing act, being a good athlete and a good student. In my small home town during the sixties there wasn’t a martial arts program and even in college there was no program. If there had been, I probably would have been involved in it also. As with many kids today, I was strong and invincible. And a Bull.

Following college I got married, started my own business, and continued some sports. Church league softball (another sport) and golf at the local country club. I was building a business, kids came along, and with the hectic schedule, sports and keeping in shape became less important and less of a need. This continued for the better part of 20 years.

As a father, there were always, and still are, the desire, need, and want to protect your family. Don't look for trouble, don't be in the wrong part of the city, avoid confrontation if possible. If the need should arise, I had my strength to take care of everything. I wasn't quite as invincible as I was as a teenager, but I was still a Bull.

Sometime during these years, personal health became an area of concern for me. My dad had a five-bypass heart surgery. After that, I eliminated beef and pork from my diet and ate only poultry and fish for several years. With the example of my best friend, Susan, I eliminated all meat from my diet. I have been a vegetarian for about five years. If it had a mommy, you don't eat it. I also started walking, all for better personal health.

My son, Toby, introduced me to Tae Kwon Do in Bethany. He knew of the class and expressed an interest. I took him to one class which was being taught by Dr. Hall. I was mildly interested, but the desire was not there. I was too busy with my business, my kids, and all of their activities. It wasn't till after my kids were getting older that a reality was driven home to me. I wasn't invincible and I couldn't protect my family 24/7/365. Through a personal family happening, self defense became very important to me, not for just myself but for my family and all youngsters, teens, and young adults. The world was changing. It wasn't as safe any more.

It was sometime in 1999 that I saw an advertisement for the Tae Kwon Do school. New classes were forming. My interest in self defense was greater. I knew I wasn't growing up (Peter Pan is still my hero), but I was getting older. I was not as strong or as fit as I once was. The timing was right. To paraphrase an old saying 'The teacher will appear when the student is ready'. Dr. Hall was still teaching the class and Mr. Gary Hall invited me in to observe a class.

That was the beginning. When I told Susan I had joined a martial arts class, I found out that she was a brown belt in karate. This was encouraging.

I found that Tae Kwon Do and self defense is not only about strength (I was still a Bull) but quickness, speed, leverage and agility. I found that Tae Kwon Do is a balance between the physical and the mental. Class has been more than a physical workout. It has been a learning experience about myself. I have learned that my body has limitations. I am not as flexible as I once was. In addition to Tae Kwon Do exercises to loosen me up, Susan introduced me to Eastern philosophy and to the benefits of Yoga asanas for reflection and flexibility. I also found that my physical balance wasn't the greatest, a result of childhood Polio which affected the growth and development of my left leg. I am grateful that my parents remained positive about my illness, and never told me that I couldn't do something because of the it. Through Tae Kwon Do exercises and forms, my balance has increased. The slow motion movements are a challenge, but they are helping with my balance. The discipline of the forms has been good for me, not only for physical endurance but also for mind conditioning, agility and learning a movement's practical application. This practical application has been of great interest for me, in how I can better learn to protect my loved ones and myself. Being able to pass along this knowledge to others is also of great importance to me.

The tenets of Tae Kwon Do have been the foundation for my training. I have come to respect the knowledge and abilities of my teachers and fellow students and those I meet in my business and personal life. This reinforces the tenet of Courtesy that I was brought up with.

The Integrity of the Art and the Two Rivers Organization is exceptional. This is evident in the teaching and training. There is a right way: Physically, mentally and ethically.

Perseverance that has been instilled in me as a student has been wonderful. When that board won't break and won't break, Dr. Hall or Ms. Slatten says, "try again. Try it this way. You can do it". They instill confidence that with proper form those boards will break. (I think that it does also help to be part Bull.) With Perseverance the task will get done.

Self Control has had the most impact on me. Not that I would lose control and go off the deep end, but as I have been told "I don't know my own strength". I have learned and I am still learning to relax and control myself, my punches, kicks, and bulling ways.

Indomitable Spirit. I find myself being more self confident, not only in class but in the world outside of class. To know that I am able to make a greater difference in self defense, mental and physical health is rewarding. I find myself being more aware of my surroundings and the people within those surroundings. I find myself more relaxed and more able to enjoy life. I find myself being better prepared to defend and protect my family, friends and self.

The training and assistance that Dr. Terry Hall, Ms Peggy Slatten, Mr. Gary Hall and Mr. John Meek have given to me has been invaluable. I thank them for the time they have taken to get me to where I am in my training. I know I have not arrived; I am just starting.

These are all the effects of Tae Kwon Do class. All positives. No negatives. That is if you don't count the broken toe.

Respectfully,

Tom Strade