

2015 California State Open Taekwondo Championship Essay Contest

My Tae Kwon Do Story

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Before I started Tae Kwon Do, my life was comprised mostly of school, junk food, and video games. I was lazy, a complete and total minimalist, and would never bother challenging myself. It was like I was a zombie, merely going through the motions of everyday life because that was what I was supposed to do. Then, my parents finally dragged me from the couch and down to the J. Lee Tae Kwon Do studio. Of course I resisted at first. I looked up at the masters and the higher belts and told myself I could never be like them. To me, there was no such thing as an open mind. I looked at the flag on the wall and the formal uniforms and wanted to hide in a corner. I only continued participating because it seemed to satisfy my parents.

But, suddenly, there was a little voice inside my head. It kept on talking to me whenever I was at Tae Kwon Do: *Whoa, look at that kick! Don't you want to learn that? Wasn't that fun? Why are you resisting if you're enjoying it?* And after a while, I began to listen to it. I paid more attention, tried harder, and would finish class covered in sweat. Going to Tae Kwon Do became routine, and I felt comfortable in the initially strange environment. By the time I earned my first belt stripe, I didn't need the voice. I would give Tae Kwon Do my all without the voice's constant urging. I strived to yell the loudest, kick the hardest, run the fastest, and do my very best. And as this occurred, my life outside Tae Kwon Do began to change as well. It was like a black and white world was being filled with color. Each and every passing day no longer felt like a chore. It had meaning and purpose. It was a time of emotional breakthroughs for me, and it was all thanks to Tae Kwon Do.

I recall one time in particular when my change in heart was incredibly visible. The master was demonstrating a kick on a bag when he hit it so hard it collapsed to the ground. I was shocked. I hadn't thought such a thing was possible. So, I made it my mission to do the same. Kick after kick, I focused and put all my effort into each strike. I saw sweat fly from my forehead and land in droplets on the floor. I kept trying, and I got close, but I couldn't seem to hit it hard enough. A glance at the clock, and I knew I was running out of time before class ended. So, I threw myself at the bag, hitting it with every last bit of strength and energy in my body. I'd never tried so hard at anything in my life. And... I did it! The bag hit the mat with a loud, resounding *thud*. I cheered, and those in line behind me congratulated me. The next day, at school, I told some of the students that sat near me all about it, and they seemed genuinely impressed. I could see it in their faces. I finally had a hobby, a skill, that I could be proud of. It felt amazing to no longer be *that kid*, a typical boy in an ocean of typical people. I had only kicked over a bag, but I felt godly.

Now, it's been nearly three years. I'm a red belt, and just the other day I was able to practice some of the kicks I'd looked up at in awe as a white belt. I'd seen the masters flying through the air, knocking targets from people's hands, and thought to myself: *I could never learn that*. But then, the little voice in my head spoke up. *Yes you can!* it

told me. *And you will!* It feels fantastic knowing it was right. Only now do I realize the voice sounds exactly like my master.

As a red belt, my goal is black belt. It's what I'm pushing to achieve right now, and I feel like I've really grown up since my white belt days. I no longer need the voice, though it's still there and still helpful. I know that when the day of my black belt test comes, I'll remember every bit of effort I've put into my Tae Kwon Do training and fight to make sure it wasn't for nothing. I've learned a lot from my experiences: not only about techniques and poomse, but also life lessons that I'll carry with me for the rest of my days. They'll be present in my mind during my black belt test. But, Tae Kwon Do isn't the only place where what I've learned can be applied. As an adult, I plan to become a writer. Without Tae Kwon Do, without the voice pushing me to be the best version of myself, I'd be much too lazy to accomplish anything noteworthy in the field of writing. One could say Tae Kwon Do whipped me into shape. The effort I put into it carried over to the other parts of my life, and it's opened so many doors for me, too many to count.

It's nearly impossible to imagine where I'd be if my Dad hadn't taken me to the studio that fateful day. My grades would be dropping. My personal relationships would be nonexistent or meaningless. I would still be a zombie, still be *that kid*. Looking back, I wish I hadn't been a lifeless ghoul without purpose before I started Tae Kwon Do, because then everything I experienced in Tae Kwon Do would have forged me into an incredible person, even better than it's made me now. Delving into the depths of this beautiful martial art molded me. It gave me confidence, the ability to work hard, discipline, and continues to combat my clumsiness. It has shaped my views and opinions about the world. And best of all, it opened up my mind to new things. The day I move away to college, my name shining on a well written novel in my hands, I'll miss Tae Kwon Do dearly, and know what to credit for my success.