

## **The Early Years: Overcoming Adversity**

Growing up I was a scared, and nervous kid, which made me seem weak and because of this, I became a target of bullying. I was chased on my first day of school, by the whole school, I was beaten, my lunch was stolen, I was choke slammed for fun, their fun. At home I watched action movies and tv shows of characters defeating bad guys, as a kid I thought the main character was defeating their bullies. I thought if I learned how to fight I could defend myself from them. So one day I asked my parents if I could do martial arts, they thought I was just trying out something new, as before I learned how to make things in the wild, I learned archery, and now martial arts. I never told my parents about my bullying, they were sacrificing everything for me and I couldn't help myself to bother them even more. My parents did some research and found out that one of my favorite actors at the time did Taekwon-do, they found a place that teaches Taekwon-do and all of a sudden it was my first day at Taranaki ITF Taekwon-do. I wouldn't be lying to say that I cried on my first day, I was eight, I remember in kids class my parents said we'd get food if I did it. I went on and tried it out, and found it fun. I had found something I was passionate about, I forgot all about the bullying, I forgot all about wanting to defend myself, I just had fun. Years later here I am now grading to 1st Dan from 1st Gup.

## **Discovering the True Meaning of Martial Arts**

Many see Taekwon-Do as just physical points on a scoreboard or boards broken in half. I used to think the same. But at Taranaki ITF, I found more than just strength, I found confidence and comfort. I walked in expecting to learn how to fight back against my bullies, but I walked out with lessons in discipline and kindness. It was an environment that pushed me to be my best rather than teaching me to be the most dangerous. This shift in perspective was so profound that my bullies eventually lost their power over me. Though a change in schools gave me a fresh start, Taekwon-Do remained the foundation of my life, showing me every day that the 'movie-style' feats of the higher ranks were actually within my reach.

## **The Trial: Injury and Recovery**

I was having fun, however I took all of it for granted. I started being lazy in my Taekwon-do, not trying hard, and almost not grading. That's when it all came crashing down. I was playing touch at school. One game was against boys that were twice my size, my foot went into a small hole in the ground, I got tackled and injured. A month later I learned that I had to go into surgery and that I had to drop all contact sports, including Taekwon-do till I had fully recovered. I had S.U.F.E (Slipped Capital Femoral Epiphysis). S.U.F.E. is a medical condition where the head of the femur slips backward off the neck of the bone at the growth plate, typically occurring in adolescents. I asked about the recovery time, they said they estimate the time for a full recovery to be when I become 16, I was 12 at the time, hearing that news broke me. I cried all night. Thankfully I had my parents to comfort and reassure me that I can go back once I have recovered. My mum joined a community on Facebook of people who went through S.U.F.E or had family members that went through it too. She learned that lots of people had fully recovered before the estimated time they were given. When she told me this, a flame lit inside of me, a flame burning to recover as quickly as possible. I rested, and once I was off crutches I started weight training, I pushed hard to recover, luckily at the age of 14 I was fully cleared, however at a price. Me pushing too hard and not necessarily weight training properly and just doing what I thought was right, caused my certain muscles to not heal properly.

## **Valuing the Journey over the Destination**

When I started I went through each ribbon in kids class as fast as I could, I even skipped a couple of the ribbons and went onto the next one. I wanted to get to black belt as fast as I could, of course that wasn't possible, otherwise everyone would be a black belt. I soon came to realize this, I realized that if

I try to rush through all the belts I would forget about all the lessons I learned throughout achieving the belts. I learned that these milestones can only come once, you can't just unlearn something, it sticks with you forever. This taught me to appreciate the present, appreciate what's around you, and to appreciate the things around you. More recently, I encountered a quote by Bruce Lee that perfectly captures this insight: "Remember, success is a journey, not a destination. Have faith in your ability. You will do just fine." Bruce Lee's words emphasize the importance of valuing the process rather than rushing toward the end goal. This quote resonates deeply with my own experience, reinforcing that true growth comes from embracing each step of the journey and learning from it fully.

### **The Foundation: Respect and Discipline**

My parents initially allowed me to do Taekwon-do, not because it's fun, or teaches you how to protect yourself, they allowed me to do Taekwon-do because it teaches you something valuable, where without it you would struggle in the modern world. This lesson is respect and discipline. Respect anywhere should be given and received. This goes in the Dojang too. You start off your conversation with a Sir or a Ma'am regardless of rank, regardless of age, regardless of skill. You always use your manners please and thank you, excuse me, etc. These values came out of the Dojang, I use please, thank you, and excuse me to everyone I tend to engage with in my everyday life. Respect is an essential part of your life and is an important lesson to learn especially at a very young age.

Taekwon-do taught us discipline, to stand as if you were a statue in ranks, hands clasped behind our backs, eyes fixed forward, fully attentive to the instructors, quietly waiting and prepared for the next command. In kids class, I'm sure I am not the only one to remember this, but we practiced this, we would stand in our rows for 2-3 minutes and if someone moved another minute would be added. As an energetic kid this was difficult to learn, however over time it became second nature. Ironically I subconsciously stand this way at school, while waiting in line, just anywhere. Someone recently pointed out that when I am talking to people, getting an award, or even walking through an entrance I tend to bow by habit. Discipline and respect being taught to me at a very young age by my parents and my Taekwon-do instructors is the reason I have the majority of my accomplishments. For example I even got a principles award for having these qualities in my day to day life.

Discipline is a core part of TKD. I used to think it was only about perfecting patterns and kicks, but over time I've learned it also means staying focused in class, meeting commitments, and treating others with respect. That mindset has earned me positive comments on school reports and the trust of my teachers, things I know make my parents proud.

### **Adapting to Adversity**

My surgery, even though I am fully cleared, still affects me, whether it be golf, or Taekwon-do. Since certain muscles aren't healed properly and are weaker than they should be, my stability has been affected, my ankles start collapsing under my weight, and I start to feel a sharp pain. If I stretch my hips even a little too far I experience nerve compression, where your nerves pinch. These weaknesses normally should have negatively affected my Taekwon-do, however this taught me to adapt, to instead of contemplating on what went wrong or panicking that my Taekwon-do will become worse and stay that way. I learned how to adjust, I embraced it, I acknowledged it, and improved upon it. I never let it become an excuse for not achieving my goals, not performing at the level that I should be. I believe that the ability to adapt will be an aspect that will take me far in life.

### **Consistency and Hard Work**

Consistency has been very important to my success in life. It has helped me during exams and pushed me through golf tournaments. Sometimes progress isn't easy to see right away, but if you

keep going, it will come. Being consistent has taught me to be patient and disciplined. It also helps me stay strong when things get tough instead of giving up.

Two quotes we often hear in class explain this well, "Train easy, grading hard. Train hard, grading easy." and "Pain is the best teacher, but no one wants to take its class." These quotes remind me that working hard now, even when it's hard or uncomfortable, will pay off later. They encourage me to keep going and trust that with time and effort, I will get better, not just in Taekwon-Do, but in everything I do.

#### The Impact on Community and Perseverance

Taekwon-Do has taught me that true strength isn't only about improving yourself, but about helping others improve too. Those lessons don't stay in the dojang or remain personal achievements; they shape how I serve my community.

Taekwon-Do has made me much more aware of the impact I have on others. I've come to understand that confidence and respect aren't just personal gains, they're ways of modelling behaviour that can encourage people to be their best. Small acts like standing up for someone, resolving a conflict calmly, or simply listening when someone needs to be heard are just as powerful as any physical skill I've learned.

One of the most important lessons Taekwon-Do has taught me is perseverance. For me, simply showing up is an essential part of the journey. Throughout my training, I've experienced highs and lows, times when I felt tired, stressed, or discouraged, but I kept going. This mindset helped me stay consistent because I learned that progress comes from regular effort, even on difficult days. By committing to show up and keep trying, I built a habit of persistence that carried over into other areas of my life, making it easier to stay focused and dedicated over the long term. It helps me become 1% better everyday and after 200 days I become 200% better than I was 200 days ago.

#### **Conclusion: A Journey of Growth**

Standing here before crossing the bridge to 1st dan black belt I have realized, Taekwon-Do has been much more than just a martial art for me, it has been a journey of personal growth and self-discovery. Through perseverance, discipline, and respect, I have learned valuable lessons that have shaped not only my skills but also my character. These lessons have helped me stay focused in school, build stronger relationships, and contribute positively to my community. As I continue on this path, I am confident that the principles I've gained from Taekwon-Do will guide me through future challenges and help me become the best version of myself.