

# Black Belt Essay

## FROM ONE BLACK BELT TO ANOTHER...

I was always interested in Karate but living in a small rural community there was no such thing as martial arts, only rugby or netball and I didn't think I had the legs for netball. So I played rugby thinking that if I ever moved to a city I'd take up Karate.

A few years later my flat-mate took up T.K.D, curiosity got the better of me so I wandered down to check it out. I was fascinated with the instructor, a small Asian 2nd dan black belt. His ability to move at lightening speed with beautifully balanced kicks was what impressed me most. Before long I was doing an 8th kup grading. While I found the patterns meaningless, their only value being a passing grade, I really enjoyed the free sparring and tournaments. This was the main focus of our training session with very little time spent on patterns or pad-work. After each club night I would come home bruised and battered but I didn't mind as I thought that was part and parcel of Taekwon-Do.

So I entered a few tournaments through the grades, won some and lost some,, in the process of which I received a broken nose, broken arm, was knocked out and lost the odd litre of blood. I quickly learnt the need to improve my free-sparring technique so that I wouldn't be severely beaten.

After four and a half years of tournaments and training I was ready for a black belt grading. The grading started at 8:30 at night, but not before around twenty-five colour belt students had done their gradings. These students and their assorted supporters were invited to watch my solo performance, naturally I found this highly beneficial to my totally nerve-wracked state. I swear those with acute hearing could hear my knees knocking.

The grading consisted of one randomly selected pattern, a black belt pattern, two three minute rounds of full contact free sparring with current black belts, a three minute full contact round against two red belts, knife attack self defence, one step sparring, pad-work and a four directional board break with jumping kicks. In total it was around 25 to 30 minutes of Hell. At the conclusion of the test I was asked to sit down in the middle of the hall and wait for my result, after ten minutes I was informed that I had passed. So there it was, in a nutshell, black belt done - piece of cake. After a few more tournaments, a few more cuts and bruises, I opened my own club.

Now that I had my own students things suddenly started getting more technical. They were asking me questions about movements in patterns for which I had no answers. I'd thought about these questions myself, and assumed there was some

deep and meaningful purpose which had never been explained, but, anyway, so what, they were only patterns, patterns were good for getting you to your next grading but lets talk about free sparring. Free sparring was what made Taekwon-Do Taekwon-Do. I ran this club for three years during which time I came to feel like a revenue collector, with my students paying \$25.00 a head for gradings which were basically a shambles. I was given no support from any other clubs in the province and felt more like rivals than members of the same T.K.D federation. At the end of this time I was very disillusioned and felt like giving up Taekwon-Do. So I did.

Two years went by with little or no training being done. I missed the training, the comrade-ship, feeling healthy, free sparring - I missed Taekwon-Do. I was ready to do Martial Arts again. I read an article in the local rag about some bloke who had started up a Taekwon-Do club in New Plymouth. International Taekwon-Do I felt it might be worth a look, it certainly couldn't be any worse than my experiences with World Taekwon-Do. I remember the first nights training, I was pleased. Pleased because at last I had found what I was looking for in a martial art. Movements had reasons and every movement had to be technically correct. The club had a good feeling about it with no big egos. So I was now at a point where I had to make a decision, I had three options. One, join the newly formed Taekwon-Do Union. Two, re-join the World Taekwon-Do Federation who had offered me an easy second Dan grading or three, staying with International Taekwon-Do as a white belt. Every once in a while through-out life we make a decision and have a gut feeling that we did or did not make the right choice. My instincts were to take the long road, staying with I.T.F.N.Z. and starting from scratch.

Before long and once again I was doing an 8th kup grading. Some of the theory disturbed me though. Especially the meaning of a white belt. ' Having no previous knowledge of Taekwon-Do '. So what the hell had I been doing the last ten years? Starting from scratch meant dropping the ego and after a period of time I found that if you could lose the ego, open the mind and not be afraid of change, then you could really begin to progress. I think too many people ( black belts in particular ) get to a certain point in their training, develop an attitude and are no longer willing to learn. This is true, be it World or International Taekwon-Do. I think that this is a great shame, as some of these people had the potential to go much further.

I think if I ever open up a club, I'd incorporate some of the techniques I learnt from W.T.F. mainly competition free sparring and stretching techniques but otherwise strictly I.T.F. I would never want to 'water down' I.T.F. but I believe we can learn from each other. In fact its amazing what we can pick up from different styles, other clubs, etc. I did Judo for a while. The instructor, Wayne, who was training for a competition, found me to be the perfect subject to use for a throwing bag. It was a bit like a cartoon you watch on T.V, getting thrown from one side to another, and then for good measure getting jumped on followed by a choker hold until I nearly blacked out. I remember trying to throw him once, but once only. He delt with my

feeble attempt with a good old fashioned thrashing, afterwards I noticed one arm longer than the other and that my neck was as red as my sisters the morning after her first date. Wayne must have felt that he had some kind of powerful inner strength, he only had to look and both my legs would fly out from under me and I'd find myself flat on my back and tapping the floor three times. What this experience taught me, apart from take a chilly bin of ice and a jar of 'Tiger Balm' was the ability to breakfall and that is something that has become second nature to me to-day.

Five years on I feel that had I not joined I.T.F.N.Z. I would surely have lost interest. While World Taekwon-Do is a sport and great for health and fitness, like many high impact sports the long term effects eventually catch up on you, doing the body more harm than good. I feel that I invested a lot of time and effort in World Taekwo-Do and received very little in return. I.T.F. gave me the opportunity of learning a martial art for self-defence as well as recreation. It hasn't been easy but I made a decision to attain a black belt with I.T.F, which I have and I've never looked back.

Taekwon...

Murray Smith. 1st. Dan.