

My Long Road to Becoming a Black Belt in Tae Kwon Do

Joe Gonzales

I began martial arts training in 1975 when employed at the Albuquerque TVI. One of the instructors at TVI who was a member of Mr. Fred Abshers' Tae Kwon School began a Tae Kwon Do club at the school and we would work out one day per week in one of the classrooms.

After a few months I joined Mr. Abshers' school and began working out 2 to 3 times per week. We studied Tae Kwon Do with Japanese terminology and also studied a Chinese style called "Kojasho". After about one year I moved to Phoenix, Arizona. I lived in Arizona for 2 years and worked out for nine months with Mr. Charlie Contreras in Okinawan Karate. I returned to Albuquerque in 1978. Two years later in 1980 I joined Karate One Inc. a school run by Mr. Ray Barrera one of Mr. Fred Abshers' Black Belts. Mr. Barreras' curriculum included Tae Kwon Do with Japanese terminology and the Chinese style Kojasho. I worked out with Mr. B. for five years and earned the rank of Second Brown which in this school was the last step before Black belt.

Once again I moved, this time to Espanola, New Mexico. There were no martial arts schools in Espanola and so during the 2 years I lived there I did not work out in Martial Arts although I did take up running as a way to keep in shape and maintain good health. While in Espanola on my 40th birthday I did a 15 mile run. That day I made an aim to myself that on every subsequent birthday I would run one additional mile until I reached the marathon distance of 26.2 miles. This aim would force me to continue a weekly running regimen. I was able to accomplish my aim and on my 51st birthday ran 26.2 miles.

I had not trained in the martial arts for 18 years when in June of 2003, my nephew Patrick Gonzales and his mother (my sister) Agnes convinced me that I should join them at Cho's Tae Kwon Do and work towards becoming a black belt, a quest I had begun 28 years before. I finally agreed and joined Chos' Tae Kwon Do and The Action International Martial Arts Assn.

Cho's and AImAA has afforded me the opportunity not only to develop physical technique but more importantly to adhere to a martial arts training philosophy which makes it possible to be successful in the Art of Tae Kwon Do. Grand Master Cho's training philosophy with its seven components of; Flexibility, Timing, Discipline, Ego, Mind & Body, Training and Fighting, if followed make it possible to succeed in the martial arts as well as in Life in general. The emphasis placed on the traditional aspects of the Art of Tae Kwon Do help build Character and Spirit in addition to physical technique.

I feel a great debt of gratitude to Grand Master Cho for his dedication to the Art of Tae Kwon Do and all the opportunities he has created for us. As a member of AIMAA, I have had the opportunity to meet many fellow martial arts students from many parts the world. I have had the opportunity to attend Summer Camps in Pittsburg and Flagstaff, and a boot camp in Hawaii. I was also able to compete in an international tournament in Ireland.

Although it has been a long road to finally test for recommended Black Belt I realize that it is only a new beginning . As a black belt I will have a new responsibility to make extra effort to give back to my school and the Art of Tae Kwon Do.

I would like to thank Mr. and Mrs. Farrell for their dedication and continual effort in keeping our school going. A special thanks to Mr. Farrell who after a hard 8 hour day at his day job he gives us an additional 3 to 4 hours of his time every night and does a fantastic job of training us.