

## My Life and Taekwondo

Pray for the Strength



Sarah Stauber

It feels as if I've been a student of Taekwondo my entire life. In the past thirteen years, martial arts has prompted my growth in ways I could never have anticipated. I've seen myself evolve from a child, in every sense of the word, to a confident, compassionate, determined and faithful adult ready to take on the world.

I first started early in elementary school, pushed by my mother, as a means to defend myself from bullies. One of the first things we were taught was meditation. As a white belt, I learned the basic Moo-gong Ryu words of wisdom: 무심 (empty mind), 인내 (patience), 극기 (discipline), 자제 (self-control), 정신통일 (concentration), and 심신수련 (training of mind and body). Such words of wisdom became the building blocks of my mental training. It wasn't until a year later that I began to practice fighting techniques. Without the mind, the body is simply flesh, and so to become a martial artist, one must train in both the mind and body. Under such discipline, my eyes were opened; all these years I had been inviting negativity from my peers, with the disrespect with which I treated them, the self-defeat that I wore on my sleeve, and the dejection I carried on my shoulders. I had been told that I had potential, but it didn't

mean anything until I could believe in myself.

The summer before starting junior high school, I was a green belt working towards my purple belt. One night, while practicing the jump-front-snap kick, my right knee dislocated. The injury left me unable to walk for months. While recovering, I got to thinking about what I was meant to make of my life. Up until then, I had allowed the currents of life to take me where they willed. Perhaps there was something greater to be gained through finding myself and my purpose. Being not yet even a teenager, I couldn't possibly fulfill such deeply introspective inquiries, but it was a beginning...By the end of sixth grade, I was face to face with the privilege I'd had. It's like the old phrase: "you never know what you've got til it's gone." All the sudden, I found myself in a world without private lessons, or my big brother to confide in, or food on the table at every meal.

Despite not being able to return to practice for lack of money, what I had learned in Taekwondo was more important now than ever.

No longer distracted by other activities, I discovered a new motivation: academics. I was amazed to find that, once I opened my mind, classes at school could teach me new and fascinating things about not only the world, but also myself. I wanted to make school a sanctuary. To combat bullies, I devised a ridiculous plan: whenever somebody directed an unkind comment at me, I'd simply respond with a 'thank you,' and walk away. I noticed that once I stopped seeing them as enemies, they became people and friends with their own strengths and flaws. I learned to

forgive. In John Green's words, "the only way out of the labyrinth of suffering is to forgive."

Nonetheless, their words still haunted me. On a conscious level, I knew that they had been meant as mere jests, but subconsciously, they had trained me to loathe my reflection. I didn't believe in myself. Since the first day I walked into Taekwondo class, Master Kim has reminded me to stand with confidence. Even some of my classmates prodded me to 'own it'. One girl even took it into her own hands to correct my posture. That's when it hit me: it's not just about how I walk and talk, but the confidence underneath. "Believe you can and you're halfway there." — Theodore Roosevelt.

Entering high school, Master Kim invited me back to taekwondo class, offering a scholarship to help cover the fees. After a three-year break, the meditations and teachings held much greater meaning for me. During this time, I earned promotions from third gup red belt through first gup skunk belt. But this too came to an end. By junior year of high school, I had so many other commitments, from nine classes and a dozen extracurriculars at school, to a part-time job at home, I found myself without extra time to sleep. I stopped going to even club meetings and practicing Taekwondo, so I could focus on studying for my AP classes.

My hard work in high school paid off. On May 24, 2015, I graduated Niles North with Summa Cum Laude honors. By the end of the summer, I was enrolled to start classes at Loyola University. To my dismay, however, I was unable to secure the funding that I had been promised, and I was forced to withdraw. It was a horrible feeling that I

was insufficient to even attend college. For months afterward, I feared that I might never earn a degree in anything or ever go to school again. Then came springtime.

In April, Master Kim generously offered another scholarship so I could continue studying Taekwondo and prepare to become a first Dan black belt. There was one condition this time, however: I had to help him teach the beginner-level Wednesday class. I was absolutely ecstatic; I had always wanted to give back my experience to the next generation of martial artists!

Admittedly, I was initially rather awkward, unsure of what to do or when to do it. But I learned. After a couple months, I was given the reigns to instruct the class all by myself. When I see my kids struggling with certain techniques now, I slow down and give consideration and feedback to help them improve. When they're upset or distracted, I become their confidant and mentor to help them through hard times and get their heads back in the game.

This gave me a new hope. If a ten-year-old could show such determination for perfecting their kick, then what reason did I have for not at least applying for school? Going to college isn't just a fallacy, it's a dream: it's the key to the rest of my life. As President Obama once said, "The best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something. Don't wait for good things to happen to you. If you go out and make some good things happen, you will fill the world with hope, you will fill yourself with hope."

Teaching isn't always easy. Sometimes they don't want to be there, as in the case of one particular student. As she later told me, her parents made her go to taekwondo

when all she'd prefer to practice archery, or gymnastics. When she told me this, I was immediately reminded of myself when I was her age. I had participated in Taekwondo because my parents made me. I would have preferred extra piano lessons or more days in the gymnastics gym. But now I practice because I wouldn't have it any other way. I told her this, and how taekwondo has helped me flourish, and that my appreciation and respect have grown enormously with time.

That's when it struck me that I wouldn't trade any of the scars or experiences that my life has given me for the world. I simply wouldn't be who I am without them, and I still have the rest of my life ahead of me. And in seeing that, I have faith that all the unfortunate things that are happening to me now are the predecessors for whatever great things the future holds. Marilyn Monroe sums it up perfectly: "I believe that everything happens for a reason. People change so that you can learn to let go, things go wrong so that you appreciate them when they're right...and sometimes good things fall apart so better things can fall together."

Taekwondo has greatly influenced my life, whether in playing in the background or taking the leading role. Now, as an adult, I can look back at all the lessons, big and small, that I've taken from Taekwondo. But perhaps the most important lesson of all is to believe in myself, those around me, and the world as a whole. Who knows what new lessons I will learn, and the people I will help in the years to come? Only time will tell. Like Bruce Lee, I "do not pray for an easy life, I pray for the strength to endure a difficult one."

## Essays



Lucy Cho  
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**We know you lead a busy life, full of activities, many of which are required of you. Tell us about something you do for the pleasure of it. (\*) (100 words or fewer)**

Every day after school, the first thing that I do is listening to K-pop. Trying to find more ways to fan-

girl, I began to compile photos of K-pop singers and design a collage like a poster via Adobe Photoshop. When I am creating a collage and experimenting with different tools of Photoshop, the hour hand of the clock seems to tick in a matter of seconds. Finishing a collage gives me a sense of accomplishment, and the self-pride and happy vibe I get from my products is a factor driving my everyday life.

**At MIT, we bring people together to better the lives of others. MIT students work to improve their communities in different ways, from tackling**

**the world's biggest challenges to being a good friend. Describe one way in which you have contributed to your community, whether in your family, the classroom, your neighborhood, etc. (\*) (200-250 words)**

My first tangible experience with engineering came to me in a very unexpected form: during my dance practice. As a Korean traditional dancer, I wear various costumes on the stage to enhance the visual effects of dances, and sometimes they cause me problems.

For the Sword dance, I wear green traditional socks called "Bu-

suns" instead of leather dancing shoes, but unfortunately, they are extremely slippery on a smooth wooden surface. Due to the frictionless Busuns, it is difficult for my teammates and me to stop ourselves from spinning or balance after jumping. Wondering how to reduce slipping, I decided to redesign Busuns by sewing foot-shaped leather and gluing anti-slip PVC dots on the bottom. I had to experiment with different types of leather and various sizes of PVC dots to create the perfect friction for the dance, since too much friction could limit the dancer from spinning well. As a

result, I found the perfect combination of leather and PVC dots, and we were able to dance more stably and comfortably on the stage.

This is engineering. It is not just about learning Physics and Calculus from the textbook, but is about applying that knowledge to create something innovative and beneficial in everyday life. Solely having the knowledge has no real effect on the Earth unless it is put into action. Through this experience, I only benefited my dance community. Yet, this small renovation of socks can mark the starting point of what changes the world in the future.

## Donald Trump, Russia and the strangest relationship in politics

President-elect Donald J. Trump held his first press conference as the President of the United States on Wednesday, January 11, 2017, in Manhattan, New York. During the conference, he mentions for the first time that he thinks the hacking attacks during the election was Russia.

When one of the reporters asked a question about what is his opinion that Vladimir Putin ordered the hack of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and the attempted hack of the Republican National

Committee (RNC), Trump answered, "As far as hacking, I think it was Russia."

At first, he finally agreed that he believes the Russian President Vladimir Putin's agencies were behind the hacking on DNC ahead of the election. However, he argued that the hacking would not happen again and added, "but I think we also get hacked by other countries and other people" when we lost 22 million names and everything else that was hacked recently, they didn't make a big deal out of that... That was probably China."

He also added that Putin "shouldn't be doing it. He won't be doing it. Russia will have much greater respect for our country when I'm leading than when other people have led it. You will see that. Russia will respect our country more. He shouldn't have done it. I don't believe that he will be doing it more now."



At the same time, he also criticized the security of the DNC by saying that, "the Democratic National Committee was totally open to be hacked. They did a very poor job. They could've had hacking defense, which we had."

He blamed the hacking that happened during the election as partially the democrats' fault and mentioned how republicans were able to defend their system by having a stronger system. He also asked the people

at the conference, "do you honestly believe that Hillary would be tougher on Putin than me?"

He was showing confidence in how he can build a better relationship with Russia if he had to, but also mentioning that, "Now, I don't know that I'm going to get along with Vladimir Putin. I hope I do. But there's a good chance I won't," showing a vague idea about how the future relationship with Putin will be.



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