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**TAEKWONDO PRINCIPLES: GUIDELINES FOR A BALANCED LIFE**

by

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Professional Paper

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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## Taekwondo Principles: Guidelines for a Balanced Life

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‘Taekwondo Principles: Guidelines for a Balanced Life’ is a project that developed as a result of my field experience during the first year of the Creative Pulse program working toward a Master of Fine Arts in Integrated Arts and Education. Because the idea of being creative and artistic seemed not only foreign but overwhelming, I wanted to explore physical creativity and artistry. In my exploration of different physical activities I discovered a passion for taekwondo. I tried taekwondo because of my niece, Rachel. Rachel’s mother, my sister-in-law Diane, died unexpectedly from cancer in October of 2008 when Rachel was an 8<sup>th</sup> grader. Diane had always supported her children’s efforts, especially in both taekwondo and wrestling. All three children, Cassie, Tucker and Rachel, threw themselves into their individual sports after Diane’s death, but the comfort and strength Rachel drew from taekwondo made me think there was more to the study of taekwondo than just physical artistry.

As I have continued my study of taekwondo, I have drawn closer to my brother’s children, especially my fifteen-year-old niece Rachel who is my taekwondo superior, mentor and coach, and I have gained confidence as well as fitness from my efforts. Taekwondo has helped me achieve comfort with my body as well as balance in my life. In noticing my personal growth, I began to desire the same type of balance and contentment professionally. By applying taekwondo principles to my whole life, both personally and professionally, I am a valuable asset to the school district, in that I am a more productive and efficient teacher, committee member, and advocate for students, as well as healthier as a human being.

The object of this project was to explore and then embrace taekwondo principles as a means of making me a more balanced human being and teacher, which will help me effectively reach additional students on different levels. The research into the history behind the taekwondo tenets and principles strengthened my belief that incorporating these ideas positively affects my classroom climate, as well as the tenor for my entire life. I no longer feel overwhelmed by the idea of being artistic; I am an artist each day as I continue mastery of not only the extremely beautiful forms of taekwondo, but also the tenets which mold and shape the human being I am becoming.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Definitions: Martial; Art.....	1
Why I Chose Taekwondo.....	2
Different Types of Martial Arts.....	4
Brief History of Taekwondo.....	9
General Choi Hong Hi's Five Tenets of Taekwondo.....	15
Tenets of Other Schools.....	18
The Taekwondo Oath, Morals and Training Code.....	19
Belt Colors.....	20
Taekwondo Training.....	24
Competing in Tournaments.....	27
Achieving Balance by Applying Taekwondo Principles.....	34
List of Appendices.....	39
Bibliography.....	49

## Definitions

*martial (adj.)*

*of or suitable for war or combat*

*art (n.)*

*creative work or its principles;*

*making or doing of things that display form, beauty, and unusual perception*

(Doyle 7)

These definitions give an indication that the study of martial arts is not something that is done once a week for a short time. Only dedicated, genuine students will excel or even come close to fulfilling the diverse, yet immense elements of the definition. Even though I have studied taekwondo for less than a year and a half, I agree with the statement by Master Deshimaru in *The Zen Way to the Martial Arts*, “What I have discovered from my own practice is that Zen and the martial arts are not things that you *learn* or *do*. They are what you *are*” (Deshimaru 3). Martial artists live, breathe, change and grow as they mature in all parts of the definition.

Taekwondo, literally the art of hand and foot, is a Korean martial art. “In the Korean language, ‘Tae’ means to kick or strike with the foot. ‘Kwon’ means to punch or strike with the fist. ‘Do’ means art or skill” (Gutman 5). Kevin Hornsey said in

*Taekwondo: a step-by-step guide to the Korean art of self-defense* that taekwondo

“is, however, far more than just a fancy form of kicking and punching. It is designed to cultivate a person into having a strong moral conscience through physical training, mental guidance and philosophical values. More than just a system of bodily exercise, Taekwondo is also a way of life” (Hornsey 12).

Dr. Kim Un Yong said, “Taekwondo is not merely a physical discipline for self-defense; rather, it is a physical and mental skill that combines and incorporates Korean virtues and spiritual characteristics peculiar to Asia” (Hornsey *i*). Taekwondo is an art form that appeals to me on many levels. I enjoy the physical conditioning which increases strength and flexibility, knowing that I can defend myself if necessary, and I benefit from incorporating the virtues into my life.

### **Why I Chose Taekwondo**

During the first summer’s classes in the Creative Pulse, my anxiety level was high knowing I had to choose an artistic or creative activity as a project. I have never thought of myself as creative or artistic. I have since discovered that I am both. Influential was fellow Creative Pulse student Tanya Miller who became a yoga instructor as her project. She inspired me to explore physical activity as a vehicle to satisfy my Creative Pulse requirements, express my creativity, as well as to become more fit. I tried classes in yoga, Pilates and then taekwondo. Yoga was very relaxing and beautiful; Pilates physically challenging as well as beautiful; but taekwondo also inspired me spiritually and competitively. While exploring these different physical activities, I discovered a passion for taekwondo. I have found taekwondo to be a vehicle for releasing frustration, reducing stress, improving physical condition, as well as embracing beliefs I have always considered important, e.g. the five tenets: modesty, perseverance, self control, indomitable spirit, and etiquette.

I decided to try taekwondo because of my fifteen-year-old niece who is an advanced taekwondo student. She is now just one step below black belt, i.e. senior red

belt. The ways that taekwondo has changed her life made it very appealing. In grade school Rachel was not a stellar student and she was often in trouble. Her parents used taekwondo as a carrot. She thrived on the discipline and challenge she received at taekwondo and wanted to go to the dojang every day, often attending more than one class and many of those beyond her abilities. It challenged her to advance and do her best since her instructors would not have allowed her to stay in the upper classes unless she could keep up. Her parents, also, would not allow her to attend taekwondo classes if her grades were unsatisfactory or her homework had not been completed. Taekwondo has given her direction, purpose and focus. She is now an excellent student who lives by the tenets of taekwondo, inspiring me, other taekwondo students, and those not connected to taekwondo. When Rachel's mother died when she was thirteen, Rachel seemed to find comfort and strength from continuing her training in taekwondo. Not only did those at the dojang give her encouragement and support through that initial trying time, but she poured herself into training and thrived. That showed me there was more to the study of taekwondo than physical artistry.

As I continue my study of taekwondo, I have drawn closer to Rachel who is my taekwondo superior, mentor and coach. I feel very lucky to be able to share my training with her. I also feel sad that Diane, Rachel's mother, is not here to share it with us. At one time Diane and I had joined Curves together and I suspect she would have taken up taekwondo with me. Interestingly, I am able to share my passion for taekwondo with two other relatives as well. My other brother Bill's daughter, Kara, who is 13, studied taekwondo and I have solicited her assistance when learning my beginning poomse forms, "a series of defending and attacking movements performed against imaginary

opponents in a set pattern” (Park, *Tae Kwon Do: the ultimate reference guide to the world’s most popular martial art* 51). Kara’s niece, Jubilee, who is six, is now taking taekwondo at Championship Training, where I am studying. It was very special to be Jubilee’s coach when she sparred in her first in-house tournament. I’m looking forward to coaching her in her first tournament, the Montana State Games, in May.

Through taekwondo I have been able to strengthen family ties, something that has always been important to me, and have gained confidence as well as fitness from my efforts. Taekwondo has helped me achieve comfort with my body as well as balance in my life. In noticing the change in my personal growth, I began to desire the same type of balance and contentment professionally. By applying taekwondo principles to my whole life, personal and professional, I am a better teacher and a healthier human being.

### **Different Types of Martial Arts**

Ideally, one should study and compare the different martial arts prior to beginning classes. I did not explore the different martial arts beforehand, but hope to explore several more in the years to come, such as Tai Chi (meditation), Taekkyon (self-defense without causing injury) and Wing Chun (Chinese form of self defense via focus and relaxation). Choosing a martial art is very personal and should include alignment of interest, age, size, and purpose. My original interest in taekwondo was as a vehicle to become fit through artistic expression. My purpose for studying taekwondo was to satisfy the requirements of my Creative Pulse project as well as to get in shape. Being a middle-aged and average-sized woman presents a few problems, i.e. there are many younger and stronger than I. However, as studying martial arts is a life-long activity, it is



not uncommon to adapt training to fit physical needs. Mr. Corbin, my coach and mentor at Championship Training, reminds all students at some time in nearly every class to push their limits, but also to protect their bodies. The adage “no pain, no gain” is false.

Though there may be discomfort from using muscles not previously worked, pain is the body’s expression of injury. I imagine this is true for all sports and martial arts. The different martial arts are diverse and fascinating, especially as many skills often overlap. In recent years there has been an increase in interest in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) fighting. That may explain why many martial artists study a variety of martial arts: to benefit from different physical skills and mental training strategies.

There are many Asian martial arts. Martial arts became more popular in the United States with television and movies in the 1970s and ‘80s. David Carradine, Bruce Lee, and Chuck Norris, among others, helped create interest in martial arts, almost a ninja craze. Having grown up during that era, I, too, was attracted to the calm yet sure strength demonstrated by those heroes. As a youth, I assumed wrongly that they all practiced the same martial art. Though there are many different martial arts from many Asian countries, only some of the most popular Korean martial arts are listed below with brief explanation.

1-Tai Chi	meditative
2-Taekwondo	self-actualization through martial arts/kicking and punching
3-Taekkyon	empty-hand combat/folk art (defeat opponent without injury)
4-Hapkido	self-defense/striking and controlling
5-Sireum	wrestling/folk sport (falling means weakness/death)
6-Yudo	similar to judo/grappling
7-Kuk Kung	archery
8-Haedong Gumdo	sword play/energy
9-Kuk Sool	guide opponent to defeat himself
10-Kumdo	art of the sword/fencing
11-Muye Eship Saban	powerful and practical combat/24 Ban Muye
12-Kyuk Pa	power breaking

13-Kyuk Too Ki      kick boxing (Doyle 9 and *Martial Arts of Korea*)

The Korean martial arts “are as varied and rich as the people” (*Martial Arts of Korea*). The traditional arts have been handed down through generations. One common thread seems to be that each of these Korean martial arts is meant to be studied for life; each is a way of life for the practitioner. Each also incorporates peace of mind that helps one focus on what is important through physical understanding and control of breathing, energy and confidence.

Though I did not explore the differences before choosing taekwondo, I am quite happy with my choice. I have discovered that I enjoy the athleticism, precision and technical physical demands of the sport; the aggression of competition; and the gracefulness and artistry needed for poomse or forms. In the introduction to his book on taekwondo and self-defense for women, Yeon Hee Park said, “Proficiency in taekwondo will give you the ability, confidence and self-esteem you need to take charge of any situation. Once you make the decision to take control of your life, you will feel like a new, freer individual” (Park, *Fighting Back: taekwondo for women: the ultimate reference guide to preventing sexual harassment, assault and rape* 7). That has certainly been the case for me. Taekwondo, especially at this stage of my life, has the right mix of physical challenges and artistic beauty, as well as mental stimulation and development. Most recently—in the last four to five months—several people have commented that I am tall. I am only five feet five inches and have never considered myself tall. I can only attribute their comments to the fact that from training in the dojang I stand up straighter than I used to, walk and hold myself with more confidence, and thus appear taller.

As important as choosing the correct fit regarding choice of martial art is the choice of school. The environment of each school, or dojang, will influence the attitudes and ideals, since “we are what we see; we become what we wish to imitate; and we imitate what makes us comfortable” (Doyle 14). I visited two schools before choosing to make Championship Training my home away from home. From both schools I learned that with the study of martial arts there is no beginning and no end. There are people from all age groups (three-year-olds to parents of post-teens) and from all walks of life (e.g. grocers, artists, school teachers, nurses, and students). Study is a continuous journey for personal knowledge and for fulfillment from technical mastery and balance. To be truly successful at the study of taekwondo, it is expected that students of all ages eat, drink and sleep taekwondo; taekwondo and all it stands for is synonymous with who they are. Some families study together, strengthening their familial bonds through taekwondo. Because students spend so much time together, many consider the dojang a family as well.

I have developed friendships with individuals from several dojangs: both those with whom I train and those with whom I compete. It is amazing to receive encouragement from my students at Hellgate High School, their parents, and parents of young students at dojang, as well as those relative strangers who share a love and knowledge of the dedication that goes into the study of martial arts. Denise Graef, the mother of two of my Latin students, has become not just a close friend but an inspiration. She and her family, her husband and four sons, train at the Missoula Taekwondo Center where I received my first instruction. Denise has overcome health issues through her perseverance and indomitable spirit. Whenever I see her, whether at school, at a

tournament, on Facebook, or when we meet for a cup of coffee or lunch, she shares a new training tip or offers encouragement and praise for sticking with something so difficult. That kind of support—even from strangers at tournaments around the state—is another thing that draws me to taekwondo. Howard Gardner said in *Frames of Mind*, “We have a special memory for feelings which works unconsciously for itself and by itself...It is in every artist. It is that which makes experience an essential part of our life and craft. All we have to know is how to use it” (Gardner, *Frames of Mind* 227). The supportive, emotional quality of family is an integral part of the dojong. When those feelings are attached to the activity, taekwondo becomes even more valuable.

Each dojong has its own emotional draw. The personality of each dojong reflects the particular tenets or ideals stressed by the school’s master. Though all the tenets are important and taught, individual instructors exude different aspects of the art form. I was drawn to the instructors, energy and commitment of the individuals at the Missoula Taekwondo Center. The enthusiasm and commitment to excellence of Steve Rosbarsky, the owner of Missoula Taekwondo Center, are evident from the friendliness and constant activity in the gym to the impressive display of awards and pictures.

Mr. Corbin, the owner of Championship Training, exudes respect, integrity and strength, characteristics I want in my own life. I felt welcomed initially by his honest encouragement during ever-changing drills and instruction. As I learn basic skills, I am expected to personalize and make the moves my own, within parameters. He has been very supportive when I need to modify exercises because I do not yet have the strength or endurance. When I first started with Championship Training, I was his only adult

student. He carefully explained the theory behind each drill and encouraged me to do what I could and that I would be able to do more with perseverance.

Mr. Corbin also explained that the performance of a poomse form is actually the story of one's own fight. Each poomse has required kicks, strikes and punches in specific order, but the tempo, ferocity and intensity of the moves are strictly personalized by each student. He and my niece Rachel have helped me to highlight my strengths when I perform poomse. Though I try to emulate Rachel's grace as well as high kicks and extensions, Rachel and Mr. Corbin have helped me to see that intensity is one of my strengths. Some day I want to meld both beauty and strength in my poomse.

### **Brief History of Taekwondo**

Learning about the history of taekwondo helped me to see the value of its study today. More than anything else, the history encouraged me as an older student to see taekwondo as a life-long activity with value far beyond physical conditioning. The discussion of taekwondo's history will hopefully give credence to my conviction to continue study and my passion for the art form.

“Although it was officially declared a martial art in 1955, its origins can be traced back almost 2,000 years, to the Koguryo Dynasty, to drawings on the ceiling of a royal tomb that appear to depict fighters in a taekwondo contest” (Chesterman 10).

Taekwondo came from the five principles set out by a Buddhist monk, Wong Kwang: “be loyal to your king; be obedient to your parents; be honorable to your friends; never retreat in battle; and kill with justice” (Chesterman 13). Mr. Corbin echoes the idea to never retreat in battle at Championship Training. He encourages his students never to

back up in competition. In my first sparring competition I took that to heart and used my arms to deflect every kick. Though I wore arm guards to protect them, my arms were black and blue from above the elbow to my finger tips. After that tournament he modified his instruction to say that one should never run from an opponent, but could avoid being kicked, e.g. by using yeop step (moving side-ways) or moving back slightly which leaves one still in position to kick after an opponent's narrow miss. For me that first tournament and Mr. Corbin's subsequent lessons clearly illustrated the Latin expression: *experientia docet*.

In the sixth century warriors called the HwaRang Do were trained to protect the kingdom of Ching-Hung, the king of Silla, in the open-handed martial arts of taekyon (foot fighting). "The HwaRang Do was an elite group of young noble men, devoted to cultivating mind and body as well as service to the kingdom Silla" (Mac's Student Guide to Taekwondo). The HwaRang Do had an honor code that is the philosophical background of modern taekwondo. They were formidable and their form of training became known as hwarangdo, the way of the flowering manhood.

"During the Yi-dynasty (1392 A.D. - 1910 A.D.) this emphasis on military training disappeared. King Taejo, founder of the Yi-dynasty, replaced Buddhism by Confucianism as the state religion. According to Confucianism, the higher class should study the poets, read poems and play music. Martial arts were something for the common, or even inferior, man" (Mac's Student Guide to Taekwondo).

Martial arts were popular and practiced daily by the masses in Korea until 1909 when Japan annexed Korea and banned all traditional Korean martial arts and forced Japanese forms, i.e. karate, judo, and jujutsu, upon them. The martial arts were not only a means of self-defense, but also recreation, and exercise of body and mind. I find it interesting that martial arts which started as a military defense became popular for all, not

just soldiers. Liberated in 1945, the Korean government tried to rekindle interest in the traditional arts. Grand Master Choi Hong Hi began this research and is considered the modern father of taekwondo. The name taekwondo was adopted by several Korean martial arts' masters and was finally recognized as an official martial art of Korea on April 11, 1955.

General Choi dispatched demonstration teams all over the world and taekwondo's popularity spread into the West. He had a falling out with the Korean government over the fact that the Korea Taekwondo Association (KTA)—the national taekwondo association for Korea--was more for sport and he emphasized taekwondo as self-defense. Choi began the International Taekwondo Federation (ITF), his own form of taekwondo, in 1966, which he later moved to Montreal, Canada. "The new KTA president felt that the world-governing body of taekwondo should be located in its mother country" (Chesterman 16), so apart from the KTA (the national association for Korea) and the ITF (Choi's more mild taekwondo) he set up the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF), headquartered in Korea. Though there have been attempts to reunite the ITF and WTF, they remain separate. The ITF practices semi-contact, while the WTF practices full-contact. The WTF practices a more traditional form of taekwondo.

Today the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF) is the one recognized by the Kukkiwon (the official taekwondo governing organization established by the South Korean government) and by the Olympic committee. There are many different sets of poomse forms, each a standardized series of movements used to practice skills and for rank advancement. The WTF emphasizes the taegeuk set of poomse forms; this is the set most taekwondo students, including those at Championship Training, learn initially.

“The Tae Geuk forms were devised based on the ideals in the Jooyeok (*Book of Changes*), a highly revered philosophical work that puts forward profound perspectives on life, the world and the universe” (Park, *Tae Kwon Do: the ultimate reference guide to the world’s most popular martial art* 52). The WTF was formed in 1973, the same year the World Taekwondo championships were held in Seoul, Korea (Gutman 6). In 1973 there were only 35 nations practicing taekwondo. In 2002 there were over 50 million practitioners worldwide (Hornsey 11). In 2005 according to Sang H. Kim in *Martial Arts of Korea* the numbers rose to over 70 million people who study taekwondo in 182 countries.

Though there are many types of poomse forms, the most common in the United States today are Taeguk and Palgwe, at least up to black belt. As the poomse forms are particularly beautiful, I hope to study not only Taeguk and Palgwe forms, but others as well. Of course, I must first master the eight Taeguk and eight Palgwe forms. At this point in my study of taekwondo, I know five Taeguk forms well and with help can do two Palgwe forms. The WTF concentrated on the Taeguk forms, but the WTF’s emphasis turned to sparring. The full-contact style of the WTF is what is recognized by the International Olympic Committee.

Taekwondo became an official Olympic sport at the Sydney Games in 2000. Because it is a less fragmented martial art, taekwondo was added as an Olympic sport rather than karate. Though it is now an Olympic sport, taekwondo continues to be “a system for training the mind and body, but with particular emphasis on the development of moral character” (Chesterman 19). The importance on developing moral character predominantly interests me as it can be applied to my life daily, especially in the



classroom. Though I have always believed these moral principles were important, studying taekwondo reminds me every day to apply them in all of my activities. Howard Gardner puts it well in *Five Minds for the Future*, “In the end there remains a far more important reason for disciplinary understanding. That is because, like the most salient experiences of life (from orgasm to philanthropy), its achievement breeds a desire for more” (Gardner, *Five Minds for the Future*, 38). It is the daily reminder to apply the principles, i.e. the discipline, that has helped me to internalize them.

“Taekwondo is not an art for the faint-hearted or the weak-minded. But for those who can marry mind, body, and spirit into one cohesive entity, taekwondo will bring inner peace and assurance” (Chesterman 19). This martial art, as well as others, trains both the external and the internal. Applying the more subtle teachings of taekwondo is not necessarily the easy or popular path. The process is almost foreign in this time of instant-gratification. In the words of Robert Frost,

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.”

I want the inner peace and assurance about which Chesterman speaks. As he said, it will not be an easy path, though the rewards will be worth the journey.

“Strategy is the craft of the warrior. This is the way for men who want to learn my strategy:

Do not think dishonestly.  
Know the ways of all professions.  
Distinguish between gain and loss and worldly matters,  
Develop intuitive judgment and understanding for everything.  
Perceive those things which cannot be seen.  
Pay attention even to trifles.  
Do nothing which is of no use.  
--Miyamoto Musashi” (Norris 103).

I am finding through participating in many drills in taekwondo classes, attending many meetings, and teaching concepts in classes, that I only want to participate in things worth doing; I want things to be done well and to be of use.

Seeking balance in life through taekwondo is a very personal and unique thing. What one individual calls balance, another might call chaotic, and yet another may consider peaceful. In any case, I look to taekwondo not only for physical fitness, but also for guidance toward a stress-free existence. In practicing the art of taekwondo, I am embracing a life-long and fruitful journey. I have already seen improvement in my life. This year has been very demanding for a variety of reasons. My youngest child, Allen, is a senior at Hellgate High School and rightfully deserves attention in his preparation for college next year. As a Latin and English teacher at Hellgate High School, I have three preparations plus three independent study students in Latin III and IV. I also teach on-line Latin courses for the first time for the Montana Digital Academy. I feel it is important to be part of the Montana Digital Academy which is in its fledgling year as computer learning is the way of the future, and an important option in helping students become global citizens. Other important duties within the district include work with Missoula County Public Schools' Arabic Grant Steering Committee. At the state level I am a trainer of trainers for the Montana University System Writing Assessment (MUSWA), which helps train teachers to holistically grade writing samples which are used for placement for the Montana University System. In addition, as I do every other year, I am preparing to take my high school students to Italy and Greece this summer. Through all of this I am finding that I use the principles of self control and patience, especially, to remain calm as I work through the myriad mini-crises.

## **General Choi Hong Hi's Five Tenets of Taekwondo**

General Choi Hong Hi, considered the father of taekwondo, formulated these taekwondo principles in 1945 from his research according to his moral beliefs for physical training as well as training for mind and spirit. His tenets or principles are designed to help taekwondo students become better people who will help make the world a better place. His “five tenets are: courtesy (ye ui), integrity (yom chi), perseverance (in nee), self-control (guk gi), and indomitable spirit (baekjul boolgool)” (Chesterman 19).

Courtesy (ye ui) in taekwondo refers to being polite and respectful to all, especially one's instructor. This includes never questioning anything one's instructor says publicly, as well as adhering to taekwondo rules and etiquette at all times, both in and out of the dojang. “Respect for others should permeate one's life” (Gardner, *Five Minds for the Future* 125). Though this has always been part of my philosophy in the classroom, seeing it as such an important part of taekwondo affirms my belief.

Integrity (yom chi) simply refers to knowing right from wrong and exercising one's conscience. Not unexpectedly, to study taekwondo in order to boost one's ego or to harm someone is unacceptable. As with many, if not all, of the martial arts from Asian countries integrity is extremely important. The Japanese Samurai had a code of honor: Bushido, the way of the warrior. “This sense of loyalty and honor was often carried to extremes by the Japanese, who would fight to the death in a hopeless battle to protect their master's castle, or commit suicide if they felt they had disgraced their lord” (Grabianowski). Hollywood glorifies this loyalty, honor and even vengeance, which seems such an integral part of martial arts in such movies as *The Last Samurai*, and *The*

*Karate Kid* (both the 1984 and 2010 versions), and the television series *Kung Fu*. The belief was very important and should be today as well.

Perseverance (in nee) is essential for learning any new art, technique, or skill. My middle daughter, Sarah, practices perseverance in that she is determined always to excel, never settling for the easy path. She decided when she was in middle school that she would be valedictorian when she graduated from high school. She not only took difficult classes (honors and AP) in high school, but pushed herself physically as an athlete and as an artist (musician and encaustic artist). She worked long hours with no complaint and was valedictorian in 2010 for Hellgate High School. I know she will continue to reach her goals, even as those goals change as she matures. In taekwondo, regardless of the skill level reached, continuation of learning lasts forever; a student must persevere, always striving to better himself.

Self-control (guk gi) must be exercised as the student of taekwondo has a responsibility to protect himself from injury as well as not cause injury unnecessarily, e.g. in training. For me this is equally important in my life, both personally and professionally, as I must remain calm when dealing with students, parents, administrators and my own family, to name but a few. I have found that by exhibiting self-control and patience, I am able to calmly address concerns and problems. “He who conquers himself is the mightiest warrior—Confucius” (Norris 88).

Indomitable spirit (baekjul boolgool) means using the energy from within, regardless of the odds, to act against injustice. Some individuals seem to be born with indomitable spirit, but it can also be learned. This tenet is similar to the concept that one never retreats in battle. My friend Denise Graef exemplifies this tenet for me. At the

age of 21 after much struggle she was finally diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. At that time she sometimes had trouble lifting a pillow and needed her parents' assistance to walk and even to eat. She was told she would end up in a wheel chair. She refused to accept that prognosis and has proved those doctors wrong. By remaining extremely active and tapping that inner strength and energy, she has beaten the odds and thrives as not only an accomplished wife and mother of four amazing boys—two of which I have had the privilege to teach in Latin, but as an athlete and inspiration to those around her. She runs, takes many classes in taekwondo as well as fitness classes at the YMCA, and just tested for her senior red belt. She has nothing but positive thoughts and encouragement for those around her.

“All that we are arises  
With our thoughts –  
With our thoughts  
We make the world—Buddha” (Norris 131).

Denise has instilled this “can-do” attitude in her sons. Michael and his friend Kent Johns began the Missoula Parkour Group. “Parkour is an art of movement in which you train the body and mind to overcome” (Home: Missoula Parkour Group Official Web Site) “any obstacle within one's path by adapting one's movements to the environment” (Toorock). The Missoula Parkour Group often can be seen practicing their moves, e.g. flips and jumps, using structures on the University of Montana campus. Parkour can be practiced anywhere, but is most often seen in urban areas, based upon a concept of self-preservation. Michael now teaches a Parkour class at Mismo Gymnastics. He also just earned his black belt in taekwondo, writes poetry and also music. Incidentally, Michael is only a junior at Hellgate High School now. Denise's next son, Austin, just represented Hellgate High School, as well as the western region, at the state

Poetry Out Loud competition, placing in the top eight. That, as well as testing for his senior red belt in taekwondo, is an amazing accomplishment for a freshman in high school. Denise inspires me, even through her children. For me she exemplifies indomitable spirit. I am reminded of her in the sentiments of this poem by Po-Eun from 1392,

“Were I to die a hundred times,  
Then die and die again,  
With all my bones no more than dust,  
My soul gone far from men,  
Yet still my red blood, shed for you,  
Shall witness that my heart was true” (Gillis 1).

### **Tenets of Other Schools**

Schools all over the world recite the tenets during each class to remind students of the values that are an integral part of taekwondo. Some schools have translated, interpreted, or even slightly modified the tenets of General Choi Hong Hi. Note that the spirit of the tenets has not changed with the wording; the honor code espoused by the warriors over 2000 years ago has been preserved. Yun Dong Il in Vienna, Austria established the school’s slogan of health, strength and spirit because he found that young students wished to compete in the Olympic games, but those over 20 chose to study for fitness (*Martial Arts of Korea*). Kevin Hornsey, a well-known taekwondo master, uses: modesty, courtesy, loyalty, humility, trust and respect for others. Yeon Hee Park, another renowned taekwondo master, encourages respect, humility, perseverance, self-control and honesty (Park, *Tae Kwon Do: the ultimate reference guide to the world’s most popular martial art* 147).

Both the Missoula Taekwondo Center and Championship Training adopted the tenets they use from Grand Master Jae-Ho Park. Grand Master Park helped to organize the North West Martial Arts Association and taught at Eastern Montana College in Billings, Montana until 1973, but then moved to Glendale, California where he organized the Dae-Myung Martial Arts Academy featuring study in Judo, Taekwondo and Hapkido. These schools use the tenets: modesty, perseverance, self-control, indomitable spirit and etiquette. These are the tenets I am applying to all facets of my life: home, parenting, taekwondo, and teaching.

### **The Taekwondo Oath, Morals and Training Code**

In addition to the tenets, the World Taekwondo Federation has encouraged the following oath, which is often posted, or recited prior to a class, tournament or function:

“I shall observe the tenets of taekwondo.  
I shall respect my instructor and seniors.  
I shall never misuse taekwondo.  
I shall be a champion of freedom and injustice.  
I shall build a more peaceful world” (Chesterman 23).

Along with this oath, the WTF also encourages five morals and ten training codes to remind students of their responsibilities. The morals include: humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust. The idea is that these morals build character and will improve society. The training codes include: showing respect, having trust and faith in the instructor, setting a good example, practicing meticulously to improve skills, and making sacrifices for the good of the club or the art itself. Sacrifice includes taking time to teach others as well as attending events. Again, in agreement with the ancient philosophical and ethical beliefs, Yeon Hee Park added the commandments of:

“Loyalty to your Country, Respect your Parents, Faithfulness to your Spouse, Respect your Brothers and Sisters, Loyalty to your Friends, Respect Your Teachers, Respect Your Elders, Never Take Life Unjustly, Have an Indomitable Spirit, Finish What You Begin and Loyalty to Your School” (Park, *Tae Kwon Do: the ultimate reference guide to the world’s most popular martial art* 147-148).

Note that all of these, whether called tenets, an oath, moral codes, training codes or commandments, represent similar strength of character. How could these not positively influence one’s life?

Not all clubs incorporate the repetition of the oath, recommended morals or training codes in their daily routines, yet maintain the ideals behind them and do teach the tenets regularly. Neither Missoula dojang that I visited repeated the oaths, morals or training codes on a regular basis, but the atmosphere in each dojang clearly reflected these ideals. After warm-up exercises and stretching, both schools do repeat the tenets, followed by a brief silence during which students contemplate and internalize them. My instructor Mr. Corbin has internalized this oath, the morals and training codes and teaches them through example. The constant drive to internalize and personify these ethical guidelines, by whatever specific names they are given, is the lifelong challenge each taekwondo student faces. For me, internalizing these tenets is the true gift of studying taekwondo.

### **Belt Colors**

Unlike the traditional Japanese arts that use only white and black belts, taekwondo has always used colored belts to denote the practitioner’s grade, at least since its resumption in 1945. There are ten grades (geups or kups) working toward black belt,



with steps between the colored belt ranks. General Choi created the colored sequence for specific reasons.

- “White: signifies the innocence of the beginner
- Yellow: signifies the earth from which a plant sprouts and takes root, just as the foundations of taekwondo are laid
- Green: signifies the growth of a plant, just as taekwondo skills begin to develop
- Blue: signifies heaven or the sky, towards which a plant grows, just as taekwondo skills improve
- Red: signifies the sun, energy, and the determination to study
- Black: the opposite of white; signifies maturity in taekwondo” (Chesterman 35)

I have reached the belt rank of green senior (Appendix A).

There is an interesting tale, a popular myth possibly, about how one’s belt originally progressed from white to black. I first heard the story from Mr. Corbin, but have read it in several other sources with slight variations as well. Originally there were only two belt colors: black and white. (Nota Bene: Taekwondo was chosen as an Olympic sport over Karate because Karate only had two belt colors.) When a student began studying he wore a white belt. As he progressed in his studies, his belt would become dirtier and dirtier the longer and more diligently he studied. When the student had mastered his craft, or at least reached a very advanced level of study, his belt would be black from use and wear, hence he had earned the distinguished rank of black belt. As the master continued to practice his art, his belt would become frayed, almost white from wear. I am fond of this story. Mr. Corbin said that at international tournaments often today a high ranking black belt will have flames at the ends of his belt, symbolizing the frayed ends of an ancient master, yet one still pursuing his craft.

Once one achieves a black belt, the journey is not over. There are ten degrees of black belt. Though students pursue a black belt, it is the journey, not the belt itself,

which is most important. The mental disciplines of self-fulfillment, concentration, self-control, and confidence are desired results of the black belt journey.

My own journey for a black belt began in August, 2009. I had never studied a martial art and began studying with physical fitness as the main objective. In the beginning achieving a black belt and continuing the study of taekwondo for a lifetime was not a given. Taekwondo was only one avenue I could use on the path to fitness. It soon became obvious that the study of taekwondo held many more gifts. For me testing for the next belt level has been more stressful than academic tests I have taken. Part of the increased stress could be because I am middle-aged, but I believe the majority of the anxiety comes from the inner knowledge that not only must my body demonstrate how much it has advanced, my mind and spirit also must show maturity, which is far more intrinsically significant.

When I tested for yellow belt I was the only student testing. There was no possibility to blend in with (or hide) among other students. In contemplation later, I realized that testing alone forced me to set my shoulders, raise my chin proudly and display my skills with calm confidence, even though I did not feel calm inside. Since patience is one of the lessons taekwondo teaches, students must wait a week to learn whether they have advanced to the next belt level. Waiting for the results for this first test was almost painful as I doubted myself and my abilities.

“It is easy to shield the outer body from poisoned arrows, but it is impossible to shield the mind from the poisoned darts that originate within itself. Greed, anger, foolishness, and the infatuations of egoism—these four poisoned darts originate within the mind and infect it with deadly poison. These three—greed, anger, and foolishness—are, therefore, the sources of all human woe—Buddha” (Norris 95).

Buddha would probably assert that doubt fits into “foolishness”.

Happily I earned my yellow belt December 9, 2009 (Appendix B). At a school-wide test, I was later promoted to senior yellow belt on April 3, 2010 (Appendix C). As a yellow belt I competed in three tournaments, the last as a senior yellow belt, the half-step between yellow and green belts.

On August 16, 2010 I received my green belt, 6<sup>th</sup> geup (Appendix D). Though I was not as anxious as I had been for the first test, possibly because my confidence had grown, I still felt almost sick to my stomach the day of the test. As my name was called to demonstrate different strikes, kicks, self-defense moves or poomse forms, my heart pounded and I feared disappointing my instructor and failing myself, of being unable to demonstrate that I had grown and begun to internalize taekwondo principles.

Several months after my 6<sup>th</sup> geup test, when speaking to my instructor informally, he was surprised that I became so anxious when testing. He said when he tested he was always excited to show what he knew and did not understand my anxiety since I clearly knew the material; his words were very reassuring. His confidence in himself was understandable as he is young, fit, and accomplished on local, national and international levels. It is difficult still for me to accept that I should have such confidence, though I am taking his words to heart. His positive attitude is very encouraging. When performing drills, classmates and I often feel discouraged when each kick is not perfect. Mr. Corbin advises students to not focus on the less-than-perfect elements of the kick, but to determine the next kick will be the best one yet. I endeavor to truly feel confident in future tests, both in and out of the dojang.

On February 26, 2011 I earned my 5<sup>th</sup> geup, senior green belt, the half step between green and blue belts (Appendix E). I am now half way to achieving a black belt.

There were over 20 people testing, as well as many parents in the audience. The testing panel consisted of my instructor and four other advanced martial artists. I felt pressure on the floor since I was the most senior belt testing, and also because I am the oldest student (by far) in the dojang. This time I used the pressure to make my moves tall, strong and crisp and my kihaps (yells) loud. Though I knew the material, I did make several mistakes, more from nerves than not knowing the material. When I mistakenly began the wrong poomse, I did not groan as I had in my first competition which could be heard clear across the crowded gymnasium; I returned to jumbi (ready position) and completed the moves with confidence. When Mr. Corbin awarded the belts a week after the test he informed me that I had earned the highest score in the dojang on my test, both an honor and responsibility. It also felt invigorating to know I could do 25 push-ups and sit-ups and complete 30 seconds of mountain climbers.

Though my weight has changed very little since beginning this journey, my stamina and fitness levels have greatly increased: my growth is measurable. When I began this adventure in August, 2009, I weighed myself and measured my biceps, chest, waist, hips, thighs and calves. I measured again in June, 2010 and April, 2011. Though my weight has only fluctuated by a few pounds, my biceps, hips, thighs and calves have all become more toned and are smaller. My waist, however, is not smaller. I attribute that to being more muscular underneath, i.e. in my core, and natural aging. I plan to continue monitoring but am pleased with the results. I am comfortable with my body.

## **Taekwondo Training**

Since taekwondo relies on speed and power, training focuses on these aspects. Students must train their bodies to kick efficiently, i.e. with height, accuracy, and, thus, power. Training includes: 1) stretching and flexibility, especially of the groin and hamstrings; 2) speed and power training, especially strengthening leg and thigh muscles; 3) accuracy and focus, using pads and drills which improve timing and coordination; and 4) conditioning for top physical shape, muscle tone and improved cardiovascular stamina. Taekwondo does not require the muscles of a body-builder or fitness of a marathon runner. However, a balanced workout helps develop strength, flexibility, muscle tone and stamina. Of course these aspects of training are not unique, though some are taekwondo-specific. Since I had not been actively pursuing a sport or indulging in conditioning activities, all of these were challenging and many were unfamiliar as well.

Conditioning progresses as skills develop. When I started training, I could not do all of the drills or activities, at least not without modification or being very out-of-breath. As stated before, for the last belt test I was able to complete the required 25 push-ups and sit-ups. To earn my black belt I need to be able to do 100 of each. With work and determination I will progress to that point. As students progress, they then toughen striking weapons, i.e. hands and feet. At first it was especially difficult, even painful, to strike training bags or people wearing protective chest padding, i.e. hogu. Students eventually learn to break boards or even bricks, through stringent training. I have not done that yet, though I did watch my niece Rachel break her first bricks last summer. Of course physical training is only one aspect of taekwondo training which appeals to me.

Physical activity has always been part of my life. Athletic as a child, I played many sports with my brothers and neighborhood children, including football, basketball

and baseball. I played basketball through my freshman year in high school, baseball at age 12 (as the only girl on the team) the first year girls were allowed to play Little League Baseball and also played Powder Puff Football (all girls) as a senior in high school. Though not on organized teams after graduating from high school, I did try to keep in good physical condition through hiking, various fitness classes, Tae Bo or activities with my own family and children. None of that compares to the rigorous training I receive from taekwondo.

From the repetitive movements—and probably being middle-aged, I developed tendonitis in my right elbow last summer. It has affected my activity both at work and at the dojang. I have found that writing a great deal (either on the white board in my classroom or by hand) exacerbates the discomfort as does extended practicing of poomse forms or blocks. For several months I wore support all of the time and avoided push-ups, but now I am able to wear support only at the dojang and am able to perform all drills. I have learned that with age one should always listen to one's body: *experientia docet*. My spirit may be competitive enough to want to do everything everyone does in the dojang. My middle-aged body, however, can only push itself and do its best, which is always more than I first imagine being possible. *Nota bene*: Denise is my inspiration of indomitable spirit; she is amazing.

My instructor, Mr. Corbin, was very helpful in recommending modifications for exercises when I was injured. The book *Martial Arts After 40* contains several pages devoted to preventing such injuries as tendonitis. Learning how to do exercises, such as push-ups, correctly, also prevents damage. From an article found on the internet, "For Killer Abs, Try Some...Push-Ups?" by Nick Bromberg, I have learned to keep my

elbows in when doing push-ups, which lessens the stress put on the elbows. Doing push-ups this way has been more difficult initially, but I am sure with practice doing the exercise correctly to avoid injury will increase the strength in my upper body and arms. Continuing to stretch and work muscles safely will allow me to continue this activity for a lifetime.

### **Competing in Tournaments**

Tournaments are both scary and exhilarating. It is the opportunity to demonstrate one's skills as well as compare one's skills against others. I have now participated in four tournaments and have become more confident with each one. My last tournament this season will be in Belgrade at the State Games on May 21, 2011. Through competition I have realized that even though I am doing my best, I am middle-aged and my best may not be better than others. That having been said, I shall continue to do my best. This story, told to Chuck Norris by Alice McCleary, one of his instructors, illustrates the importance of giving one's best.

“One of her young students showed up for training class without his purple belt. Alice reminded him that part of his responsibility as a student was to have his gi and belt with him at all times.

“Where is your belt?” she asked.

The boy looked at the floor and said he didn't have it.

“Where is it?” Alice repeated.

“My baby sister died, and I put it in her coffin to take to heaven with her,” the boy said.

Alice had tears in her eyes as she told me the story. “That belt was probably his most important possession,” she said.

The boy had learned to give his best, a lesson he had probably learned from Alice, from martial arts and from Zen which teaches us when to accept things and how to make peace with the inevitable, such as serious illness or death (Norris 141).

*Bozeman Tournament: February 20, 2010:*

My first tournament was held in Bozeman February 20, 2010. My son Allen came with me to watch, videotape, and show his support. It meant so much to have his encouragement. When we arrived, the gym was full of activity, nervous competitors ranging in age from three to 50, as well as anxious parents, coaches and referees. I found my coach's wife, Amy, and others from Championship Training and immediately was put to work helping prepare "the littles" for competition. I helped Kyle, who was almost seven, run through his poomse before going to change clothes myself.

That is when I discovered I had forgotten my yellow belt. One cannot compete without a complete, clean, neat dobok. Of course there were no extra belts in the gym; who attends an event without proper attire? Luckily because of the age difference and, thus, time between competitions, I was able to borrow a yellow belt from one of the little ones from my gym. I had to wrap it only one time around my waist (not the usual two), but had a belt. My adopted taekwondo family saved the day.

The first competitions of the tournament were poomse. Students were arranged in groups based on belt-rank and age. I was not very focused when I had my first head-to-head competition for poomse. Both other competitors were senior yellow belts, which was a little intimidating. I really blundered through the first competition, winning only one of three judges' votes. Mr. Corbin said afterward that he could hear my groan of frustration during my poomse from across the crowded, noisy gym. The second round went much better and I swept the judges panel. I ended up with a silver medal (Appendix F).

Living in Montana has its advantages, but it can be a disadvantage when it comes to bracketing for sparring competition. There often are not many older competitors so the



usual age range becomes much larger. Sparring consists of three one-minute rounds. Points are scored by judges for kicks to the body or light contact to the head. I was put in a bracket with two women, both much younger than I, and both with competition experience at tournaments. The woman from Kalispell, a decade younger than I, was very skilled, i.e. moved quickly and kicked hard. She won the bracket. The other young woman, more than two decades younger than I, was from the Missoula Taekwondo Center. I was ahead until the third round when her coach encouraged her to “go up”, i.e. kick to the head. I had not learned that skill yet; one of my taekwondo goals, still, is to successfully execute a head kick in competition. Head kicks receive two points instead of one. She scored four times with head kicks and beat me by only a couple of points. I won a bronze medal. Though I was third out of three, I truly felt I had earned the medal (Appendix F).

After competition and for the next week, my body felt like it had been run over by a Mack truck even though I had worn protective padding on my shins, forearms, and chest, as well as head protection and mouth guard. My arms were bruised from biceps to finger tips and my legs were bruised from shins and knees to the tops of my feet. I learned that there is a reason students are taught to pull back their toes. Immediately after competition I could not put on my shoes to walk to the car. I have not been that bruised again, i.e. experientia docet; I have learned to kick more safely and efficiently.

*Great Falls Tournament: April 10, 2010:*

Though far from a veteran, I felt more prepared and relaxed at the next tournament. My brother and niece were also in attendance. It was comforting to have Rachel competing and Carl to talk to and ask for advice since he had observed so many

tournaments. I earned silver medals in both poomse and sparring, and participated in the tag-team sparring, the first time it had ever been offered in Montana (Appendix G). I did my best in poomse and was pleased with the results, though, of course, I had hoped for a gold medal. I also was not as bruised as I had been after the Bozeman tournament.

Though I won a silver medal, the sparring competition was a disappointment, however. I won against a white belt from Stevensville, but lost to a 29-year-old, Beth, from Great Falls. The white belt had little experience and I beat her easily. The fight against Beth was frustrating. I was ahead at the end of the first round. I was kicking hard and Beth was crumpling over from the force of the blows. I had several opportunities to execute a head kick, but was being kind and did not take any of those opportunities. I was ready and was fighting well, but in the second and third rounds my points were not counting. Her points were going up, even when her foot was not hitting me. I felt like she was going to win no matter what I did. Because of my frustration, I stopped trying. After three rounds I lost 20-17. I learned later that two judges have to click the button within a certain time frame for the points to go up. Depending upon where the fighters are standing, i.e. the angle, it is impossible for judges to see the impact and so both do not push the button.

Shortly after that tournament I saw Hugh Suenaga, a US Olympic Wrestling Solidarity Coach who is a friend to my brother Carl's family and has become a supportive friend to me. He has been through incredible adversity in his life yet has maintained a positive outlook, has excelled and continues to inspire others with his enthusiasm, positive attitude and accomplishments. He first congratulated me on my accomplishments and willingness to complete at all and especially against those so much

younger. When I described to him my frustration with the fight against Beth, he asked a few questions which changed my thinking. I shall never again give in to defeatist thought, even though it seems unfair and that I cannot possibly win. Hugh reminded me that the behavior of others, e.g. referees, opponents or audience members, should not affect my performance. Whether points appear on the scoreboard or not, I must do my best, i.e. keep my integrity, maintain my indomitable spirit, and persevere. I am the only true judge of my performance. If I do my best, whether I win the gold or not, I can feel satisfaction in a job well done. My goal should always be the gold medal, the Olympic ring. My sparring matches will never again end as this one did, with me not doing my best. No matter what happens with regard to score, my opponent will know she has fought a worthy adversary.

The tag-team sparring event was for fun. It didn't count toward team points, but was an enjoyable experience for all. I participated with two young men, aged 22 and 15. None of us were very experienced, though we all had enthusiasm. Mickey is 22 and a very large teddy bear, while Allen is wiry and fast. We competed against more experienced athletes and placed fourth. It was an honor to have participated in this fledgling event.

*Butte Tournament (State): June 6, 2010*

Not only were Carl and Rachel at this tournament, but my oldest daughter Katie and Carl's other children, Tucker and Cassandra, were also able to attend. It was a treat to have Cassie home from Marquette, Michigan, where she has a scholarship for wrestling and is training with the Olympic Education Center. Again, taekwondo blends family into this athletic event for me. We competitors, Tucker, Rachel and I, each had a

boisterous cheering section and support staff. It warmed my heart to have Katie attend a sporting event for me since I had attended so many events (i.e. concerts, presentations and sporting events) for her, as well as for my other children, Sarah and Allen, throughout the years. I earned bronze medals in both poomse and sparring at the State Tournament (Appendix H). The brackets were larger (five in poomse and four in sparring). Sadly, I was nervous and did not perform my poomse well. The next day while practicing my poomse, my fight, my story, was flawless. One day it will be flawless in competition as well.

In sparring, Beth won gold, her instructor's wife Darcy who is a blue belt (a belt and a half higher than I) won silver and I won bronze. I beat Terri, a green belt (a half belt higher than I) Missoula Taekwondo Center athlete who had studied for two years. I was reminded to use my cover punch and then kick, which I did. It worked! I had beaten a worthy opponent. I had satisfaction in knowing that I had fought my fight to the best of my ability that day; I had learned and grown internally from talking with Hugh Suenaga.

*Great Falls Tournament: April 10, 2011*

It was wonderful to have Carl, as well as Rachel and Tucker, at the tournament. Rachel was unable to compete because she had injured her foot and was wearing a cast. She was able, however, to act as coach for both Tucker and me. Tucker (age 16) competed well, earning a gold medal in poomse and silver in sparring. I earned a silver in poomse, bronze in sparring and bronze in tag-team sparring (Appendix I).

I was focused and intense when doing my poomse, but was beaten by Nathan Woronik, one of my training partners from Championship Training. Later my friend Denise Graef, who had been one of the judges, said it was very close; he beat me 2-1.

There were five women in the sparring division, three senior green belts (aged 48, 30 and 18) and two yellow belts (aged 30 and 28). Usually the yellow belts would have been in their own group, but numbers put them in with higher ranked belts. Usually, also, the 18 year-old would have been in different a group. I fought the 18 year-old first. She was tough. I learned later that she was actually a red belt who had fought Rachel in the past, but that her instructor had moved her down in rank because she had not trained consistently of late. She beat me 14-2, which means we did not finish the last of the third round because she was up by 12 points. I fought hard, but she was too fast and skilled.

I then fought Lisa Rogers, the 30 year-old yellow belt from my dojong. Our instructor reminded us right before the match to keep each other safe. I am not sure whether he was warning me to take it easy on Lisa because she is lower in belt rank or if he was warning her not to punch me in the face, her bad habit. In either case we both fought well, but my additional training won the match. After the tournament I was disappointed that I did not get the opportunity to spar with Beth. Though she has beaten me twice in past tournaments, I think we are fairly evenly matched and I want that challenge. Lisa, Beth and I all fought against the 18 year-old and all of us were bruised. My shin was bruised and achy even two weeks later. Kelsey out-matched us all in skills.

The tag-team match up was entertaining. My team (Lisa-30, Nathan-35 and I-48) fought against three men (38, 22, and 15) who were all at least 200 pounds. At one point I was kicked to the mat and rolled head over heels. When I popped right up, the referee asked if I wanted to tag out. I could not go out on that note. We lost, but did not lose by 12. It was fun to participate in this relatively new activity.

On the ride home with my less-than-gold medals I had to really think about whether I should be competing. My body was bruised. I was the oldest competitor in the whole tournament by at least ten years. Should I be competing, risking injury? Am I making a fool of myself? My fears and concerns are valid. I have not watched video of my matches, but did ask my family (Carl, Tucker and Rachel) if they honestly thought I belonged on the mat. They unanimously said I did not look like a fool, that I look like an athlete and am competitive. It was good to hear, but really did not factor into my decision to continue competing. The most important factor was the reason I started taking taekwondo.

My study of taekwondo has been purely selfish. I continue to study taekwondo to strengthen my skills and inculcate the principles of taekwondo into my very being. I compete to test and challenge myself. Though I would like to earn a gold medal, that is not my purpose for competing, for pushing myself beyond what is comfortable. Taekwondo's lesson of humility and modesty reminded me that I study to help shape who I want to be both physically and mentally.

### **Achieving Balance by Applying Taekwondo Principles**

As a professional and educator I am always exploring new ways to more effectively reach students on many levels. I am always looking for the magic bullet, the innovative method that will reach and interest all students. The Creative Pulse has given me the opportunity to explore my own habits of mind and has encouraged me to look for different habits of mind among my students. In that exploration I have begun to achieve more balance in my life. Gardner says in *Five Minds for the Future*, "The synthesizer

seeks order, equilibrium, closure; the creator is motivated by uncertainty, surprise, continual challenge, and disequilibrium” (Gardner, *Five Minds for the Future* 99). I must employ both of these to reach and interest all students.

Taking each tenet (modesty, perseverance, self-control, indomitable spirit and etiquette) to heart, I have noticed positive change in me. Though my life is far from perfect, applying these principles is having a positive effect on all facets of my life: at home, while parenting, with taekwondo, and while teaching. I am truly happier, more content, and at peace than I have ever been. It is difficult to explain exactly why, but I believe it has to do with consistent application of these principles.

Modesty is an attitude reflecting selflessness. I have found that I do (and always have done) things that need to be done as an educator, i.e. work on committees, assist students outside of school, or take on projects, all because they need to be done. I act without expectation of recognition or reward. The intrinsic satisfaction of knowing that I helped and that I may be making a difference is enough.

Applying the principles of perseverance and indomitable spirit are necessary for me to be a successful teacher and human being. The day is never long enough to complete the chores at home; the time spent with students is never enough to get through all of their questions; the years of setting a good example for my children have gone by too quickly; work interrupts valuable time that could be spent cultivating friendships; making money to pay bills can be wearing. Before consciously applying these principles, I often became depressed and bogged down in dealing with the daily tedium of life. Since trying to inculcate these principles into my daily life, I do not allow myself to dwell on the problems; I take a deep breath and work on a solution for each problem as it arises.

That does not mean that I do not occasionally give in to tears; it means I do not give up. I think of those I admire at taekwondo (Denise who works through pain every day and Rachel who is in almost physical distress when she has to forgo taekwondo because of a school commitment) and realize any problem has a solution. I may wallow in self-pity or doubt for 20 minutes, but then work at solving the problem or dealing with the fall out. I will not give up on my children, my students or myself. I know that what I am doing as a parent, teacher and human being IS making a difference. We all share the need to find purpose and value in our lives. Applying these tenets is helping me to do that.

Self-control may sound easy to apply, yet it is something I work at every day. I am opinionated and often voice those opinions. I strive to apply self-control to my tongue. Every day I wear a necklace, a replica of a Greek coin with the image of Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom, on one side and her symbol the owl on the other, to remind me to be wise before I speak. Applying the principle of self-control has helped me remain calm during confrontations with students or fellow staff members as well as my own children. I still voice my opinions, but present them (most of the time) diplomatically.

Etiquette is so often lacking in the world today. Teachers are demanding, students are rude, and children disrespectful. Treating others with kindness, expecting kindness from others and acting with integrity has improved my environment. I have always tried to set a good example for my own children and for students. Now I expect it. I treat them with respect and most often get it in return. Though I cannot control the world outside of my home and classroom, I have set and am endeavoring to enforce standards where tolerance and acceptance, caring and doing for others, honor and integrity are the norm.



Often it is hard to measure the success of trying something new, especially in education. However, I feel a sense of contentment and balance in my world right now. The outcome of this experience has been overwhelmingly positive. I have connected with students who are martial artists and athletes as well as those afraid or unwilling to try. Bruce Lee said, “When I look around, I always learn something and that is to be always yourself. And to express yourself. To have faith in yourself. Do not go out and look for a successful personality and duplicate it...start from the very root of being, which is ‘how can I be me’” (Lee, Shannon 24)? Being reminded of these principles daily with taekwondo is helping to shape me into the human being I would like to be. I am more confident, professionally as well as personally; I am more valuable to the school district, as a better teacher and contributor; and I am healthier as a human being, both physically and mentally. By applying these principles I have improved myself, which not only makes me healthier and more able to serve in a school setting, but also allows me more energy to devote to others in and out of the classroom. I also am a better example because I show students it is healthy to take care of oneself in order to be better equipped to assist others.

Applying these principles is changing the climate of my classroom and my life. With my indomitable spirit I feel ready for the challenges that face me, both in the taekwondo tournament arena and in life. Pursuing taekwondo is reminding me to accept artistic challenges, and to continue to grow as a human being. Without the challenge put forth by the project in the Creative Pulse, my personal growth and new-found understanding would not have happened. I feel lucky to have received the opportunity to so alter my life. It is just the beginning of a seemingly insurmountable task. Said the

philosopher Lao-Tzu, translated by General Choi, “Building a skyscraper begins with a shovel of dirt” (Gillis 16).

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix A	Photo of belts earned thus far: white through senior green.....	40
Appendix B	Certification of Yellow Belt .....	41
Appendix C	Certification of Senior Yellow Belt .....	42
Appendix D	Certification of Green Belt .....	43
Appendix E	Certification of Senior Green Belt .....	44
Appendix F	Medals for Bozeman Tournament, 2010 .....	45
Appendix G	Medals for Great Falls Tournament, 2010 .....	46
Appendix H	Medals for Butte (State) Tournament, 2010 .....	47
Appendix I	Medals for Great Falls Tournament, 2011.....	48

Appendix A—Belts Earned





**CHAMPIONSHIP TRAINING**  
**• TAEKWONDO •**

*Certification of Yellow Belt (8<sup>th</sup> Group)*

*For*

**DEBBIE HENDRICKS**

*This is to certify that the above named person is hereby promoted to the rank of Yellow Belt, on this day, as determined by the requirements of Championship Training's Taekwondo program.*

*Instructor's Signature*  


*Date*  
12-09-2009

**CHAMPIONSHIP TRAINING**  
**TAEKWONDO**

*Certification of Senior Yellow Belt (7<sup>th</sup> Group)*

*For*

**DEBBIE HENDRICKS**

*This is to certify that the above named person is hereby promoted to the rank of Senior Yellow Belt, on this day, as determined by the requirements of Championship Training's Taekwondo program.*

*[Signature]*  
Instructor's Signature

*4/3/10*  
Date

**CHAMPIONSHIP TRAINING**  
**TAEKWONDO**

*Certification of Green Belt (5<sup>th</sup> Group)*

*To*

**DEBBIE HENDRICKS**

*This is to certify that the above named person is hereby promoted to the rank of Green Belt, on this day, as determined by the requirements of Championship Training's Taekwondo program.*

*[Signature]*  
Instructor's Signature

*8/16/10*  
Date

**CHAMPIONSHIP TRAINING**  
**• TAEKWONDO •**

*Certification of Senior Green Belt (5<sup>th</sup> Group)*

*For*

**DEBBIE HENDRICKS**

*This is to certify that the above named person is hereby promoted to the rank of Senior Green Belt, on this day, as determined by the requirements of Championship Training's Taekwondo program.*

*[Handwritten Signature]*

*Instructor's Signature*

*2-26-11*

*Date*



Appendix F—Bozeman Tournament (February 2, 2010)



Appendix G—Great Falls Tournament (April 10, 2010)



Appendix H—Butte (State) Tournament (June 6, 2010)



Appendix I—Great Falls Tournament (April 10, 2011)



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