

## My black belt test

I particularly remember some magic moments of that early time.

I remember practicing my form at school between classes, because I couldn't wait until evening to go to Taekwondo school. I mostly did it mentally, and minimized my movements, so when others saw me they didn't think I was trying to show off or intimidate anyone. I remember showing my form in my underwear at home at my parents' request. Sometimes I got paid (about ten cents!). I also made some cool poses for pictures with my red belt on in my front yard.

I can't remember my first-degree black belt test at all, but I vividly remember every detail of my second-degree test. I took my second-degree test when I was in the fifth grade.

It was a cold winter, much warmer than where I am living now (Minnesota), but pretty cold for me then. I was nervous and excited at the same time. There were thousands of people testing at Kukkiwon, the headquarters of Taekwondo.

I noticed that one boy had outstanding technique. He was about 16, and a little taller than me. His form was excellent, with power, speed, and accuracy. His side kick was awesome. He was absolutely outstanding! He was a student of my master's friend. We tested together for form, then, guess what—I had to spar with him!

Because I was always taller than most of the kids my age in Korea, none of the elementary kids my size were taking a second-degree test, so I had to face this high-school kid, even though I was only a fifth grader. Even my master told the kid's master to take it easy on me. I was scared to death.

Then magic happened. We always bow to each other before sparring to show respect, because Taekwondo starts with courtesy and ends with courtesy. Right after we bowed, the judge commanded ready, and I did loudest *kihap* (Energy Yell), because I learned a *kihap* would help to rid all of the negative tension. As soon as the judge declared *si jak* (which means "begin" in Korean), the fight was on.

The kid was so fast! We had exchanged several kicks and punches when I noticed I wasn't that bad at sparring after all. I was getting my confidence back. At the moment my opponent attacked me with his fast kick, I would just react without thinking, counter attacking with my right foot so my round kick ended up at his face. I couldn't believe that I'd kicked his face, and it seemed like he couldn't believe it either. In that flash moment, two emotions rose together—"Oh, yes!" and "OMG, I am so dead now!" As my fear almost took back over, I heard the sound of the whistle blow that indicated the match was over.

I felt so lucky. After the match I asked him if he was okay, and told him I was sorry. He was such a cool kid. He said that he was okay, and praised me, saying my kick was so fast that he couldn't see it.

That was my magic moment. Today, I teach my students: "You can always do better than you think you can, so have faith in yourself, and never give up. Sometimes magic happen when you have faith in yourself."

### **Taekwondo demonstration in Taiwan**

When I was 15, I was honored to be selected to the Junior Taekwondo Demonstration Team. I had always wanted to visit another country, and now I had the opportunity to visit Taiwan for a Taekwondo demonstration. I was thrilled.

Our demonstration team visited several different states in Taiwan, each place with large audiences. One place greeted us with fireworks and a military band playing as we marched into the arena. Another place had a huge stadium, absolutely packed with spectators. Whenever we finished performing, they awarded us with tremendous applause. Then we did a demonstration at the TV station.

We'd attended a press conference, eaten great foods, and seen the sights in Taiwan—I felt like a rock star! I thought it was so cool. I didn't realize how much people in Taiwan were interested in Taekwondo.