

Josiah Lang
Black Belt Essay

When my parents first pulled into a strip mall on my eighth birthday, I didn't know what to expect. They told me they had signed me up for Tae Kwon Do lessons, and I couldn't contain my joy.

I was first inspired to learn martial arts after watching the well-choreographed fight scenes from *The Karate Kid* and various other action movies. If it had not been for those movies, I don't think I would have ever found my love and passion for Tae Kwon Do. Although I will admit that I was a little disappointed to learn the Crane kick is in no way an effective move.

When my dad and I stepped inside the *dojang* for the first time, we were given a *dobok* and a white belt. We started learning the white belt form that day. From that very first class, I saw everyone helping each other. No one was in it for themselves. This taught me early on that being a black belt isn't about being the best on your own. It's about being willing to help others, and to ask others for help when you need it.

Now four years later, I have received my first decided black belt. To me, being a black belt isn't about getting your poster on the wall or sitting in the front of the class, but about having honor, respect, humbleness, and self-control. I have tried to practice these traits over the course of my journey, and although I haven't mastered them, they have gotten me where I am today.

I can't say that my black belt came without sacrifice. Taking evening classes proved to be quite a hindrance when it came to playing with my friends after school, but I had made a commitment.

Unlike some of my peers, I wasn't going to let my black belt slip away from me. So I stopped seeing my friends as much and took more time to practice. Although I didn't like it at first, my skill was improving by a large margin, and I was starting to really like taking class.

I always looked forward to Wednesdays, because that usually meant I would get to spar my dad and anyone else who was there that night. Because my dad and I went to the adults class, I was always put across from men twice my size to fight. This gave me confidence when sparring other boys taller than myself who would try to intimidate me.

From the very beginning I have had many people to inspire me along the way. When I first met Master Wayne, I wasn't sure what to think. He was a very loud and intimidating person, but in his actions and demeanor, he made it clear that he cared about me receiving my first decided black belt. Master Wayne has poured countless hours of training into my journey. He could easily have decided not to train me because I wasn't a member of the tournament team, but instead, he took extra time out of his day to teach me how to use the *nunchaku* effectively. I can honestly say Master Wayne has changed my life for the better.

Parker Anthony also inspired me at the beginning of my journey. It feels just like yesterday Mr. Anthony was teaching me how to break my first practice board. Once I got the technique, he let me try harder and harder boards, which gave me confidence.

One of my favorite memories was when I was a white belt watching Mr. Anthony break boards with all these cool kicks. Immediately inspired, I asked my dad to hold three practice boards. I then attempted a jump spin wheel kick and broke all three of them. This taught me what you could do with a little passion and focus.

The people who have inspired me the most are my parents. After every no change my mom would always be there to encourage me. No matter how many times I didn't want to practice, my dad pushed me to take class. I am without a doubt sure I wouldn't be here without my parents.

Of course, my greatest inspiration is the Lord. Colossians 3:17 says, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." I'm thankful that he gave me the focus, physical ability, and endurance to earn my black belt. Without him I could do nothing.

One of the hardest challenges in my journey was getting a no change. It's always hard seeing your peers move up in rank while you stay behind with no progression to your black belt journey. This happened to me three times on my red belt testing. This left me very discouraged and with low spirits, but I knew I couldn't give up—otherwise those past three years would have been for nothing. So I trained harder than I did for any other testing. I was determined that when the time came, I would be ready, and after twelve months, I finally got my poom belt.

Over these past four years, I have learned many lessons about having confidence in myself and persevering through all the hard times and no changes along the way. I believe it has not only improved my character in Tae Kwon Do, but has also made me a better person overall.

It feels like I have come so far from a shy boy standing in a room with six-foot black belts hovering over me, to being a first decided black belt myself. However, I know my journey has just begun.