

A Whole Lot of Firsts

Five years ago, I made friends with a very special group of people. One day, a few of them invited me to come join their Tae Kwon Do class. I'll never know what they saw in me that convinced them that I had a knack for martial arts. Or perhaps they were just desperate for members. Either way, it was a good match because, from that cold January day at the Gilpin Rec Center onward, my love for the Korean martial art only grew.

Back then, I knew I wanted to join a martial arts group, but I figured that it would eventually blow over like most of my other interests at the time. Of my group of friends, there were six students in my class including me. A couple were green belts and a few were blue belts, and some eventually advanced to red belts. However, of those six students, I am the only one of my friends who has made it this far. Back then, I never would've thought that I would make it this far-- that I would be getting my black belt just four and a half years later.

Ever since my first day in Tae Kwon Do, I learned new things every day. One day I was practicing front and fighting stances, the next I am learning my first form: Echan cho don. One moment I am practicing three-step, the next I am learning my first weapon form. There were many weeks at a time where I was practicing the same forms every day to get ready for the next belt, but it was still fun and exciting with different activities to do in the class. Whenever I advanced onto another belt, it was another exciting challenge to learn. So on and so forth, the pattern went on and on until I started writing my first 25 original one-steps. Each new thing I had to learn took lots of practice, and could even be tedious and frustrating when it took extra time to master, but it was all worth it.

The Rec Center room in which my group met up was not just a place to practice and spar, but it was also a place to just see my friends and hang out. In this class was where I got to know and grow closer to one of my best friends and first roommate. I got to become friends with both of my instructors and other classmates. In fact, I am now roommates with one of my peers/instructors. Making friends with everyone in the class has helped me improve my confidence to face each test and new challenge. A lot of students have come and gone in the years that I have been in the class, but the friendships that we have made will always be memorable.

I also had my first teaching experience in my class. It started with just doing basics, but I was still nervous. I had never taught a class of people before and, even though it only took about 8 to 10 minutes to teach, I was anxious to stand in front of a small group of people out of fear of messing up. However, after a bit, I wasn't scared anymore and I was able to get through the teaching experience successfully. Even now I, and those around me, can see how my attitude towards teaching has changed. I am still a little hesitant towards the idea, but I will step up if needed and take charge as best as I can.

Now, I am getting my first degree black belt. It has been a long and stimulating road and I still can't really believe I have even made it this far. To think that I am still nowhere near done, however, it builds a whole new level of excitement in me. Looking back, most of these events have blurred together over the last four years, but I will never forget all of those firsts.