

A Short Treatise On Indomitable Spirit

Presented as Partial Requirement

For the rank of 4th Degree Black Belt

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Introduction

TaeKwon-Do (TKD) is the name of the Korean martial art designed by General Choi Hong-Hi. It utilises kicking and punching to defend against one or more stationary or moving opponents. The syllabus incorporates many physical and mental aspects.

General Choi (1993, p.15) proposes five tenets which form a framework within which students may learn the art of TaeKwon-Do:

1. Courtesy (*Ye Ui*)
2. Integrity (*Yom Chi*)
3. Perseverance (*In Nae*)
4. Self-Control (*Guk Gi*)
5. Indomitable Spirit (*Baekjuk Boolgool*)

It is the last of these tenets, Indomitable Spirit, which shall form the basis of this discussion.

What is Indomitable Spirit ?

Indomitable Spirit is described by General Choi (1993, p.17) in the following manner:

“Here lie 300, who did their duty,” a simple epitaph for one of the greatest acts of courage known to mankind.

Although facing the superior forces of Xerxes, Leonidas and his 300 Spartans at Thermopylae showed the world the meaning of indomitable spirit. It is shown when a courageous person and his principles are pitted against overwhelming odds.

A serious student of TaeKwon-Do will at all times be modest and honest. If confronted with injustice, he will deal with the belligerent without any fear or hesitation at all, with indomitable spirit, regardless of whosoever and however many the number may be.

It may also be considered the flame which flickers in the wind of adversity, but never dies.

Sa-seong Sereff offers the practical observation, “there is a fine line between Indomitable Spirit and stupidity”.

There are many definitions, but most, if not all, refer to *inner strength*, or “The Power of One” which is illustrated by Courtenay (1992).

Over the years I have walked with several people who have revealed the ideal of Indomitable Spirit. These luminaries are Mr. Dale Burkhart, Mr. Wayne Schofield and my son, Aidan.

The Top Frog

In October 1995, I moved to Denver, Colorado, USA from Perth, Western Australia with my wife Trish and son Aidan.

In early January 1996 we commenced training at Foothills TKD school in Lakewood, Colorado, USA with Mr. Dale Burkhart, a 5th degree black belt. He was respectfully dubbed The Top Frog because of the school's emblem, a flying frog. Several months later we were surprised to learn from other students of Mr. Burkhart's close call with paralysis.

Mr. Burkhart (2000) commented that up until the end of 1994 he was troubled with high blood pressure, loss of balance and intermittent body numbness. After about six months, the problem was tracked to a pinched spinal cord in the neck caused by bone spurs.

In early 1995, he underwent reconstructive neck surgery. The road to recovery was rocky, but he defied the odds and returned to full-time training and teaching.

In June 1996, Mr. Burkhart tested for 6th degree black belt (Schade & Scheirer 1996). It was an inspiring day. He showcased his prowess in patterns and performed an extensive breaking sequence with wooden boards and roofing tiles. More incredible was the fact the demonstrator could have been a cripple. The test was a resounding success for Mr. Burkhart, his family, friends and students.

We ceased training with Mr. Burkhart in June 1997 to return home to Perth, Western Australia, but have remained in close contact.

In recent conversations with Mr. Burkhart (2000), we have learnt of further neurological complications with constant numbness and burning sensations in the arms and legs. Any physical activity in TKD causes tremendous discomfort, yet he continues to teach. Early medical results have proven inconclusive and the outcome is unknown.

Our hopes are with him in this new struggle.

The Gentleman Warrior

My wife Trish and I commenced training with Sa-seong Sereff in late December 1995, at the United States TaeKwon-Do Federation (USTF) headquarters in Broomfield, Colorado, USA.

As the months passed, we came to know Mr. Wayne Schofield, a 4th degree black belt. Mr. Schofield was a veteran of World War II who entered into TKD, circa. 1980, at the age of 57 years. While stationed near Papua New Guinea (PNG) during World War II, he contracted malaria.

Mr. Schofield was a wonderful gentleman, with many friends in North America, Australia and New Zealand. He was also a personal friend of Sa-seong Sereff and General Choi. The latter respectfully addressed him as “Mr. Wayne”.

In April 1996, Sa-seong Sereff hosted an Instructor’s Seminar. Between sessions, Mr. Schofield, aged 73, spoke candidly of his health and involvement with TKD for an informal interview (Rounthwaite & Rounthwaite 1996).

Mr. Schofield had many physical hurdles to overcome in order to pursue TKD. His breathing was hampered by only one-third lung capacity and periodic bouts of asthma, his vision and depth perception were limited by the loss of one eye, his equilibrium was poor due to inner-ear problems, he wore hearing aids and only one kidney was functional.

In addition, he was often troubled by the malaria virus, which sometimes required hospitalisation.

Many of the physical aspects of TKD rely upon the ability to see, breathe and maintain balance. Mr. Schofield did not perceive his deficiency in these areas or other health problems as detrimental; they were challenges. He continued to train regularly in TKD with Sa-seong Sereff and pursued his own physical programme at home.

Mr. Schofield closed the interview with several sagely comments, including, “don’t quit” and “TKD is the best medicine of all.”

During the seminar, Mr. Schofield was called upon to demonstrate his patterns and techniques to fellow students. His TKD colleagues were all impressed. In recognition of his achievements, Sa-seong Sereff promoted Mr. Schofield to the rank of 5th degree black belt.

Sadly, Mr. Schofield passed away on 15th January 1999 in Boulder, Colorado, USA. His funeral ceremony was attended by his TaeKwon-Do family formally attired in their doboks.

1999 – The Year That Was

On 27th October 1999, my little boy Aidan was diagnosed with medulloblastoma, a malignant brain tumour. He was only four and half years of age. It was a day which still burns brightly in my memory.

In the preceding weeks, Aidan had become unsteady on his feet and his mornings were troubled by intermittent nausea and vomiting. After many weeks of facing an unknown illness, our family doctor, Neil Ozanne, sent Aidan to the Kalamunda hospital for a Computer-Aided Tomography (CAT) scan to explore possibilities. The results indicated a brain tumour located in the fourth ventricle at the base of the brain.

My wife Trish and I had no time to truly grasp the unfolding events. Come nightfall, we were at Princess Margaret Hospital for Children. The neurological registrar, Dr. Steven Lewis, confirmed the CAT scan results and briefly explained the tumour, a suspected medulloblastoma.

Dr. Lewis also explained that Aidan's symptoms were triggered by excessive cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) inside the brain. The tumour was blocking the regular flow of CSF from the brain to the spine.

Dr. Lewis outlined the course of treatment, which included immediate brain surgery to remove the bulk of the tumour. The remaining tumour would be treated using chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Surgery was scheduled with Mr. George Wong for the afternoon of Monday 1st November. However, by Sunday evening, Aidan was no longer responding to the steroids aimed at reducing the swelling in his brain. His vital signs dropped rapidly overnight and by early morning he was rushed into theatre.

The surgery was a success. He spent one week recovering in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and another in a regular ward.

When Aidan returned home from hospital, he was exhausted, physically and mentally. He was barely able to walk and required constant supervision. As the weeks progressed, his mobility returned a little. He was determined to regain some of his former glory, that of a happy and energetic little boy.

In December 1999, a month of radiotherapy commenced at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. This is a technique in which a beam of gamma rays is focused upon a region of tissue to destroy cancerous cells.

It was an exhausting period for all concerned. One of the hardest aspects was accepting the consequences of the treatment. With radiotherapy, he could suffer long term brain damage and risk the chance of secondary tumours. Without, his chances of survival were negligible. There really was no choice.

Aidan was almost revered by the radiotherapists. He would lie on his chest, face down in a moulded mask and wait quietly until each of the exposures were completed. Many children are frightened by the hospital and machinery.

The start of chemotherapy overlapped with radiotherapy in January. Chemotherapy uses a variety of drugs to destroy rapidly dividing cells, which includes healthy and cancerous cells. The expected outcome is for healthy cells to rejuvenate while cancerous cells will be eliminated. Unfortunately, the drugs employed produce unwanted side-effects such as nausea and hair loss.

A milestone was reached in February when Aidan commenced pre-primary education. He responds favourably to the school environment and enjoys the company of his friends and teachers. He is a very intelligent and perceptive little boy, which cuts both ways. He is well placed to deal with the treatment, but also becomes despondent because he is aware of the nature of the illness.

Aidan's treatment and regular hospital trips have become woven into the fabric of our lives. While his prognosis is good, he could relapse at any time, now or in the future. Sadly, many children do not reach adulthood. Cancer treatment in the twenty-first century is still unpredictable.

We maintain an on-going diary of Aidan's treatment for family and friends. See Telcik & Telcik (1999).

Aidan remains our champion.

Conclusion

Indomitable Spirit is an important tenet of TaeKwon-Do. It provides a philosophical bastion from which to defend against the unknown.

There is no universal metric against which Indomitable Spirit may be measured and there is certainly no individual or group to which it can be isolated and confined. Many people portray a natural understanding of Indomitable Spirit.

There can be no definitive explanation of Indomitable Spirit. These pages are a reflection of the Indomitable Spirit portrayed by several special people.

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Note: These references are organised according to the Harvard referencing system (Harvard University, Massachusetts, USA).

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Glossary

CAT	Computer-Aided Tomography. Provides image slices of three-dimensional objects.
CSF	Cerebro-Spinal Fluid. The fluid which cushions the brain and spine.
Do-Bok	Training uniform. Referred to as a <i>Gi</i> in Karate.
Do-Jang	Training hall or gymnasium.
MRI	Magnetic Resonance Image
Sa-Hyun	Master. 7 th or 8 th degree black belt.
Sa-Seong	Grand Master. 9 th degree black belt.
TKD	TaeKwon-Do.
USTF	United States TaeKwon-Do Federation. Presided by Sa-seong Sereff.