

THE WANDERING WARRIOR



Tae Kwon Do

By Jill Roth

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THE INTERVIEW



MSSD: *What kind of shape do I need to be in BEFORE I start?*

Sr. Master Moody: It makes no difference. We have people in their 90s, people with one leg, people with no hands, all body configurations. There are no prerequisites. Everything is about where you are today and where you want to be tomorrow.

MSSD: *Will I get hit/kicked in the face?*

Sr. Master Moody: While we do want students to understand what they are up against [in a real attack], the primary focus is developing spontaneous reactions through drills, not by just hitting randomly. That said, as you develop more confidence, it is important to spar. We always use safety gear that protects your face as well as the rest of your body.

THE MARTIAL ART



This month we will be entering the world of Tae Kwon Do with Sr. Master Greg Moody and Ms. Laura Sanborn of Karate Built, L.L.C. They are part of the American Tae Kwon Do Association (ATA), which is the largest single style martial arts organization in the world.

(www.KarateBuilt.com and www.ATAonline.com).

Tae Kwon Do means “the way of foot and hand.” This martial art combines blocks, kicks, and strikes. According to the ATA, traditional Tae Kwon Do focuses on personal development of the mind and body. To say it was just self-defense would be to lose most of the valuable ideas and philosophy behind this ancient art. Self-defense is really the fringe benefit that is gained by dedicating one’s self to the values, philosophy, and training of Songahm Taekwondo.” (1)

THE WORKOUT



We immediately knew we were in good hands when Ms. Sanborn greeted us at the door. She was prepared for my arrival and was able to quickly adapt when I surprised her by bringing my daughter, Kelsi, along for the class.

After the appropriate greetings and introductions, she asked us some questions about our goals and aspirations in Tae Kwon Do (TKD). Most people join a martial art for four main reasons: self-defense, self-discipline, physical fitness, and/or self-confidence. She asked us to rank these goals in numerical order of importance. It was fun to see in which ways Kelsi and I were similar and different in our aspirations. Ms. Sanborn was then able to use our input to better share the world of Tae Kwon Do.

Next, she wrote our

MSSD: How much time does it take per week?

Ms. Sanborn: Two nights per week; an hour each class.

MSSD: What are the benefits of Tae Kwon Do for women?

Ms. Sanborn: What was good for me, was that it required so much focus. I had to think about my left side, my right side and what they were doing. It required my total concentration. I had to focus on me for that hour. It was time for myself. I couldn't worry about if my husband was feeding the kids or putting them to bed on time. I only focused on what I was doing. And, it was so fun I wanted to stay with it.

MSSD: Can women in their 40's start?

Sr. Master Moody: Absolutely. Unfortunately, the media represents the martial arts as an activity for really young, super athletic women. Most people doing the martial arts are just regular people making themselves just a little better every day. Students don't all start at the same level and won't end up in the same place. It is all about people progressing forward in their abilities and goals.

MSSD: What kind of health benefits/results can I expect?

Ms. Sanborn: Weight loss, muscle toning, better aerobic ability, stamina, posture (both from muscle strengthening and increased confidence).

Sr. Master Moody: Most workouts use about 50% of your muscles. At Karate Built you will be using a much broader range of muscles; both slow twitch and fast twitch muscle fibers. There is a great emphasis on flexibility.

MSSD: How invasive is it on the joints (knees)?

Ms. Sanborn: You are going to be kicking and bending your knees, but we can modify everything if you have knee issues.

MSSD: What goals can you hope to reach?

Ms. Sanborn: You can go to black belt and beyond. It is very reasonable for everyone to become a black belt. You could become an instructor. I knew nothing about martial arts when I started and am now preparing to become a master next year.

Jill's note: One can become a master in the ATA after you earn your 6th degree black belt.

names on white belts and tied them around our waists. This gave us a great feeling of belonging and acceptance, not to mention feeling a little special inside.

Next, we were off for a tour of the school. Now, I must tell you, they are the masters of organization. They have a board where you can read all the important announcements of the month and a board which shares the "life skill" of the month.

This month's skill is "Communication." Clearly, they invest a lot of time to insure that students are well informed and learning to be excellent communicators. There is also a board showing what is happening with the ATA nationally and even internationally. I was quite impressed with the wall rack full of black belts. Of course, you would expect the black belts to be on the waists of the students, but Ms. Sanborn explained that these are the black belts that the students have committed to earning. Each day they are hanging on the wall giving the students a clear vision of their goal. I noted that there were not only 1st degree black belts, but even a Sr. Master's black belt waiting for him to achieve and wear with pride. Everyone is striving to improve and grow. Ms. Sanborn



introduced us to our instructor, Mr. Kreskow, and then showed us where we could warm up before class.

Kelsi and I took advantage of this suggestion and sat down to stretch while we watched the end of the kid's class. I was impressed with how closely the kids listened and how much they enjoyed class. They bowed out, and Kelsi and I took a big breath because our class was about to start. Ms. Brown was responsible for our warm up and took her task to heart. I couldn't have been any "warmer" by the time we were done.

She called us to line up by rank, and each student yelled "yes, Ma'am," and ran to their place. Respect was being shown from the very first action. We started with some basic front kicks, and I was feeling pretty good about myself. We did some punches, and my confidence was growing. We even did "ATA punches," which is where you punch low and say "A," punch to the middle and say "T," and then punch high and say "A." It is a good way to work on your focus and accuracy and it was fun.

Then she moved on to a special kind of jumping jack. After each "jump" you would immediately "jump" again. So you kind of look like a bunny rabbit doing jumping jacks. At first, I thought, "Oh, look how cute, my reflection looks like a bunny." Then I progressed to, "Holy, *&^%, I can barely breathe." I would not have thought that simply jumping could make one so winded. But, on the plus side, when she had us touch our toes afterwards, I could bend a lot lower than I have in years. Evidently, having warm muscles does make a difference. With us appropriately warm, she handed the class over to Mr. Kreskow.

I believe that it is Mr. Kreskow's personal mission to get his students into the best shape of their lives. By the end of the night, we had done 60 pushups, 60 leg lifts, and multiple kicks, punches and blocks.

It was sparring night for the higher-ranked students, so they all started out dressed in their safety gear, (Ms. Sanborn later explained that safety and respect are strongly emphasized in all sparring practice). He had them go through their sparring drills on one side of the floor, and we lower ranks were on the other. He began our work with #2 round kicks. #2 means that you will kick with the

MSSD: *How long till black belt?*

Sr. Master Moody: Minimum 24 months the average is 30 months.

MSSD: *What if the first class is too much for me?*

Ms. Sanborn: Let the instructor know you are having trouble, whether it is a lack of knowledge or you're not in good enough shape.

MSSD: *What respectful behavior is expected of me?*

Sr. Master Moody: That is a great question. The first thing you should do is call and set up an appointment with the instructor. Any good school will take the time to tell you what to expect. It is different at every school, but usually, you will bow as you enter the school and/or mats. This helps you make the mental transition to your workout. Your body knows that you are now leaving your everyday life and are ready to focus on Tae Kwon Do and yourself.

MSSD: *Is everyone in the class a beginner?*

Ms. Sanborn: No, the majority of our adult classes are a mixture of belt levels.

MSSD: *What can a student do for homework in between classes?*

Sr. Master Moody: We have a curriculum webpage that is only accessible to students. It has videos and written summaries of all the student's curriculum so that they can review everything at home. This can be a great supplement to what the instructors teach in class.

MSSD: *Is it competitive like Karate?*

Sr. Master Moody: It can be if you choose to. About 10-15% of our students do tournaments. They are available at the local, state, national and world level, so it extends to an extremely high level of competition. One thing about our tournaments you'd be amazed at is the high level of respect and friendliness that the participants show. We have students that enjoy competition, we have a demo team, but most of the people enjoy Tae Kwon Do for themselves.



back leg, and then that leg will end up in front. He showed us how to properly pivot our foot to avoid any unnecessary torque on your knees. This also opens up your hips so you are able to have maximum power. We progressed up and down the floor with these as he gave us helpful hints and input. As you execute each kick you "Ki-hap" (yell). The Ki-hap helps with focus, confidence, an adrenal rush, and to confuse an attack-er. It was now time to put our kicks into practice. He divided us into pairs so we could hold the pad for each other. We first bowed and shook our partner's hand. This shows respect and that we will honor our partner during our practice. We moved up and down the floor again with an actual target. I found this really helped in learning how to judge your distance, power and accuracy. We then switched and held the pad for our partner. Again, just by holding the pad, you learn a lot about distancing, how much power a kick can have and how to move in the best way to assist your partner. He had instructed us to do 20 kicks on each side. I liked the fact that he counted on our honesty as he instructed the higher ranks with their sparring.

Mr. Kreskow then showed us how to do a "twin low block". This is a block you would use to protect both sides of your body. He shared with us that you want to twist your hands at the last minute in order to increase momentum and decrease friction. He had Kelsi count out the techniques for us, and we did about 30 of these. It was fun to watch her practice her communication as the temporary leader of the group. Just about the time my biceps were whispering threats of impending doom, he asked another student to the lead the count, and we did 30 more. My biceps had decided that whispering wasn't quite cutting it and threatened to "make me pay tomorrow." (It is tomorrow while I'm writing this, and they have followed through with their evil threats).

Now, with these two techniques well rehearsed, he pulled them together for a "combination." He shared with us the importance of good hand and foot timing. You should complete your technique at the same time your foot touches the ground. At first when I was focusing on my timing, both of my techniques suffered a little. But, as my practice progressed, I was able to gain confidence with both

hand/foot timing is important because it provides you with the maximum power. TKD is an art of "one strike." In other words, you want your techniques to be so strong that you can finish an attack within one to three techniques. They do use combinations, but each blow counts, as opposed to other arts that I have tried where the idea is to distract your opponent with many blows.

Meanwhile, I noticed the higher ranks had taken off their sparring gear and were working on their weapons. This month was Bahng Mahng Ee, which is a short stick. Of course, safety is paramount, so their sticks were padded so they could learn techniques without injuring their partner. It was clear that they were having a grand ol' time as they worked through their drills. It reminded me of a well-choreographed scene from Pirates of the Caribbean. I also saw them practicing their forms. A form is a set of moves, on average about 40, that simulates fighting against multiples partners. They showed terrific self discipline as they consistently worked hard without supervision.

Pleased with our progress, Mr. Kreskow brought the whole class back together. We did 20 regular pushups and then he introduced us to the beauty of "buddy pushups." This is where you and your partner are head-to-head, and after you come up from your push up, you high-five your buddy, you then push up again and high five with the other hand. That equals "1". We did 20 of these. With quivering arms, we moved to partner leg lifts.

I was particularly impressed with the respect Mr. Kreskow showed to one of his students. The gentleman wore a back brace, and Mr. Kreskow respectfully asked him if he felt comfortable doing the leg lift drill and then offered options when the student said, "No." We, on the other hand, were just about to experience the fun and excitement of the leg lift drill. I layed on the ground with Kelsi's feet on either side of my head. I grabbed her ankles for support and then lifted my legs up to her hands she gently tossed them away and I brought them an inch above the floor and then touched her hands again, she tossed them to the right and I did a 360 circle and touched her hands so she could toss them down to the left, I then did another 360 with my legs

THE STATS

Required Uniform?

Yes

Nationwide price range?

\$100-\$200 per month.

What is the flooring?

Well padded floor.

Are there women in the school?

Yes, the ATA has a plethora of women. About 50% of their adult students are women. The ATA has 60-70 female masters (6th degree Black Belt), 15-20 Sr. Masters (7th degree Black Belt) and 6-7 Chief Masters (8th degree Black Belt).

Can you accommodate physical challenges?

The ATA has students in wheelchairs, with no hands, in walkers and even blind. They have never had a physical challenge that they weren't able to accommodate.

How physically exerting is it? On a scale of 0 to 10 (0 = sloths are confusing me for a tree and 10 = there may have been gasping)

9 – It was a terrific workout.

Age limit?

There is no age limit.

“Martial” versus “Art” scale between 1 to 10
1 = ART completely an internal art no combat
10 = This is down and dirty combat moves only.

5 – Tae Kwon Do is definitely a fighting art, yet you will learn to embrace the philosophies of respect, loyalty and courtesy.

...touched her hands. That is I. We did 20 of these. Gasp! Right around “14” my legs decided that they couldn't go up and down anymore. I rested for “14” and “15” and finished strong with “16-20.” But I felt good about myself as I know I honestly did my best and my self esteem will grow as I do better in the future.

At the end of class we all lined back up by rank. Mr. Kreskow shared some school announcements and bowed us out. Phew! After Mr. Kreskow walked away Kelsi glibly said, “Oh good, now I can go puke.” It was definitely a good workout. But, all joking aside, I feel invigorated today.

After our workout, Ms. Sanborn had us follow her to her office and then reviewed the school curriculum and offerings. Since Kelsi had noted “Self Defense” as her primary motivator, Ms. Sanborn pointed out that the Karate Built teaches 12 self-defense techniques which are based on the most common attacks determined by the FBI. These are pieces of the form from each belt level.

There is ONE set self-defense for 12 different types of attacks. Keeping the options of self-defense limited to one response is ideal. According to a study done in 1973: “They found that high or even moderate levels of stress appear to interfere with fine muscular control and decision-making.” The study stated that, “cognitive complex skills degrade with even slight increases in stress”. (2) With this in mind, Karate Built reviews the same skills consistently so the student knows them backwards and forwards. Muscle memory can be the key to survival in a high-stress situation.

...survey, was physical fitness. I believe I would hit all of my physical fitness goals in just 30 days of their classes.

Finally, Ms. Sanborn shared that students grow in their self-confidence through Tae Kwon Do. You will gain confidence in yourself as your focus and concentration improve through forms. When you are able to have self-control, and work on your own, you will gain self-esteem. Through the leadership skills that are taught throughout the year, discipline, vision, communication, honesty, self-esteem and respect, you will grow in your confidence in both yourself and others.

Painted on their wall is the slogan:

“We Are Creating The Leaders Of Tomorrow, One Black Belt At A time”

I think that says it all!

-Jill Roth



Jill Roth holds her fourth-degree black belt with the American Tae Kwon Do Association, a blue belt in Kempo, a level 2 Reiki, and an NRA Certification in basic pistol. She has taught Tae Kwon Do across the country. She studies different types of martial arts all over the state and writes about her experiences in her “Wandering Warrior” column.

Email Jill at:

jroth@mindsetselfdefense.com

NEXT MONTH

Where will you send me next?

Sources:

- (1) The Way of Traditional Taekwondo, Volume one, white belt.
- (2) Pressure Point Control Tactics Instructor Manual, PPCT Management Systems, Inc. , p.2-6

