

Taekwondo Through my Eyes

September 25th, 2025

Taekwondo has improved my life with its strength building in body and in character.

I started my Taekwondo journey in the beginning of 2022. I wanted to quit in the middle of my journey. Then I realized why waste all this time and the tears I shed, when I am so close to the end? If you look at what makes a dollar, it can be four quarters. That's what I see when I think of why I'm pushing myself so hard to become a Black Belt. One quarter for my family, especially for my sister, one for my instructors, one for my friends, and that last quarter is for myself. Everyone sees potential in me that I can become a Black Belt. I am doing it with my sister to be her buddy through Recommended Belt, in a way that I didn't have as a Color Belt. But then there's that one quarter left for me, because why quit now, and let three years of long dedication and so much time go to waste? Along the way Taekwondo has improved my life with its strength building in body and in character.

Improving character doesn't just happen – it takes work. In every class we start with a character discussion. There are twelve Character Components we cover as Color Belts and three more when you are a Black Belt Recommended Belt. And then there are two Themes that relate to all of the Components. In the third week, we meditate and say a mantra in our heads and focus on breathing, or we say a certain prayer about the Character Component for that month. For each Character Component or theme, there is a scripture, or quote, and motto. We have to memorize the scripture and/or motto for all the Character Components and the two Themes. Since I was enrolled with IDEA Homeschool, which requires the secular curriculum, I memorized the quotes. Mom wanted me to also do the scripture, so in order to get my blue stripe for Character on my belt, I said both a scripture and a motto. Confidence and Connection are our Themes. True Humility, Grace, Love, Respect, Diligence, Peace, Patience, Compassion, Integrity, Self-Control, Trust and Truth are the Color Belt Components. As a Black Belt Recommended, we also cover Sacrifice, Service and Choice.

The beginning of my journey to develop body and character started as a White Belt in 2022. Two of my sisters did a summer camp at CMA; after that, one sister wanted to join. I was given the option to join with her, but I decided against it; I didn't want to embarrass myself. When she tested for her second belt, Yellow Belt, I went to her test to support her. As I watched her test, I realized that she was having fun and I wanted to join. Particularly, as I watched the Primary Open Hand Form, the second part of it, that's where I said to myself I wanted to join. I started in January 2022 and that month we covered True Humility. The Motto for that is: "True Humility knows its value." What I've learned from our True Humility month is that I can recognize my value without making myself cocky. I have an open mind. I know what I am capable of doing and am proud of it, but I do my best not to make it into pridefulness. Being a White Belt I think is the hardest belt to be. I stepped on the mat completely clueless. In a baggy bright white uniform that was also stiff. I could hear myself every time I moved. I remember just doing repetitive techniques over and over again.

Learning how to do a high block is hard. You have to cross your centerline with your arms. It looks simple, but my brain couldn't grasp the idea of crossing my centerline. I powered through White and made it to my first test for my Yellow Belt.

By the time I moved into the Yellow Belt I had already improved my coordination, and then in Yellow we started sparring classes. Yellow Belts don't actually start sparring yet – instead, we practice drills and we do lots of cardio work. I was sweaty every Monday night because of those cardio drills, which we do while wearing a ton of sparring gear. We have light to medium contact, but the sparring gear (mostly) helps us to be safe. I hate wearing my helmet, it feels like I am suffocating when I am working hard. We learn pre-choreographed sparring drills. In Orange, we spar and then we work on leg strengthening for our jump kicks. I love to win! I've always had the drive to win, which makes sparring one of my favorite things to do. Right now, being a Recommended Black Belt, I need to have the drive to win. But for me I've always had it in me. Not gonna lie, when I lose a match I'm a little hurt. I use my loss to improve my strategy. In the past, my strategy used to be all about offense. But through my losses, I've learned that I need to utilize defense as a part of my sparring strategy to win. Whenever I sparred in a tournament I usually won first place, and it's the only thing I enjoy about competing in tournaments.

By the time I was a Yellow Belt I had already been doing NYO for five years. For those that don't know, NYO stands for Native Youth Olympics. In my early years of NYO, I wasn't really dedicated to the sport. With the help of Taekwondo, I started to realize I was getting better at the events as well as Taekwondo. The skills in strength training from Taekwondo have transferred flawlessly into my NYO events. Right now, my favorite event in NYO is Wrist Carry and my second is One-Hand Reach. Both of those events require lots of arm and core strength, which I train in Taekwondo. I honestly believe that if I didn't start training in Taekwondo, I wouldn't have been stronger in NYO. I started winning first place in the Wrist Carry and became stronger and better at the other events in NYO as well.

My personal progress was still improving in Green Belt, which was my favorite belt because I was able to learn a new staff form as well as the start of the Intermediate Open Hand form. We also started working on hip flexor exercises, and that helped my kicks get higher than what I could previously do. My Kneel Jump in NYO improved after starting my hip flexor exercises. At the start of the Kneel Jump, you are kneeling on the ground, and your feet are flat, then you use your arms to swing yourself forward, get momentum and simultaneously use all your strength to jump and land on your feet. You have to maintain your balance and land your feet at the same time. You are measured behind your heel to the closest start line. You only have three attempts, and the person with the farthest

distance wins! I never was good at it and only did it for fun, yet I noticed that I was able to reach farther because of my Taekwondo training.

When I became a Brown Low Belt, which is the first Advanced Level Belt, I started strength training. Strength training has really made a change in my physique. It was hard to be a Brown Low Belt because we did not learn any new Open Hand forms; it was mostly perfecting techniques that I already knew. Because of the extensive repetition, it has now become second nature to me. It was hard, but much needed. Brown Low Belt was mentally the most difficult belt to go through, and at this point I stopped making an effort to go to class. Two things contributed to this lack of interest: I started my first job, and I was tired of being alone as I worked through the belts. Being a Color Belt without a buddy is hard. Up to this point I hadn't had a consistent buddy that could help me stay on track. I would say that was also part of my laziness, because I didn't have someone to meet up with and move along with. I needed accountability. I considered myself a loner because when we were working in groups, I was always alone training. I wanted to quit so many times. I had my mom, my instructors, my sister and friends that encouraged me to stay and come to classes. There were too many days to count that I didn't want to go to class. Most of the time when class ended, though, I felt better than what I did before class. I had a routine to go to the morning class, and if I didn't go, the day felt off. Then my sister and a few of my friends started waiting for me to work my way up through the Belts. Whenever possible, I started coming to two classes a day even after a long day of work. My family and friends were waiting for me to catch up to start Black Belt Recommended classes, so I pushed myself to go after work even though most of the time I didn't have any desire to go. Because I pushed myself, I flew through Brown High quickly.

My character was really growing with all of the friends I was making and I was so excited to catch up and to be able to train with one of my friends when I got to Red Low. It was really nice to work with him and then to test with him into Black Belt Recommended. But unfortunately, we went to opposite classes, so we hardly got to actually work together. My sister had to test into Recommended by herself and she said it was hard for her. My friend and I got to help each other through drills, and kept each other accountable. I loved having my friend test with me into Recommended because we had each other's backs. Now, being a Recommended Belt with four other students, I have several buddies that I can rely on to keep me on track. We have the same end goal to finish and become a Black Belt. We all are working together and sacrificing some of our beloved Sunday nights to make up classes when we can't meet on our usual Saturdays. Not gonna lie, waking up between 6:30 and 7:00 on a Saturday morning feels illegal. But we do it, and make it on time to avoid the consequences that come from being even seconds late. Being a Black Belt Recommended, we have so many lower ranks looking up to us. They expect us to know

everything and to look good. We have to set a good example for them, so that they, too, can reach the goal of becoming a Black Belt. I was homeschooled from 6th grade, up until I graduated in 2025, and going to the studio was part of my social time – this is where I made a lot of my friends.

My journey to become a Black Belt wasn't all sunshine and rainbows; it actually was dark and cloudy, but I pushed through with the help of my family, instructors and friends. I've had my share of trials and tribulations, but I am almost there. All along my journey, my character grew so much, my strength in my body changed, and it made me so much better at NYO. I developed the skill to persevere and keep holding on even when the temptation of quitting feels so much easier. I'm going to take that quarter for myself and not quit because I'm so close and why waste all this time, and all the tears? As I was writing one of my last paragraphs, I realized that I have another reason to stay... it's to be a role model for the lower ranks, and for them to know that they can get their Black Belt, too. But the main reason why I am still here, working harder than I ever have, is for myself. I don't want to waste the time that I have dedicated to Taekwondo. When I was a Color Belt, I watched a few of my friends go through the program and saw their perseverance. They became Black Belts and now it is my turn to become one.