

## Black Belt Essay

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I have the Ajmera family to thank for introducing me to Tae Kwon Do. They live in our neighborhood and their mom, Mary told me, "If I can do this, anyone can do this!" Since we had moved to the United States, I didn't have a work visa and I had become a full time at home mom. I *needed* to do something to get me out of the house and out of my comfort zone, and Tae Kwon Do did just that.

Previously, I had tried working out at the gym or step aerobics classes, but I wasn't very dedicated and my mind would always wander during classes. You can't do that at Tae Kwon Do: you have to be fully present and focused during a class. Tae Kwon Do provides such a complete work out for flexibility, coordination, strength, and mental concentration.

The greatest benefit Tae Kwon Do has given me is in helping me to live and cope with Crohn's disease. It is a painful and chronic inflammatory condition that I've had for 16 years. Since starting Tae Kwon Do, I have never felt more fit and healthy, despite the disease. There are still days when I am literally too sick to get off the couch, but a few days later when I can come and keep up with a class, it is *truly* empowering. While working towards my black belt, I have had 2 minor and 1 major surgeries for Crohn's, and Tae Kwon Do has definitely improved my recovery times and motivated me to get back at it.

Tae Kwon Do has changed my life in other ways. When I started, I had such poor flexibility that I couldn't touch my toes or do more than 20 push-ups. I also

feel privileged to get to work out with people of a variety of backgrounds and ages, and that I can learn something from each of them. Finally, I feel that I could better defend myself if it ever became necessary. I have to be realistic about my chances because I am a petite person, but at least *now* my instinct would be to react and fight back.

There are many ways I can challenge myself between a first and second degree black belt. Earning a black belt is really a starting point, where now I've got the basic tools to actually begin learning about Tae Kwon Do. Every kick or movement can always be done with better speed, accuracy, or power. There are kicks I still need to work hard on to improve consistency and combinations I would like to be able to do fluidly. I haven't spent much time with the Bo Staff and I would like to become skilled at it. The last challenge I have for myself is to continue to persevere through the rough Crohn's days and to consistently keep coming to class. I want to set an example for my kids that you can overcome challenges and to do the best you can with whatever you've been given.