

Taekwon-Do Under Fire

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I accepted many risks in Taekwondo for many years in Afghanistan, because I loved Taekwondo. When I was very young my brother always talked about sports including Taekwondo. He told me that Taekwondo gives people the skill of strong defence. He told me that anyone could do this sport then he could fight with many opponents. I could not imagine that how it is possible to defeat many attackers. In that time I was a child of ten or eleven years old. After that Taekwondo was my dream. I thought every night and day about Taekwondo. I wished one day I will start Taekwondo to become strong and able to defeat others.

Finally my dream came true and my brother told me “Do you want to do Taekwondo?” When I was young about 12 years old my father and my mother had dead and it was my brother who made decisions for me. On that time I was 15 years old and I was a very good soccer player but very quickly I told my brother yes I really like to do Taekwondo. He told me that tomorrow morning he would go with me to register me in a Taekwondo club. I could not sleep that night, because I was very happy and I found my dream was about to come true. I started Taekwondo on an early morning at 4am in 1977 in a garden in Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan.

After a few training I understood that is a very special martial art. It has very strict rules and it is just for self defend not for attack and to force others. I was very proud doing Taekwondo. The first thing I understood from Taekwondo was how to respect people and respect the teacher and senior. It taught me never be aggressive, always be patient and do good thing for others. It showed me how to respect my family and others. I was very careful about these rules, because the punishment for some mistakes was very harsh. Sometimes you would lose your belt for six months or a year or you would have to leave Taekwondo forever.

Training was very hard, free sparing was very hard; no one was any protective gear. I had to fight hard. If you did not fight hard might someone hit you very hard. I did not worry about anyone else because you so worried about yourself. If you hit and hurt some one, you could not apologise for it. The weather was very cold but I trained because I loved it. I remember standing there, shivering and the instructor said, “Do you want to train?” all students replied “yes”. The instructor said if you can train in the cold, then you are strong enough to do ITF Taekwondo.

On that time there was a war in Afghanistan. The government did not like Taekwondo, so practicing became too risky. We lost many students to kept Taekwondo in Afghanistan. Government officials arrested many people and killed them if they did Taekwondo. Sometimes I came to training and I did not see someone, I knew they have gone to prison and never come again. For these reasons training was kept very secret.

Training still took place very early in the morning, so I had to leave home at 3am because I had to run or walk for one and half hours. Sometimes I would be lucky to jump on the back of a delivery lorry carrying fruit and vegetables to shorten my trip. Being late even by a matter of minutes meant that I was not allowed to train. If you wanted to train, you always had to be early.

Another problem was that if you leave home early in the morning, the Russian soldiers would be in the street and might prove to be very dangerous. But we never thought about it because we wanted to keep training in Taekwondo.

In 1982 I became an instructor and I taught Taekwondo for eight years. At that time the government attitude towards Taekwondo had changed, so the school could train openly. I had 680 students in 1982. In 1990 ITF Taekwondo experienced a large milestone. The Afghanistan Federation of Taekwondo was established. I was a vice president of Taekwondo Federation. We had a lot of demonstrations on TV, because the previous government had a lot of issues to introduce Taekwondo as violence.

In 1991 unfortunately the civil war started and federation had to close. I had to leave my hometown and I went to the north of Afghanistan called Mazarisharif. There was another opportunity to work for Taekwondo and introduce it. I started teaching there for five years.

In 1998 the Taliban took over Afghanistan and I had to leave the country. I went to Iran but I could not forget Taekwondo. It was part of my life. I found it very hard not being able to train. I had a very difficult life in Iran. I did not have any ID and job. I found some people who did ITF before the federation was closed there. We started training but after a while they moved to WTF and I was alone. I continued training alone on the mountain near my house, because there was a calm place to think about anything and train hard. I trained about 30% of 30 years of my Taekwondo training on the mountains.

Finally, in 2005 I came to New Zealand as a refugee with nothing. It was very surprising for someone who works in the Mangiere camp to see me running around the camp at 3am. I started training again. I explained to them that Taekwondo is an amazing school of mental and physical training. It had given me the power to stand up on my feet after 30 years of war. I never leave it and I will continue until I die.

Fortunately I have found Brooklyn Taekwondo club and the very nice and best instructor, Mr. Brett Kraiger. The first day I told him my history and he accepted me and allowed me to start the training. He has done so many things for me. My techniques were very old and he puts lots of energy in to change my old techniques to new techniques. I had found my Taekwondo family again.

In 2006 I Achieved my second don, and I was involved in national and local tournaments. I had some demonstrations at Massey University and the home tutor service.

This year I was in Germany and Holland to visit my family after 20 years. There I have found many of my previous students. They said they wanted to train like we had done in Afghanistan. We had a lot training there. When I started training there it was early morning at 5am, my older brother told me you never forgot Taekwondo training in the middle of the night.

Firstly I would like to thank the government of New Zealand for accepting my family and me into this wonderful country. Then I would like to thanks Mr. Kraiger for so many things that he has done for my family and me. I would also like to thank the New Zealand ITF Federation for allowing me to finally achieve my second Dan after so many years.

