

# What Tang Soo Do Means to Me

Written by: Robyn Goodwin, 1<sup>st</sup> Gup, Northwest Tang Soo Do

Translated into English, Tang Soo Do means “The way of the open hand”. Tang is from the Tang Dynasty of China. Soo means “open hand”, weaponless combat. Do, means way of life or art. Tang Soo Do Moo Duk Kwan was established in 1945 by Hwang Kee. The Hwa Rang warriors were an instrumental part of the Shilla military system during the Tang Dynasty. The Hwa Rang, loosely translated “flowering manhood”, were youth devoted to serving their king and country. They trained in military combat including *Soo* (Hand) *Bahk* (Hard) hand techniques, a weaponless fighting. The Hwa Rang adhered to a five-part code of honor written by the monk Won Kwang approximately 1,800 years ago. This code is the philosophical basis of Tang Soo Do and is adopted by most Tang Soo Do organizations today.

In 918 AD, the Shilla kingdom was overthrown and the Koryo Dynasty was established and lasted until 1392 AD. Martial arts flourished during this dynasty and became integrated into the military and social makeup of the times. Soo Bahk was practiced both as a fighting component and as a way to improve one’s physical and mental health, as well as a competitive sports activity.

During the next dynasty, The Yi Dynasty, Korea was invaded by the Japanese (1592-1598), followed by two Chinese invasions in 1627 and 1636. The Yi Dynasty collapsed with the invasion of the Japanese in 1909. As a result, Korean arts and culture were suppressed by the Japanese. During this time, Soo Bahk and other martial arts were practiced, but only underground. Hwang Kee studied both Soo Bahk and Tae Kyun. He then studied Kung Fu in China. His employment working on the railroad allowed him to travel throughout Korea, where he studied some books on Okinawan Karate. Thus in 1945, he founded the Tang Soo Do Moo Duk Kwan Federation. Incorporated in modern Tang Soo Do are fighting principals of Soo Bahk Do and techniques from northern and southern Chinese Kung Fu.

Several years ago, in looking for an activity for my then 7 year old son to be involved in, I sought out a local martial arts program, believing that every child could benefit from studying martial arts. It was in Rainier, Washington that I found Master Aubrey. Though my son did not continue training, my own passion for the art was revived as I watched various belt tests and tournaments. I could hardly stand to be on the sidelines. I was itching to settle back into that horse stance I remembered so well and start punching. Approximately 13 years earlier, I had received my first dobok for my 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, along with an enrollment into a karate program at a local community center. Due to a military move and my parents’ schedules, I was unable to pursue my interest. Approximately 9 years later, I was briefly able to enroll again into a Japanese style martial art, but the demands of life, another move, and lack of income prevented me from pursuing this further. It wasn’t until 1998 another 4 years later, that

I began studying Tang Soo Do under Master Robert A. Aubrey. I trained diligently both at the dojang and at home for a period of about 2 1/2 years, earning 2<sup>nd</sup> gup. I was again in what I call my natural element. I returned to pursuing my passion. The release of endorphins, the physical and mental challenges, and stimulation that happened as a result of my training produced in me a high that could not be manifested any other way. Due to the closure of the school, another move, and the demands of raising five children, my passion was once again put on the shelf.

It was not until mid January, 2008 that the ember that had long since been ignored beckoned for oxygen. Life's stresses were starting to weigh me down and I was feeling quite suffocated by them. My husband and two of my 5 children have a muscle deteriorating disease that is progressing. The impacts that this disease has on my family, as well as the routine pressures of having 5 teenage children were enough to tempt me to run away. I realized though at that point, that "no matter where I go.....there I am." Running away was not an option, because no matter where I find myself in life, the truth is, I have to cope, for I have an indomitable spirit. Anything less is not acceptable to me. It's who I am.

It was at this time that an old childhood friend suggested that I do something for myself. Doing something for myself has always been a challenge for me. My first thought is that I am strong enough to go without, so maybe I should. And, I typically question whether or not my getting or doing something for me is it at someone else's expense? Physical activity has always been an excellent method for me to deal with stress so I went for a walk after talking to my friend. At this time, I dialed the home number of my former Sabunim and left a message. Within a couple of days he returned my call and I was back in the dojang. Thankfully, I remembered how to tie my belt!

Although it was awkward at first, I knew I was where I belonged. I spent the next several weeks and months, relearning the forms and becoming familiar again with the terminology and protocol. I would encourage anyone who is thinking about returning to the art, to do so. It is very similar to riding a bike. For me personally, the stances, the pivoting, the ki-yaps all *felt* so right. Even the pushups, crunches, and leg lifts that burn my abdomen produced in me a rush that cannot be experienced anywhere else. Besides the affects of the physical training and the mental benefits that result, the mere act of controlling my breathing amazes me. Controlling my breathing allows me to focus. It allows me to take the time to choose. As I am faced with choices each and every day, just the mere act of focusing on my breathing allows me to collect my thoughts and feelings before I respond to a situation. I have heard and believe that  $E+R=O$ , or Event plus Response equals Outcome. In other words our response has as much or more to do with the outcome of situations than does the actual event.

All of these things have enhanced my life greatly, but they still are not the most important aspect of the art to me. No, the most important aspect of the art to me is the relationships. Being surrounded by and exposed to people of such a high caliber is the most treasured pearl of all. The Masters and Grandmasters who pour out their heart and soul, exhibiting patience and commitment to

students such as myself, these are my heroes. Each one is so humble, yet so powerful. Each one encourages and stimulates me to growth, passing on what was given to them by their Masters and Grandmasters. It is an ongoing relay, one generation of artists passing on what they know to the next generation so that it never dies.

In conclusion, as I approach the next step on this journey, demonstrating all that I have learned up until this point, in preparation for earning my black belt, I am reminded of the poem “The Flowering Warrior” written by Robert J. Ott. I read the poem in the biography of Master Robert J. Ott, “Certain Victory”. Reading this book was a turning point in my life because it showed me that even when it seems all odds are against you, you still have a choice. The choice is to view yourself as a victim and surrender to the assailant, whether it be a person or circumstance, or to search deep within the recesses of your heart and realize that you are a warrior and that a warrior never surrenders.

### **“The Flowering Warrior”**

When the wind and the cold air cuts through the skin while the endless surrounding of blackness  
encompasses our existence

In life we must then learn to see the true light.

For in life no one can take away our lust, passions, drives and dreams.

Nor can they take away the strength, courage and Indomitable spirit that we all carry inside.

Ultimately, the love of life and others will persevere through all of the challenging journeys that are  
faced.

In all we hold that of a Flowering Warrior who will never surrender.

As I approach the beginning, after all earning one’s black belt is the beginning of the journey I realize the meaning of Tang Soo Do encompasses physical, mental, and spiritual strength. It is a gift and an art. It is serious, it is fun, and it is peaceful. It is both self defense against an outside enemy, as well as self defense against the enemy within.