

Anyong ha shin neeka. My name is Bob Elliot, and I just turned 45 years of age. Though I reside here in Renton, and have lived in the greater Seattle area for almost 21 years, I am at heart (and always will be) a small town boy from Eastern Washington. I was born and raised in Ephrata, the same town in which my father was also born and raised, and likewise followed in his footsteps to Washington State University. As I write this, I hope upon recitation that I will be basking in the glow of our Apple Cup victory over the Huskies. I am a Civil Engineer, specializing in water resources including the study of rivers and floods.

I have been married almost 14 years to the truly lovely Denise Elliot, and we are blessed with two children: Isaac and Abby. It is because of my son Isaac that I became involved in Tae Kwon Do. Early on, he seemed to develop an interest in martial arts kicks, punches, blocks, and stances. This is in no small part due to watching old Power Rangers episodes, and providing Isaac the action figures with which to play. His Mamaw also noticed this interest and skill potential in him, encouraging us and helping us to enroll him in Tae Kwon Do at Lee's Martial Arts. For more than a year I was just a parent and observer of the program, but became impressed with it in a number of ways. The life values taught to the kids at the Dojang, such as discipline, respect and concentration, are as equally important as the physical skills and the exercise. We have seen that in Isaac, with his grades and focus in school, his confidence in sports, and in goal setting. We were also highly impressed with Isaac's birthday party which we held at the Dojang. Having anticipated merely a facility rental of the place, instead Denise and I were able to sit back and let the LMA staff run the show with fun and games and some basic Tae Kwon Do instruction for everyone. It was then we knew we had found the right place.

So, when they offered a free month of training for Dads, I eventually was convinced to give it a try. Even once I decided to stick with it, however, I didn't really initially see myself as a Black Belt. Mainly I craved the exercise, as my usual jogging and weight lifting routine was becoming stale, but more importantly an opportunity to do something together with my son. As I moved up the belt ranks, however, it became apparent that with a little effort Black Belt was an attainable goal – for both of us. So, I stand before you today, in many ways just as a Dad of a Tae Kwon Do kid who came along for the ride. But it's been a worthwhile ride indeed, with many memorable moments: the first belt advancement, the board breaks (from a simple axe kick in the beginning and now turn snap kicks and multiple boards), but perhaps most importantly, the many new friends made. Lee's Martial Arts strongly encourages family participation and fellowship, but the staff and students there have also become like a second family to Isaac and me.

Also emphasized at LMA is faith and spiritual development. Many if not most of you here have been to the Renton Dojang. In the mural at the front of the room is given a scriptural reference: 1 Peter 5:6-7. How many of you have looked that up? Here's what it says: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on

him because he cares for you". This teaches us a couple things, one being humility. For the Bible does teach us to humbly consider others more important than ourselves, which is in fact the basic point in Number 3 of the LMA Student Creed, which tells us never to fight to achieve selfish ends but to develop might for right. Basically this is the Golden Rule, to put others rights and needs before our own selfishness. Another thing we learn from 1 Peter 5:6-7 is that when feeling weak or anxious, we can turn to and be lifted up by One who is mighty and who cares for us. In those moments during workouts when I'm feeling weak, for example after Instructor Michael's third set of pushups, crunches, and squats, I can look up to the front of the room and be reminded of this truth and find personal strength from it. Similar verses can be found saying "I can do everything through him who gives me strength", and "the LORD is my rock, He gives me strength for war and skill for battle". These references can actually be found on apparel worn by Sabunim Robert, and I'm sure serve to remind him as it can remind all of us that we need strength just to get through each day, for life in this world is a battle. Other scriptural references you can find in the Dojang teach us to bear good fruit and to live by the Spirit and not by our sinful natures.

I do not apologize for speaking at length about faith and the Bible, for as a Christian these are very important aspects of my life. It also provides a foundation for the moral code taught and the attitude instilled at LMA Renton, including the Children's Home Rules and the Student Creed. I am sincerely thankful to have LMA Renton as a place that my son and I can go to, where these beliefs are taught and practiced, and where we exercise not only our bodies but also our mind and heart and our spiritual well-being.

As I close, I am reminded of my much younger days when I was driven by a desire to earn awards and to achieve personal recognition. As I grew older those things became less important and my focus shifted to my career and then providing for my family. I figured I was through striving for awards, and certainly becoming a Black Belt at middle age would have been the furthest thing from my mind. But one thing Tae Kwon Do has taught me, however, is that I can still set goals for myself. Even if my motivation has changed, and I think or at least hope it has, from one of self pride and glory to one of personal growth and service to others. And so it is, not with pride but with humility and thankfulness, that I receive this belt promotion. The real reward for me, however, has already been achieved. It is neither the destination where I've now arrived nor the color of the belt around my waist, but the journey that was taken to get here. I humbly thank Sabunim Robert, Micah, and Geoffrey – also Master Lee – and the SWAT team for their patience, encouragement, instruction, and friendship over these past several years. Special thanks also to my extended family, some of whom are here, for their prayers and support. I love you all very much. Especially I thank my wife Denise and daughter Abby, whose schedules are often rearranged and inconvenienced so that Isaac and I can do our guy stuff at the Dojang. Thank you and God bless you all.