

A Tiger's Pride

At our last black belt test, we were honored by having a very special guest judge; my Grandmaster, joined the testing panel. He was my instructor and tested me for my lower ranking black belt degrees.

I had not seen my Master in over 15 years. The last time I saw him was when I was packing to move to Korea to join the Korean Tiger Professional Demonstration Team. Although I have not seen him in a decade and a half, I have no doubt that the character traits he instilled in his black belts are in part responsible for the great success of my school today.

I selected his school from its reputation and had already made up my mind to join before I found out where it was located. "Good thing I'll be learning self-defense, because I probably should not be in this part of town," I would tell myself. There was a tattoo parlor as a neighbor on one side and I believe a massage parlor on the other side, hard to tell, the windows were blacked out. No parking in the front, had to park in the back and walk around the block.

Inside, the training floor was covered in a big geometric pattern deep shag carpet. It made you a little dizzy when running laps at the beginning of class. The shag was great; you could grab a fistful and use it to pull yourself down when trying to stretch into the splits. The carpet was stinky enough to encourage you to push your face away from it when you thought you could not possibly do another push up.

By today's standards, with martial arts schools located in every new shopping center and padded wall to wall with Swain mats, this all sounds very funny. But back in the day, this was a nice school. It was our school and we loved it.

My Master had a way of instilling pride and honor within our school and we were fiercely loyal.

I remember when a new school opened down the road. It was so close we could see it from our front sidewalk. Out of curiosity, a few of us went to take a look inside. It was laid out nicely, big and clean, smelled nice too. Never once did it ever occur to anyone to "change schools". Back then we did not have contracts binding us, we were free to go. Instead, we pitched in and bought some supplies. We called a few other students and over the weekend we cleaned up our own school and gave it a fresh coat of paint. We all understood that the new school was nicer, so we did our part to help bring our own school up to par.

In time, I became the manager of the school. One day, a Master from another school stopped by to visit. He brought me a little gift from Korea and then offered me a job being the manager of his school. "Whatever you are being paid now, I will double," he offered. I was flattered and offended at the same time. I was happy someone thought I was doing a good job taking care of the school, but it was out of the question that I would ever leave my school, especially to work for the competition. I respectfully declined the offer and laughed to myself. "Double of \$0 is still \$0, after all." This was a labor of love, I was just a volunteer.

Over the years, a variety of masters taught classes at our school. They would come and go, but Grandmaster made sure the school was always being taken care of. Our leader attended more and more to his duties of being an owner and

businessman and although he was not physically on the floor, his presence was always felt.

It was my Master who took me to Korea and opened the doors for my involvement with the Korean Tiger Professional Demonstration Team. I had already learned so much from my Master on managing a school, but it was this two years experience with the team in Korea of training, learning, and making connections that sealed the deal and prepared me to develop my own curriculum and open my own school someday. I knew upon returning to the states, I would no longer have my advertising business to support me, and for the first time, it would be necessary to support myself from teaching martial arts. My style had evolved, I had ideas that were too progressive for my old school and there was no place for me there.

It would have been easier to return to Detroit; all my friends were still there, I had grown up there, and I knew the area. I had kept in contact with many of my old students, parents of students and instructors, some of who encouraged me to make a school nearby. I have no doubt that I could have opened my doors with some "starter students and staff" from my old school. But I was wise enough to know things (and people/relationships) that are stolen from another are never truly yours.

Of all the things my Master taught me, the most important was respect and honor. Forever I will be grateful and appreciative of the opportunities he provided for me. There were no "non-compete" forms used by schools back then, but Michigan was the last place on Earth I would consider making a school. From Korea, I flew back to the states, bypassed Michigan completely and landed in North Carolina to establish White Tiger. I would build my school the right way, the hard way...I would earn it.

Fifteen years later I was finally able and ready to show my school to my Master. As he entered the bustling school, I could see the sense of pride in his eyes. Yes, he was proud of me and happy for my success. He shared some of that pride as well, for his teachings instilled in me are what helped create this school. Although he resides near his school (a new beautiful school in a good area) in Michigan, in my heart and within the walls of White Tiger, his presence is always felt.

Master Rondy is a sixth-degree black belt in WTF Taekwondo, a fourth-degree in Hapkido and a second-degree in Kickboxing. She was the only non-Asian member of the Korean Tigers Professional Martial Arts Team, spending two years in Korea, living in Seoul and YongIn. Master Rondy successfully blends the cultures of a Korean teaching staff and an American management staff for her 24,000 square foot superschool located in Cary, North Carolina. For more information visit whitetigertkd.com.

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East Meets West By Master Rondy