

A Working Woman In Korea

I applaud *TaeKwonDo Times* for publishing another women's issue. I imagine most women in martial arts do not stop and think about themselves as a female martial artist, but simply as a martial artist. We trained the same amount of years, put in the same sweat, and took the same tests as our male classmates. It is usually someone else who makes a big deal about it when they can't believe that we have a black belt; that we are not just going to martial arts class, but will be instructing; or that we are not the secretary of the dojang, but the owner.

I often write about my living in Korea and being able to extract the best from that culture and my own to create White Tiger. In most aspects it is a pretty fair share of some of theirs and some of mine to make the complete and perfect package. I could not say the same for being a woman working in Korea.

My initial visa when I started training with the Tigers was stamped for only six months. The status had run out during a U.S. tour and I needed to obtain a working visa in order to return to Korea with the team. Master Chang and I had been married during the tour, but the ink on the license had not dried yet and I couldn't use it to get a spouse visa. The fact that he was just entering his junior year of college and that I was older did not help much. I had to take a real job teaching ESL (English as a Second Language) in a Hogwon (English school). I would be teaching four hours a day, four one-hour classes back to back from 6 to 10 p.m. My first class was for middle school students, then high schoolers, next university students, and last, for the professors from the local universities.

In Seoul, there are many foreign ESL teachers. Most I met were from Europe or New Zealand and I had a hard time understanding them. English teachers actually from America were highly sought after.

The Tigers were moving their training to the little city of YongIn, near YongIn University, located 30 minutes outside of Seoul. The owner of the local Hogwon seemed quite happy to advertise that he would be having an official American teaching at his business. He never had this opportunity before; most Americans would prefer to live in a big city. In fact, I never saw another American in that city the entire time I lived in YongIn. My boss had me go to photo shoots and plastered my American face all over posters and flyers.

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.

He would always try to drag me out for public appearances and show me off. I tried to get out of them the best I could. I appreciated the fact that because he hired me, I had a visa allowing me to continue to live in his country. It was just that I had owned my own advertising agency back in the States, and had not had to answer to a "boss" in a long time. Also, I was working only because I had to, both for a visa and to support us, but all I really wanted to do was train.

My boss did little to enhance my working experience when at the end of the first month he walked up to me with a stack of cash in his fist. Paychecks were paid out in real cash. He said, "It is payday."

"Great!" I said and respectfully held my hand out.

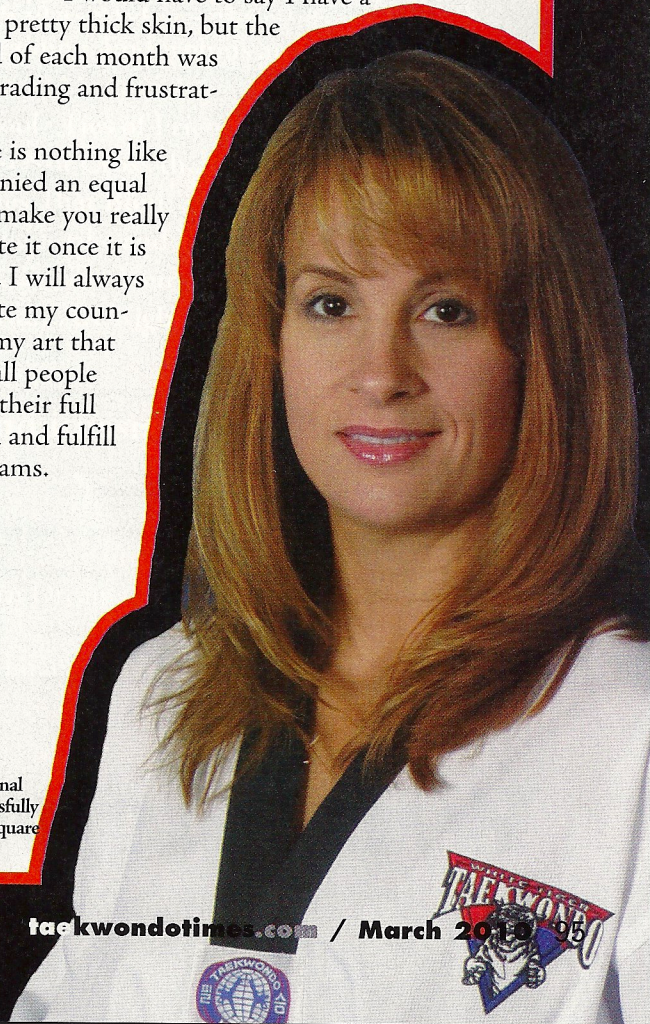
He pulled the stack of cash close to his chest and shook his head from side to side, saying, "Please tell your husband to come pick up your paycheck."

Trying to be helpful, I said, "That's okay, you can give it to me, I'm right here. Besides, my husband (the unemployed college student) is busy at school." But there was no way that guy was going to give that money to a woman. "But he has only been my husband for 30 days!" No dice, not budging. He was just a little guy. I could have taken the cash if I really wanted it. Just the satisfaction of knowing that, kept me employed beyond the first month.

I would have to say I have a pretty thick skin, but the end of each month was very degrading and frustrating.

There is nothing like being denied an equal right to make you really appreciate it once it is restored. I will always appreciate my country and my art that enables all people to reach their full potential and fulfill their dreams.

Please
tell your
husband to
come pick
up your pay-
check



By Master Rondy