

# Tang Soo Do Bridges the Generations

by Joe Goss, Jr.

When most people start training in Tang Soo Do (karate) it is a new and foreign experience. They enter the dojang (studio), either as a child or an adult, and are introduced to a totally different atmosphere than they are accustomed to - people marching up and down a floor in bare feet punching and kicking, half the time yelling "Yes sir!" and the rest of the time just yelling. This and the amount of respect shown the instructor and other students appears odd to most people. Until they have been training for awhile they do not understand. My experience was very different.

There has not been a time in my life that I have not been around Tang Soo do. My earliest memories are of times spent with students at the dojang, going to dinners with Masters and playing with Masters' children. For me Tang Soo Do was just part of growing up.

I actually started training when I was six. I can remember my father standing in the entrance to the training area asking me if I would like to join the other kids in the class. I hesitated, not sure if I wanted to. Then I saw a child student who I looked up to motioning for me to come in. So, I started.

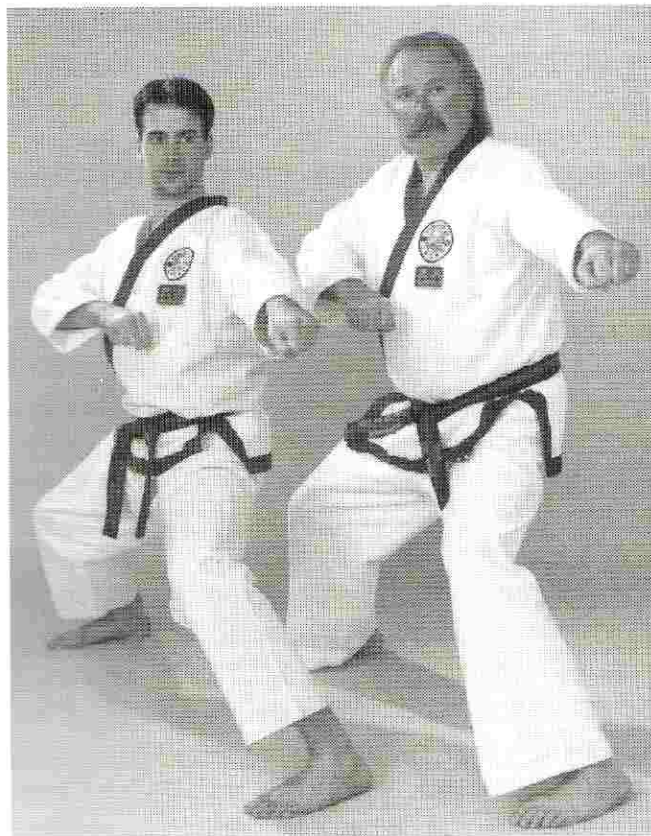
It took me awhile to adjust to a teacher/student relationship with my father. In my first class I called him "Dad." All the kids laughed. From then on it was Sabom Nim (Master Instructor) in class and around students. I would still have a father/son attitude (all fathers and sons will know what I'm talking about) in class sometimes instead of a teacher/student. I was well into my teens before I knew when to treat my father as "Dad" and when to treat him as Sabom Nim. It's a little like having two people in one body. I learned that anything that happens between you and your father at home, good or bad, stays at home. At the dojang he's your Sabom Nim - you must train under and teach for him with a clear mind.

It took time and was very stressful, but I began to understand this. I am very thankful my father/Sabom Nim and I made it through this. However, I can fully understand why many Masters' children would not continue training.

In elementary school I was picked on a lot because of who I was - my father is very well known in our area. Being a very meek child I put up with the harassment. It was not until junior high school that I realized that not everyone did Tang Soo Do. I defended myself and the harassment stopped.

When I started training I was not very good. I was very inflexible and not very coordinated. Recently, one of my seniors told me the Dans from my father's school and other schools would talk about me: "Sabom Nim Goss is good and has good students. Maybe his son has a problem we don't know about." No problem - I just stunk.

The first tournament I attended was in Pittsburgh when I was seven. The first tournament I



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placed in was New Jersey - I was 15. For years I went to tournaments all over the place and never won anything. There were two reasons for this. In forms competition I simply lacked the technical ability it takes to win. In sparring I might have done better, but because I was taller than most children my age I was always put into a higher age division. (When you are nine years old fighting 12 and 13 year olds you simply get beat up.) My father never said a word or complained. I would be standing dazed, bruised and beaten after a match. My father would come over to me and say, 'Some-day son, there won't be an older division to put you in and you will be better for having this happen to you.' He was right.

I guess I got used to competing against the "older kids." At 14 I started entering the men's division instead of juniors. I did this about half the time knowing I would be able to win as much, but feeling I would learn more. Doing well at a tournament should mean you have walked away from it having learned something - not that you won a trophy.

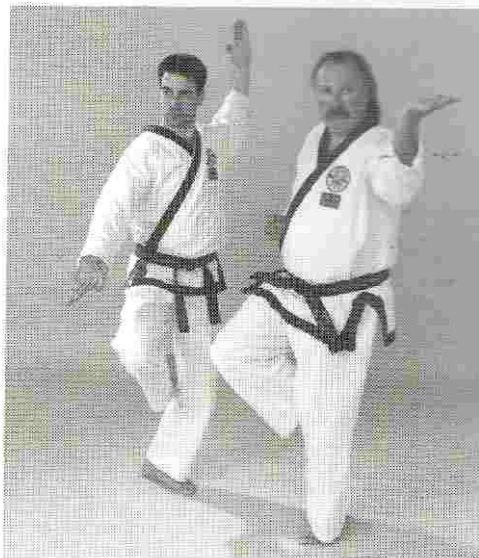
Since I was a Master's son many people didn't believe I had earned the ranks I had achieved. (Cho Dan at age 9, Sa Dan by age 19) or the trophies I would win. I trained long and hard to prove them wrong.

From the age of 12 until I was 18 I would get home from school, eat, get to the dojang at 5:00 and train until 9:00 or 10:00. I did this five days a week. I felt a need to prove to everyone that it was through my father's instruction that I did well, not his "political influence."

When I did start to improve people said it was because my father was giving me "special training." Never did my father spend extra time training me, in or out of class. In fact, I would often complain to my mother about how little he would correct my technique. I would see my father take other students (many times my juniors) aside and teach them things that to this day he has not taught me. It would make me jealous and I would leave the dojang thinking maybe I wasn't good enough to be shown those things. so I would work harder the next time I was in class. I found out later that these students had asked my father to work with them - I never did.

My father treated me like all his other students. Because of that none of the students

were jealous of me for any reason. My relationship with them has always been good. I am proud to say that my father's students improve and become good not because of extra time or special training but because of the quality of his instruction. I am also proud to say I am one of these students.



**"Since both of us train in and teach Tang Soo Do in Johnstown ... and are only 12 minutes apart ... we sometimes switch locations for a change of pace."**