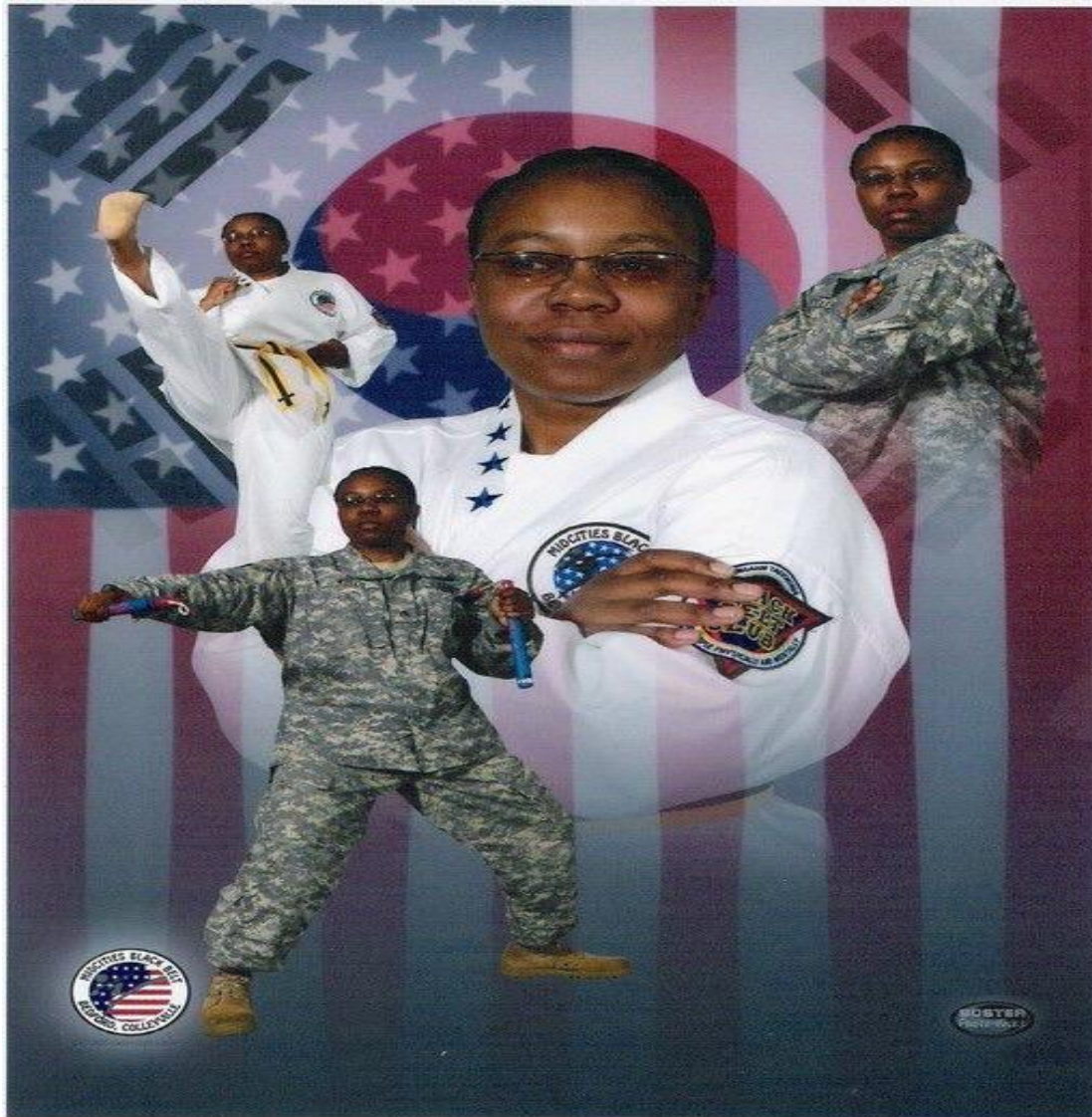


# My Martial Arts Journey



by

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“What qualifies you to attain this goal of becoming a Black Belt?”

I believe that I am ready to accept the challenge of becoming a Black Belt. Why? Because along my martial arts journey as well as my journey through life, I have developed the patience and tenacity to overcome the many obstacles that have been placed in my path.

At some point in my martial arts journey (I've been training off and on in the martial arts since I was a teenager), I never really entertained the thought of becoming a Black Belt. To me, becoming a Black Belt was an “unattainable goal” reserved only for those who wanted to achieve martial arts excellence. I never thought that I would ever be on the side of achieving such an esteemed rank ever in my lifetime! Throughout the years, I've studied or rather “dabbled” in various styles of martial arts. I first started my martial arts training in the basement of my church. My sensei “teacher” was a deacon of the church, and a probation officer who worked for the city. The style was called Okinawan Goju Ryu karate. The cost was only \$30.00 a year! My sensei taught us out of his love for the art and out of love for the youth of the church. I trained twice a week. This was my first real taste of martial arts training outside of watching the requisite martial arts movie that came on during “Kung Fu Theater”. I absolutely loved the classes and my high school friends thought that it was “cool” and “awesome” that I was practicing karate! Little did I know that the training that I received would help me to develop the inner strength that I never knew I had. The training helped me do well on the track team and it also helped me to endure the rigors of Basic Training and to pass the Physical Fitness test when I joined the Army. It's been many years since I've set foot into the dojo of my former church, but the lessons that I've learned were very valuable and I am still learning from my experiences even today.



(Twelfth Baptist Church Karate Dojo, circa 1993? That's me in the upper right corner.)

While in the Army, I searched for martial arts training equivalent to the training that I was accustomed to at home. I tried Kung Fu, Olympic-style TaeKwonDo (I made it to Orange Belt), Jhoon Rhee TaeKwonDo, Shotokan Karate, and even Kendo! You name it; I've probably tried it! None of the training was a good "fit" for me. While I was getting into shape physically, I was "out of shape" mentally. After awhile, I just gave up on martial arts. I got into bodybuilding and yoga briefly. After deployments, change-of-duty stations, moving from state to state, country-to-country, there was a growing void in my martial arts training. When I was assigned as a recruiter to the DFW area, I needed to do something that would help me to withstand the rigors and demands of recruiting duty. One great thing about being a recruiter was the fact that I was allowed to choose a physical fitness activity that would help me to maintain my physical fitness level. I chose to get back into martial arts again. I looked for a martial arts school in the Yellow Pages and found a school that had the training and the level of physical activity that I so needed. I was back on track. At this time, becoming a Black Belt was an attainable goal. It was there, it was possible, and it was very well in reach!



(ATA World Championships, Little Rock, AR circa 2007 Me as a Camo Belt)



(Carrollton ATA circa 2007 Me as a newly-promoted Blue Belt)

The military had other plans for me. I ended up being re-assigned to another duty station, again putting my martial arts training on hold. Once I retired from the Army and started my “second career” as a full-time student, I decided to get back into the “swing of things” and get back into my martial arts training. I really believe that it’s never too late to accomplish my goal of earning my Black Belt! The only thing that was holding me back was myself! One of the biggest things that I have learned throughout my martial arts journey, is to have patience and in due diligence, my goals will be soon realized! Patience is such a virtue, especially in the martial arts! Upon my return to training, I was becoming frustrated because I wasn’t “getting it” or “I wasn’t catching on” like everyone else. This left me feeling isolated and kind of embarrassed. Every training cycle presented me a new challenge, as there is something new to learn even while I was doing the same poomsae (form) over and over again! As I continued to train, I’ve learned that it takes time to learn something new and it takes even longer to “perfect” it. Knowing and understanding this, I have been better able to have patience and not give up even when the techniques gave me trouble and frustration.

Patience is a learned skill, that when applied outside of the dojang, can show your supervisors, professors, and family that when something is extremely difficult or next to impossible to accomplish, that you don’t stop or quit. Martial arts is quite challenging and can be very difficult at times, but by having patience and staying the course, I believe that the more that I work on my goals, many things can be achieved.



(Marshall’s ATA In-School Tournament July 2015)



(Texas Twister TaeKwonDo Tournament August 2015)

As a Black Belt, I hope to continue my training in the martial arts. Why? First of all, I absolutely love martial arts and I am really looking forward to what lies ahead for me as a Black Belt! To me, being a Black Belt is not merely a physical thing, it's also a mental a spiritual thing as well. Being a Black Belt means having a "Black Belt attitude", which comprises of humility, character, and personal conduct. As a Black Belt, I hope to take what I've learned on the dojang floor and apply those lessons to the different areas of my own life. I will not "show off" my skills to prove a point; I will have the wisdom and discernment as to know when NOT to use my martial art.

In closing:

"In victory, be humble. In defeat, be strong. In all things, be fair."

-Eternal Grandmaster Haeng Ung (H.U.) Lee (1936-2000)

"There's always more to learn."

-Grandmaster (Emeritus) Soon Ho Lee (19??-)