

Inspirational Martial Arts Stories 2006-3

From: www.your-martial-arts-resources.com

Taking on Tourette's:

From: <http://www.belleville.com/mld/belleville/living/14713763.htm>

(June 4, 2006):

During karate class, Andria Dontigney of Swansea focuses on kicks instead of tics. On her instructor's three count, 12-year-old Andria balanced on her right leg, then delivered a quick kick with her left.

No blinking. No grimacing. No finger snapping.

She was concentrating on karate at Belleville's east end YMCA to think about Tourette's Syndrome.

Each kick is a way of releasing pent up frustration. Sort of a "take that" for every time her body twitches uncontrollably.

What is Tourette's?

"A neurological disease you get from your parents, and it's annoying," said Andria, who also blinks, grimaces and taps her fingers unexpectedly.

Sometimes, she has a series of high-pitched hiccups.

Andria can usually feel a tic about to happen, sort of like a sneeze coming on.

"I warn people I'm going to start tapping," said Andria, who drums her fingers on a desk or chair.

"I have a lot of motion in my hands," said the preteen, who tosses a hackey sack from hand to hand when she needs to release extra energy at home.

She has attended three public schools in Belleville. Her mom Christine, 37, started homeschooling her this spring when the tics and Andria's frustration with them got in the way of her education.

Being a preteen can be awkward. Add Tourette's to the mix, and Andria has extra challenges each day.

Her dad John, 49, said Tourette's runs in his family. Andria began showing signs of Tourette's at age 5 in Wisconsin. In second grade, Andria developed one of her first tics.

"She would bark like a dog and fall out of her desk," said Christine. She outgrew this tic only to gain the hand-tapping and hiccuping.

The Dontigneys have a dilemma.

Andria has special needs in the classroom, but they don't fit into traditional categories.

Christine said doctors had tested Andria, and she has no learning disabilities. She devours Harry Potter books and "The Chronicles of Narnia."

Keeping her hands still at school is hard for Andria, especially when she's nervous about a state standardized test or other kids watching her.

"I started tapping and I couldn't concentrate on the ISAT because I kept thinking about trying not to (tic)."

Sometimes, she would have to leave the classroom until the tics stopped. Other times, she'd just get frustrated. "One time I punched a wall," said Andria.

She worked with counselors at school and earned a stuffed monkey as a prize for self-control. "It was for three weeks of good accomplishments," said Andria.

She sees a counselor regularly at I Think I Can, a counseling center in Fairview Heights, and takes medication to help control side effects of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder. Taking karate helps, too.

Sensei Bill Anderson is pleased with her alertness in class. "She's a good student, and it's a great way to teach self-control," said her karate teacher. "It's not just about karate. It's about working together as a group and fitting in."

Fitting in is tough for Andria. "I get along well with boys," said Andria.

Andria's a favorite with youngsters on her street. Two grade school boys like to toss her a football.

Andria also has obsessive compulsive disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. She feels a need to repeat mundane tasks such as touching a wall.

Doctors say she can learn to control these behaviors but not Tourette's.

"Sometimes you can't tell the difference. When do we discipline and when do we ignore it?" said Christine.

Christine and John say Andria's tics have gotten worse this past year.

"Doctors say it peaks at adolescence," said Christine.

Andria has a 33 percent chance of having fewer tics by the time she finishes puberty.

"If she stays like this, OK. But is she going to get better or worse?" said Christine.

What should other students do when they see someone start to tic? "Just ignore them and let them do it," said Andria.

It's easier said than done.

Having Tourette's has made Andria more compassionate.

"It helps you to understand people with a disability and not to make fun of other people," said Andria.

When Andria is frustrated, she tries to remember a poem written by her mom's friend, who also has Tourette's.

"I'm getting mad. I don't want to do anything bad. So I'll count to ten. If it doesn't work, I'll do it again."

Picture this: 'The Blind Eagle Scout':

From: <http://www.northjersey.com>
(June 5, 2006):

Nineteen-year-old Matthew Graves cuts lawns to earn some extra cash, like a lot of kids his age. As an Eagle Scout candidate, it's part of what he does, perform community service. But what makes this good deed so great is that he's completely blind.

Yet mowing a neighbor's yard, with a little guidance from his dad, is one of the remarkable everyday things he does regularly. Things most people take for granted, he takes as a challenge.

Like wrestling. He held his own on Leonia's varsity team, wrestling in the competitive 140-145-pound weight class. Or the shot put and javelin on the high school track team and the black belt he's working toward in karate. He's even a junior fireman at the Ridgefield Park station house, following in his old man's boots. Being blind is an obstacle for sure, but don't tell this kid he can't do it, because he will.

"He's blind, not dead," says his father, Harry, who coaches him and encourages him every step of the way.

Matt was born with good vision, but then around age 8, something seemed wrong. In the blink of an eye, his sight was gone. "The tumor stopped sending pictures to my brain," he says.

Matt has optic glioma, slow-growing tumors that form along the optic nerves. "They told him it might be years," recalls Harry. "It was weeks. He went through chemo and radiation. It just happened like that."

"At first I felt kinda sad that I wouldn't see things I used to see," Matt says. "Like sunsets. The skyline of New York. I miss seeing my friends, my family, the leaves in the fall."

"I would be bitter as hell," Harry says. "But he hasn't been that way. I wouldn't want anyone to lose their sight. [But] it made him do more things. How do you tell him no?"

The father and son are an easygoing team, telling jokes and stories. Together they entertain as well as inspire. Often Matt will make light of his handicap by cracking jokes. "Dad, it looks good to me," Matt quips after cutting the patch of grass behind the firehouse, with his father guiding him by the shoulder. He snaps at the photographer who just shot his picture with a bright camera flash: "Ohhh, now I can't see!"

Matt cuts about three to four lawns a month, and performs similar chores in Troop 3's "Rent-a Scout" program, which provides Scouts with an opportunity to earn cash to help pay for trips.

Matt will become an Eagle Scout later this summer. He says he earned merit badges in archery, climbing and rifle. "I outshot the troop," he brags.

"Some people don't even know he's blind," says Harry. "We treat him like a regular kid."

Getting his vision back is a slim possibility, says Harry. There's an outside chance on a medical breakthrough in regenerating nerves.

"To see again [is my dream], and get my sight back," says Matt. "And if I do, to become a police officer. I just don't want to sit around."

My fight for life:

From: <http://www.leedstoday.net/ViewArticle2.aspx?SectionID=39&ArticleID=1545389>
(June 5, 2006):

Andrew, 17, tells how kick-boxing helped him survive coma ordeal

A teenager who was knocked down by a speeding driver and spent four weeks in a coma has made a remarkable recovery... and he puts it all down to kick-boxing.

Black belt Andrew Stott's story is one of courage and determination.

The 17-year-old, from Armley, Leeds, was struck by a car on the wrong side of the road, whilst visiting his gran in Liverpool on August 6 last year.

After spending a month in a coma, during which time he had four major operations, he learned a terrible piece of news – that while he had been battling for his life, his elder brother, Philip, 24, had died.

Andrew's accident left him blind in his right eye and deaf in his left ear. In addition, the sports-mad teenager who had just passed 12 GCSEs, had a fractured skull, broken collar bone, jaw, eye socket, ribs, all his fingers and fractures to part of his spine.

Fitness

Doctors had to carry out four operations to remove blood clots from his brain and other procedures to keep him alive.

Andrew, who has practiced kick-boxing since he was eight, spoke about his ordeal and why he is determined to fulfil his dreams. He said: "My mum and dad thought they might lose me a number of times. I had to have some operations and the doctors said afterwards they would not have been able to carry them out if I hadn't been as fit. They said it was down to my fitness that I survived.

"I can only remember a few hours before the accident. I was due to go on holiday. I had just finished my GCSEs and was going to go away the week after.

"When I was told about Philip, I was very upset. He was trying to get into music college."

Although Andrew has been told he can no longer take part in contact sports such as rugby and football, he returned to kick-boxing as soon as he was able and is preparing for his second degree blackbelt.

He said: "I train three times a week, concentrating at the moment on pad, bag and air work. Eventually, I want to go to college to do sport and recreation."

His instructor, Tony Higo, who runs National Martial Arts College centres in Armley, Pudsey and Horsforth, said: "Andrew has fought back to rebuild his ambitions of making a career in martial arts. He made a dramatic recovery which, according to the doctors was due in no small part to his high level of physical fitness gained through his martial arts training."

His mum Ann, said: "Four times he had to have operations, including two on his brain. They told us they were doing things to him they would not do to other people and that was because he was so fit. We thought he would have to give up the kick-boxing but he has got back to fitness and the club has been brilliant. It has always been a big part of his life."

Andrew will take his second black belt grading, along with 20 other students, in September.

Ninja gran still pulling punches:

From: http://www.metro.co.uk/weird/article.html?in_article_id=14877&in_page_id=2
(June 7, 2006):

While most people settle for a telegram from the Queen, one woman wants to celebrate her 100th birthday by gaining a black belt in karate.

Ida Blake, 86, is already part of the way there having achieved her orange belt.

The grandmother-of-five, from Tooting, South London, took up the martial art three years ago because 'older people sit around too much'.

She added: 'I'll probably be 100 by the time I get to the black belt.

Young women determined to live independent lives:

From: <http://159.54.227.3/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060609/OPINION03/606090331>
(June 9, 2006):

Kelly Stewart and Nina Gulbranson are young Olympia-area women who had to add disability-related challenges to the usual assortment of hopes, dreams and stresses most young adults encounter in making the move from high school to productive jobs.

Not only are they pursuing their own interests and earning their own money, they are beginning to achieve a new level of independence that all young people experience after finishing high school.

I believe we define our lives in terms of transitions - from school to work, sometimes to further education and almost always to greater independence. For young people like Stewart and Gulbranson, the transition from high school is especially momentous because of the promise of greater independence that employment brings.

I showcase the stories of Stewart and Gulbranson to underline work's importance to people with disabilities.

Stewart first learned about vocational rehabilitation services during an outreach and orientation visit with Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Cathy Monroe at Tumwater High School when she was 16.

Monroe helped Stewart get training and placement assistance from Morningside, a local nonprofit organization whose mission it is to advance the employment and self-sufficiency of individuals with disabilities. Through this partnership and her own determination, Stewart, now 22, has earned her high school diploma, works three days a week at Wagner's European Bakery and Cafe and is well on her way to earning her second black belt in karate.

Stewart is a very disciplined and goal-oriented person. She earned her black belt in Shotokan Karate at age 17 by practicing five hours a day for six years. With that kind of determination and follow-through, it's no wonder that Stewart was able to successfully prove her work skills at Wagner's by completing a trial work experience arranged by Morningside. Following the assessment, Wagner's offered her a job. Stewart performs various duties at the bakery, including dishwashing, and enjoys her job and fellow employees. Her employer and coworkers also value her.

Stewart continues to be involved with martial arts and is on her way to earning her second black belt in Shito-ryu. She participates in Special Olympics in soccer, softball and horseback riding. She has a very full life, and that is the way she wants it. She hopes to attend college and earn a degree.

"I'm in awe of my daughter," says Stewart's mom, Sandra.

Gulbranson also participated in a school-to-work partnership with DVR and Morningside. From the moment Gulbranson was referred for supported employment from the Rainier School District, it was apparent that she was ready to go to work.

Her main goal was to work at a movie theater. She got some help from DVR, and luckily, the Lacey 16 Cinemas opened at just the right time. Moviegoers at the Lacey Cinemas may find Gulbranson taking their tickets, directing them to the appropriate cinema or cleaning up spilled popcorn. She is a valued member of the cleaning crew that prepares the theaters before each showing and keeps them clean during the shows.

Gulbranson has been successfully employed for more than nine months. While she is proud and content with her job, she is always thinking of the future and what it may hold for career advancement.

The common ingredients in both of these success stories include motivated young women, supportive families, receptive local businesses that saw potential in these workers, skilled counseling and guidance from DVR counselors and outstanding transition support services from Morningside Inc.

Both women enrich our community with their skills, commitment to work, personalities and determination to live independent, productive lives.

Kentucky officer loses leg but not courage to overcome:

From: <http://www.officer.com/article/article.jsp?siteSection=1&id=31125>
(June 20, 2006):

Louisville -- If a police officer loses a leg in an accident, it pretty much means losing his job. In fact, city officials know of only three officers in the country who have returned to work after having a leg amputated -- well, make that four now. Scott Reynolds brings us the story of the amazing comeback of Louisville Metro Police Officer Kevin Trees.

When you see a police helicopter in action, you might think it has something to do with traffic or a crime. But regardless of the situation, with Officer Trees at the controls, it's all about courage.

Trees lost control of his motorcycle three years ago, and nearly lost his life. Even LMPD Chief Robert White police believed Trees would never be back on duty again. "If I was a gambling man, I would have given him a thousand-to-one odds that it wasn't going to happen."

The near tragedy happened just three weeks after Trees received the Louisville Officer of the Year award in 2003. His right leg was severely injured, and after a two-and-a-half year battle and 33 surgeries, doctors finally had to amputate.

But Trees wasn't satisfied with a desk job, so he decided to fight to return to active duty outside the confines of the police station. He hopes his determination sets an example for his kids as well as other people with similar leg injuries -- like soldiers returning from battle in Iraq.

So Trees shunned walkers and crutches, and endured sleepless nights in agonizing pain. "If my purpose for being on this Earth nowise to lose a leg and inspire other people, then so be it. I'm completely satisfied with that."

Now, he uses karate to help give him the confidence to handle any situation an officer might encounter, training with fellow officer and 20-year expert in karate, Major Bill Weedman.

"This man's got two good legs, Weedman said. "The only difference is he can take one of them off."

Chief White says "he's probably back in as good of shape as 80 percent of the police officers. And he's not satisfied with that. I don't know if I've met an individual that was just so determined to get to a certain place in life. And Kevin never gave up."

So the next time you see a Louisville police chopper, just remember, the pilot could be Kevin Trees, an officer who doesn't see himself living with a disability -- he's living out his dreams. "I feel like I'm the luckiest guy in the world," Trees said. "And I don't take anything for granted."

Officer Trees didn't surprise everyone. His good friend Major Weedman says he knew about Trees' perseverance and dedication, and correctly predicted he'd be back to work at Churchill Downs for the Derby.

He's expected to be flying solo for LMPD sometime this summer.

Taekwon-Do instructor needs help to compete:

From: <http://www.themercury.co.za/index.php?fArticleId=3301715>
(June 21, 2006):

Njabulo NtshaliNtshali, 21, was born a sickly child in need of an urgent blood transfusion.

He grew up in the harsh KwaNdengezi township outside Pinetown and has lived with his mother, a child-care worker, at an orphanage in Durban since he was 10. He tried to join a karate class when he was seven but was told he was "too weak".

Not discouraged, NtshaliNtshali took up Taekwon-Do, another martial art, and has risen through the ranks to become the highest ranked black Taekwon-Do competitor in the country, being selected to represent South Africa at an international competition in North Korea, the home of the sport, later this year.

He said of his rise from obscurity: "It's great that I am where I am now. There were people who thought I couldn't do it, but I'm better (at martial arts) than they are now. It just shows that the human spirit, if it wants to do it, can do anything - that's the motto I live by."

NtshaliNtshali, who teaches Taekwon-Do twice a week to young children at an activity centre at Glenwood Village shopping centre, said the trip to North Korea would be a highlight in his career which he would use to help others.

"The first thing is that I can teach my pupils that if I can do it, they can do it and that anything is possible."

However, NtshaliNtshali cannot afford the trip and has appealed for sponsorship. He needs to raise R18 000 for his accommodation and air fare. He is allowed to wear his sponsor's logo on his kit.

Making all the right moves:

From: <http://www.topix.net/content/trb/2131681433185439259521926010843200227940>
(June 22, 2006):

Alexa Schwichow is on her side on a mat, and she has her jujitsu instructor in a clock choke--one leg across his hip, her knee against a shoulder blade, a hand under his armpit.

Feeling her way through the darkness that has been her world since birth, she tugs on her instructor's arm, and he rolls onto his back.

Alexa is blind, but learning seems to come easy--whether a martial arts exercise or a new Braille skill--for the 11-year-old, who will enter 6th grade in the fall at Johnsburg Middle School in McHenry County.

On Friday, Alexa will take part in the sixth annual Braille Challenge in Los Angeles, an academic competition for blind students from the U.S. and Canada. She was the only representative from Illinois chosen this year to compete with about 60 other visually impaired and blind students.

The competition, which is intended to motivate students and encourage them to study Braille, tests skills such as reading comprehension, spelling, speed and accuracy and the ability to use charts and graphs. More than 300 students took qualifying tests to compete in the challenge.

Alexa began to learn Braille in preschool, but experts say fewer students these days study the system.

'If they went to a school for the blind, they were going to read Braille,' said Nancy Niebrugge, director of the Braille Challenge for the Braille Institute, a non-profit organization in Los Angeles. 'Most students are mainstreamed now.'

Asked about the weekend competition, Alexa said, 'I want to win.'

That spirit is evident on the mat, as Alexa focuses on completing the jujitsu move against instructor Bart Palaszewski at the Curran Martial Arts studio in Crystal Lake.

When she does, he pulls her to her feet and lightly swings her around his back as they return to where parents Tina and Rob Schwichow are sitting.

'Good job, Lex,' yells her mother.

Alexa, whose blindness is caused by Leber's congenital amaurosis, has learned to ski, play piano and trumpet, and takes tumbling lessons. She taught her 3-year-old sister, Jade, how to sing the alphabet.

Alexa said jujitsu could help her if she's ever attacked. The explanation sounds almost like a dare.

'First, I'd break his arms,' she said, arms jabbing outward. 'Then I'd choke him to death.'

'You don't have to win a fight,' Palaszewski told her. 'You just have to get away to be safe.'

With a barrette in her hair and grin on her face as she plays in the back yard of her Johnsburg home with Jade, Alexa doesn't seem the type to break anyone's arm.

Alexa's parents decided early on that Braille would be crucial for her to learn. Experts wish more parents made the same decision.

Advocates for the blind won a victory in 1997, when a new version of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act took effect.

The law said blind and visually impaired students should learn Braille as a matter of course, unless school officials drafting a child's individual education plan decided otherwise.

But with resources stretched thin and tools such as audiobooks available, Braille often gets little consideration.

'Teachers are not there, textbooks are not there,' said Mary Ann Siller, project manager for professional development at the American Foundation for the Blind. 'We're depending too much on volunteers for Braille transcription. And parents are not informed about all their options.'

Niebrugge said parents of children whose vision is not as seriously impaired as Alexa's don't always insist that their children learn Braille.

That can be a mistake if the child's vision worsens, Niebrugge said. Young children, whether blind or sighted, pick up things easily--including Braille, she said. Later, it may be more difficult.

'[A child will] learn to read Braille at the same pace as a sighted child will learn to read print,' Niebrugge said. 'To a blind child, if a book doesn't have bumps, it doesn't have words.'

Sometimes Alexa listens to audiobooks.

But running her fingers across Braille makes her feel more connected to the words. Lately, she has been reading the Harry Potter books--10 Braille volumes for 'The Goblet of Fire,' because Braille takes up more space than printed words.

'My arms will get tired,' Alexa said.

She wonders sometimes what it's like to see. But sight is difficult for her to imagine. Alexa sees through her hands and fingers, which sometimes has its drawbacks.

Once in science class, pupils were comparing a real cricket in a jar to a rubber one on the table.

'I could see the fake one,' she said. 'I could touch it.'

But all she could see of the other was the glass jar that held it.

Sometimes, even walking can be a challenge.

'I veer,' Alexa said. 'I go crooked. I just have to point my whole body straight.'

And there are some things she still doesn't grasp when she's playing with friends. 'They're always talking about stuff I don't get,' Alexa said. 'Like makeup. What is it with girls and makeup?'

Tai chi saves a former fireman:

From: <http://www.statesman.com/life/content/life/stories/health/07/3fitcity.html>
(July 3, 2006):

Thomas Terbay stashes his walker along the wall of the mirror-lined studio and shuffles to the center of the room. He raises his arms, moving silently through a series of tai chi positions like a martial arts movie in slow motion. Sweat beads on his forehead, and every few minutes, he pauses to catch his breath. He apologizes, because for the past two months leg pain has kept him from his usual routine of classes here at Master Gohring's Tai Chi & Kung Fu academy.

But Terbay, a former firefighter who credits the mental and physical benefits of tai chi with helping him turn his life around, says he'll be back to his regular schedule in a few weeks. And considering the odds he overcame in getting this far, it's not hard to believe him.

Terbay, 39, grew up in Austin. He earned a nursing degree and started working as an emergency medical technician at a volunteer fire department in Tarrant County. Even then, he was a big guy, weighing in at 315 pounds.

In 1991, he was working an apartment fire when he missed a rung on a step ladder and came crashing down. He hit the ground feet first, suffering a compression fracture in his mid-back. He wore a hinged cast for 10 months.

"At first I didn't have problems. But as the months went on, it became apparent I couldn't stand for long or run. My firefighting career was over and my nursing career, too," he says.

He started to gain weight. He couldn't stand for long and got out of breath after hardly any exertion.

"I was sedentary and continued to eat like a high-school football player," he says. He got depressed and moved back to his parents' home in Austin. Soon, he weighed 525 pounds and was essentially bedridden. He developed diabetes and heart disease.

When his mother died in May 2003, he was spiritually adrift. Friends suggested he try yoga, but he felt he couldn't do it because of his size. "I couldn't get down on the floor and tie myself into a pretzel," he says.

He saw a flier for tai chi at his doctor's office, and assumed the ancient Chinese martial art was like yoga, only done standing. Maybe he could do that. The thought passed until he saw another ad a few months later. He remembered the karate classes he'd taken as a teenager. He decided to give it a try.

Terbay lasted just two minutes at that first introductory class. Then he sat and watched, mesmerized by what the students were doing.

"When I walked in the door, I felt this positive energy I hadn't felt in years," he says. "The tai chi was beautiful. I wanted to be able to do what those people were doing."

He started attending classes twice a week. In the beginning, he used a walker to get to class. For the first six weeks, he could last only five minutes. He kept at it.

"It took three months before I could substantially participate," he says. His classmates encouraged him. In six months, he exchanged the walker for a cane.

His "chi," or life force, was growing stronger. He started to heal, in many ways. Tai chi was helping him relax, and improving his coordination, flexibility, endurance and strength. It was calming him mentally.

"It gave me, before the end of my first year, my sense of confidence almost back up to where it was when I was a firefighter. I felt like part of a community," Terbay says. "That's all I had in my life — tai chi or doctors. And it was a better place to be than a doctor's office."

Slowly, his weight started to drop. So far, Terbay has lost 130 pounds. He hopes to lose more.

The style of tai chi that Terbay studies has 10 basic postures. Sometimes, the class moves through those postures to the beat of a drum.

Tai chi also incorporates the use of weapons, and Terbay is training to use a fan. In ancient China, the fan's stays were made of sharpened metal instead of bamboo, and were concealed in the user's sleeve. Terbay demonstrates, whipping his bamboo fan out of his sleeve with a pop.

For Terbay, though, tai chi is self-defense only in the sense that he has used it to save his own health. "It's self-defense from yourself — from your own poor choices, your own bad decisions and life pressures — not just someone on the street," he says.

Tai chi skills are measured on a 10-color sash system similar to the belt system used in karate. White is the most novice level; black the most advanced. Terbay's proudest moment came when he earned his white belt. It took six months.

"I never thought I'd get that white sash because I never thought I'd be able to stand through an entire class," he says. "That's when I really felt like part of the school."

But even that sash doesn't mark the most important change for Terbay. "It's more about what's happened to me and how I've changed as a human being than how high I can kick or what sash I'm wearing," he says.

Now he's a purple belt, a little more than halfway through the 10-sash system. He's started a program to earn an instructor's certificate, and works a few hours a week for Master Gohring, recruiting potential students.

Tai chi is a nonimpact form of exercise. You don't have to have a sleek, toned body to reap its benefits. People who are overweight, or have arthritis or other physical limitations, can take classes. Some students come to class using canes or walkers. Even people who use wheelchairs can do a modified version of tai chi.

"It's excellent for people who are returning to exercise or who have never exercised," says Tom Gohring, a fifth-degree black sash and owner of Master Gohring's Tai Chi & Kung Fu martial arts academy. "It's almost a form of physical therapy."

That's why he encouraged Terbay to keep coming to class.

"It is my belief that everyone can make it to black sash with the right training, environment and program," Gohring says. "That's what we provide here. I didn't consider that Thomas couldn't be successful."

Besides advancing his own training, Terbay has inspired other students.

"When you look at someone who gets up on the floor in his condition and participates and puts himself out there in front of people, your problems seem kind of dwarfed.

You think 'Wow, if Thomas Terbay can get up there and do tai chi and live up to the challenges given by Master Gohring, I can do that,' " Gohring says. "To have Thomas get up there and overcome his fears right in front of us is like, well, OK. That's a leader."

Now, when Terbay misses a class or two, the other students at the academy ask about him and want to know when he's coming back. They've become a sort of support group that rallies around him when he gets frustrated.

Andy Prince, 38, a public relations consultant, started taking tai chi classes at Master Gohring's a year and a half ago to improve his fitness. He met Terbay, and was immediately struck by the former firefighter's persistence. "I thought, 'Here's someone who's trying to better himself, hats off to the guy,' " Prince says.

Eventually he got to know Terbay, who was at the studio nearly every day.

"When he started telling me his story, I was shocked and amazed and impressed,"

Prince says. "I thought I had a good motivating reason to come here, but I didn't fall off a ladder and get hurt. To think he comes to class every day with the things he's gone through was a tremendous inspiration to me. What would I do in his situation? Wallow in pity, stay in bed all day?"

In the past six weeks, Terbay has experienced pain in the joints and muscles of his legs. Doctors aren't yet sure of the cause. But he can't drive and is once again homebound.

He hopes the setback is temporary. He expects to return to tai chi, and has been visualizing the training even though he hasn't been able to participate at the studio. Still, he attended a small tournament at Master Gohring's academy last week, watching with interest the competition and assuring fellow students that he planned to return to classes as soon as he could.

Besides continuing with his own training, he has another goal in mind — to encourage people who don't think they can get fit to start a tai chi program. Martial arts, he says, transcends the physical. It can provide mental and emotional tools for life.

"I still want to help people out with their lives, and I want to use tai chi to do it," Terbay says. "My hope is that they can look and see this guy was crippled, he weighed 130 pounds more than he does now. If he can do it, maybe I can."

Wheelchair-bound karateka a world champ:

From:

http://www.int.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=125&art_id=vn20060715082406394C511604
(July 15, 2006):

It is not an easy task winning a karate world championship - and it is even more difficult when you are confined to a wheelchair.

Dirk van der Merwe, 33, with all the odds stacked against him, won first place in the Kata division at the Tenshinkan World Championships out of 25 able-bodied people from the US, Japan and South Africa. Tenshinkan is a type of karate style.

The black belt Sho Dan holder from Villieria was the only disabled participant in the entire event. He also managed to clinch the honourable Kancho Cup, awarded to the participant with the most spirit.

Van der Merwe, who got married two months ago, said the only difference when practising karate as a disabled man was the use of arms.

"Every move the able person makes with their legs, I must first do using my arms to move my chair before continuing with my arm movements."

His father took him to his first karate lesson when he was in Grade 1. "When I was 23 I was involved in a car accident. I was flung from the car. I broke my back and my legs are paralysed," Van der Merwe said.

He said it took him eight years to piece his life back together and get into karate again. "You have to adjust to a totally new lifestyle. You have to learn to do everything with your arms; clothe yourself, bath and how to get around.

"I tried to get a few people to train me again, but they were sceptical about instructing a man in a wheelchair."

All that changed when he met "Shihan" Hans Haupt, a chief instructor, at a wedding in Johannesburg earlier this year.

Haupt was prepared to give him a chance and helped him get a special invite from the world chief instructor, Kancho Mamora Miwa, in Japan to the world championships.

He struggled to get the R46 000 required to get him to Japan, but with the help of friends, sponsorships and sports organisations he raised the money.

In June he left for Japan and went on a week's intensive training called Gashuku, travelling to various Dojo within the country for training sessions.

At the end of the training he was graded again to get his Sho Dan belt, the first level of black belt.

"One of the reasons I really wanted to go to the championships was to receive my black belt from the world chief instructor. It was a true honour," said Van der Merwe.

However, his main ambition was not to win at the championships, but to travel around South Africa teaching other wheelchair-bound people the art of karate.

"I want more disable people in the sport. Karate can help them in their self-esteem."

Karate Kid Battles Rare Disease:

From:

http://www.13wham.com/health/local/story.aspx?content_id=0BEEBE51-A0AE-48DC-BFB5-38C8CA6146FE
(July 17, 2006):

A seven-year-old boy recently diagnosed with a rare disease has found an unusual prescription to deal with the illness.

There is nothing Toby McQueen loves more than karate.

"It builds up your strength and it makes you fight a lot better," he said.

That's pretty important because Toby is already in the fight of his life: Every day, he battles a rare disease called eosinophilic esophagitis or EE.

Pediatric specialist Dr. Philip Putnam said, "It's a mouthful that means inflammation of the esophagus with a particular kind of white blood cell called 'eosinophils.'"

Researchers aren't sure what causes EE or how to fix it but it makes it very hard to swallow and causes severe allergies to almost every food most children like to eat. Toby's coping mechanism is training to be the next "karate kid".

His mom, Tanya McQueen, said it's made a big difference--not just in his body--but in his head, and his heart.

"It helps him deal with his anger, it also helps just with the exercise part, because he's allergic to everything outside, so the exercise really helps him," she said.

The other kids in his Martial Arts America class have helped too. Together, they hold events to raise money for research on EE through an organization called CURED. Putnam said, "The interest right now is looking at both the immune factors that create the disease in a given individual, and the possible solution to it from both the immune system and an allergy perspective."

Toby's interest is simply to keep fighting to find a cure.

Blind fighter teaches mixed martial arts:

From: <http://www.wkyt.com/Global/story.asp?S=5184486>
(July 22, 2006):

In an interview, nothing seems unusual about Jason Keaton. The 28-year-old mixed martial artist is 5-foot-11 and 190 pounds of mostly muscle on a wiry frame.

He has short-cropped blond hair, glasses and is well-spoken, with a voice that sometimes betrays the passion he feels for his sport and way of life. He is courteous and patient with newcomers asking questions.

But his nickname is "Blind Fury" for a reason. Keaton is legally blind.

Keaton's sight is not an issue. He rarely brings it up himself and, as his opponents will note, is not totally blind, only legally.

Asked how he survives in the ring, he said his opponents have to be close enough for him to see them to strike.

"You learn to keep your hands up," he said.

Keaton has spent a lifetime studying different disciplines. He began wrestling at age 4, and has trained in various martial arts, including Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, Muay Thai, Kung Fu and judo. He's also tried boxing.

The combination of these mixed martial arts skills has earned him a 12-3 professional record in the ring.

While he is strong on the canvas, his truer passion may be for teaching. Last February, he opened his own school in Radcliff called Cyclone Martial Arts and will begin giving lessons at Energy Sports and Fitness in Elizabethtown in early August for children and adults plus a women-only program.

"We needed something to bring more energy, to bring in people not used to it," said Dustin Edge, manager of the club. "It's something to make us better. That's our main goal."

His perspective on teaching children mixed martial arts is unique.

"Having fun is the first thing," Keaton said. "I try to keep a high energy level, where the only expectation is to have fun. It will amaze you what they can do. Nobody's going to push them into it. They'll decide for themselves if they love it."

Keaton does not use exercises as punishment and attempts to get children used to the physicality of the sport "in a way that's fun."

"I want them to love martial arts like I love martial arts," he said.

Keaton, who is from eastern Kentucky and grew up in Louisville, learned to love the sport after moving to Lexington. There, he had access to several high-profile sparring partners, as well as teachers. It was at Straight Blast Gym many of his teaching techniques were formed.

"I absorbed everything I could. I watched how people taught classes," he said. "Matt Thornton, the president of Straight Blast Gym, opened my eyes to how martial arts are taught and how to teach effectively."

Keaton thinks it is important to teach at his students' pace, in their comfort zone. Students do not need prior martial arts experience or even be in peak physical shape to take classes. A boon for the classes is that, aside from learning and getting in shape, Keaton teaches self-defense and guarantees it will work.

"We put them in scenarios and use a suit to make it as close to real as possible," he said. "The overall goal is to get away. I teach the element of surprise, to play until they see an opportunity and then strike."

Students also get an intense workout. "I think running is boring," Keaton said. "This is much more interesting."

Edge said it is a welcome addition to the classes and programs in place at Energy. "It's pushing fitness, its the best of both worlds," he said. It also teaches students more than how to kick and grapple.

"Doing techniques, training the way we train, the changes it causes in people it gives people real confidence," Keaton said. "A student in Lexington lost 100 pounds. It gave him the confidence to be himself."

Keaton is experienced in the ring itself, which he draws on for teaching. He estimates he fought 30 or so amateur fights, as well as 15 professional, including on pay-per-view for a King of the Cage tournament.

He is involved with several teams and will be taking one to the Ultimate Cage Challenge in Madisonville on July 29.

Getting his kicks:

From:

http://www.independenttribune.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=CIT/MGArticle/CIT_BasicArticle&c=MGArticle&cid=1149189341304

(July 24, 2006):

Before you hear about the 70-year-old man who recently earned a black belt in karate, you should know this: John T. Harris, 70, is built like a linebacker.

He's 6 feet 4 inches tall and barrel-chested. And he doesn't look a day over 60.

But you should also know this: Four years ago, he couldn't even bathe himself.

A fall from a tree at the end of 2000 left his back broken in two places and left Harris unable to care for himself. His body became covered in blood clots.

He gives all the credit to his wife, Annie, who told Harris after the accident, "Don't worry about anything."

"And I didn't worry about anything," Harris said.

During that time, Annie, 67, not only bathed Harris, but also took care of the cooking, cleaning, yard work and bills.

However, she's modest about her role.

"I give him credit for getting back on his feet," she said.

The couple will have been married 47 years next month.

Harris, who will be 71 in December, also credits his healing process with listening to the doctors' recommendations.

"A lot of the problem with we senior citizens is that we're hard-headed," he said. "We don't want to follow doctor's orders."

Now, Harris said he is known for being "sudden" with karate moves.

"They call me the 'Silver Fox' " said Harris, a Concord resident and reverend at Concord's Good Samaritan Church.

"Everyone I meet, I tell them they can get out of that rocking chair and get active. I believe that regardless of what's wrong with you, that if you stay active, the body will heal itself."

Karate actually came into Harris' life because of physical activity.

Three days a week, Harris was walking three miles. And friends would often warn him that he could be mugged on his walks.

"I didn't want to carry a weapon," laughed Harris, a Richmond, Va., native who moved to Concord in 1963. "So, I decided I would become a weapon."

Truthfully, Harris said, he entered karate as a way to stay physically fit, not to learn how to fight.

“If you’re a senior citizen, it gives you confidence,” he said. “Every time you go, you’re accomplishing something. They didn’t take it easy on me because I was an old man. I guess I rob my energy from the young ones.”

Harris practices at Concord’s Jones Japanese Karate with instructor Johnnie Jones. Jones said karate challenged Harris to come back after his ordeal and heal himself faster.

“It gave him the will power to come back and do it again,” Jones said. “Praise God.”

He attended classes a short time before his accident. And doctors told him if he hadn’t been involved in karate, his condition would have been far worse, possibly life-ending.

Aside from karate, Harris works on the treadmill, does 400 crunches a day and cares for the lawn.

Annie also stays active, taking exercise classes twice a week and working in the yard.

Harris is a first-degree black belt, as he obtained the ranking in April. It’s the first level of black belt.

“You don’t know about karate until you’re a black belt,” Harris said. “That’s when you start to learn.”

As part of the process, Harris had to break a brick slab with just his hand.

Before crushing through the brick, Harris said he spent a few moments in a combination of karate meditation and talking with God.

But Harris doesn’t plan to stop at first-degree black belt.

He’s set his mind on the highest possible black belt rank - a 10th-degree black belt. However, that’s not even Jones’ biggest goal.

“I think I’ve got another 30 years in me,” Jones said. “People say to me, ‘John, I won’t live to be your age.’ And I say, ‘Not with that thinking you won’t.’ You pick up that shovel, push that lawn mower.”

Karate man defies odds:

From: <http://www.senews.com.au/story/19955>
(July 27, 2006):

Australia -- A Cranbourne man defied the odds to become a karate black belt after a devastating accident left him in a wheelchair.

Matt Charles will now take over the Seishin Dojo karate school in Cranbourne despite being told he would never walk unaided.

The 32-year-old was crushed by a concrete retaining wall at his workplace 10 years ago and three discs in his spine were squashed.

He had two discs removed but extensive damage to his spinal cord meant doctors could not operate immediately.

Mr Charles said within six weeks he could not walk and was confined to a wheelchair for the next year.

When feeling came back into his legs he started to use crutches and leg braces to help him walk but doctors told him he would never walk without the support.

But after another two years he began to walk by himself and in 2000 he started his karate training.

“I used to train when I was younger. I always loved karate,” Mr Charles said.

He said he progressed very slowly at the start and had to find an instructor that would not only take him on but also give him the attention he needed to keep going.

On 16 June, he was awarded his black belt.

“It took me a bit longer than most,” he said.

Mr Charles said he hoped his case took away some of the stereotypes of people with a disability.

“I didn’t want to get held back. Karate is for everybody,” he said.

“Gone are the days when you had to be of a certain physical stature to do sport.”

Mr Charles had been teaching on a casual basis at schools in Seaford and Mornington and jumped at the opportunity to take over classes in his home suburb.

He now teaches 20 people, half of whom are kids, at a temporary site at the Cranbourne Guides Hall.

Mr Charles said he would not have been able to keep going if not for the support of the people around him, particularly his wife, Fleur.

They had just moved in together and she was training as a physical therapist when he had the accident.

“She is my biggest fan. She always believed in me,” Mr Charles said.

“If I had to do it on my own I think I would have given up.”

Mr Charles still lives with a fair degree of pain and has some numb spots in his legs and while he cannot compete much he said he was well suited to teaching, having compensated his physical weaknesses with a high understanding of technique.

Inspirational ... Angi defies the odds once again:

From: <http://www.leedstoday.net/ViewArticle2.aspx?SectionID=39&ArticleID=1655928>
(July 27, 2006):

An inspirational slimmer diagnosed with the crippling disease FSH Muscular Dystrophy as a teenager has defied the odds to take charge of her local weight loss club.

Angi Marsden, 42, left, had to give up her dream of becoming a professional dancer when she discovered she had the condition, which causes weakening of the muscles, at the age of 18.

However, despite having to use a wheelchair or a walking stick to get around, she has managed to juggle a full-time job at Leeds Metropolitan University with being a mother of three, attending martial arts classes and becoming a green belt in karate.

Now Angi, who lives on Marsett Way, Whinmoor with her husband Alan and three grown-up sons, is set to take over as leader of the Swarcliffe branch of Slimming World, having joined five months ago and lost a stone.

She told the YEP that she had never let her disability get in the way of life and was looking forward to her latest challenge.

"I'm excited but very nervous," she said. "Nothing holds me back, I'm a very determined, strong woman.

"I really wanted to be a dancer, but by the time I was 19 or 20, the disability had already taken hold of my body and I couldn't put myself through that.

"My Mum was my inspiration. She said that nothing could stop you if you put your mind to it.

"Now I know that it isn't important how you walk or how you look, it's how you feel inside that matters. There's more to life than worrying about superficial appearances."

Angi's remarkable story comes at the same time as the government try to get more people on invalidity payments back to work.

She added: "Not every disabled person can go to work but if you've got the will and determination, it's achievable.

"My advice would be you've got nothing to lose. Just give it a try – if it doesn't work for you, there's always something out there for you that will."

Disability doesn't halt judo progress:

From: <http://www.siouxcityjournal.com/articles/2006/07/30/news/top/2253f533cd4a5dc5862571bb000c4f4b.txt>
(July 31, 2006):

At a judo class on Sioux City's north side, Darcie Boyok looks just like everyone else.

She does her warm-up stretches just like the other students. She's right there with her classmates when, in one quick movement, they drop from a standing position to roll onto their backs on the floor and then back up into a standing position.

Boyok even looks like the other students as she springs across the room doing a series of front-falling rolls. But now suddenly there is a difference.

Listening you hear a classmate on the other side of the room calling, "This way, Darcie. This way, Darcie."

The classmate is calling to Boyok because Boyok is blind.

Many people who have their sight probably wouldn't dare to try a martial art. But two Siouxlanders who are blind are advanced students at the American Judo Club in Sioux City.

"I get, 'That's amazing!' a lot," said Greg Hanson, the other judo student who is blind. "That really bothers me. It's not amazing. It's hard work!"

It all started 22 years ago when Hanson lost his vision. He had just turned 28 years old.

"I had to make a choice when I lost my eyesight," Hanson said. "I could sit in a rocking chair and feel sorry for myself, but that just wasn't me. I just had to be the best I could be."

First Hanson learned the basics of dealing with blindness at a nine-month program offered by the Iowa Department for the Blind in Des Moines.

Then after that nine-month school in Des Moines, Hanson enrolled at Briar Cliff College in Sioux City. He worked as a truck driver, a mechanic and a construction worker before he became blind, but without his vision, he knew he needed more education to get a job.

Besides getting that education, Hanson also dealt with his blindness by looking for a way to stay active that wouldn't require chasing a ball around. He decided he'd join one of Sioux City's tae kwon do clubs.

As it turned out, the first three tae kwon do clubs Hanson tried wouldn't even accept him as a student.

"They didn't know how they could teach me," he said. "They didn't know how a blind person could do a kicking, punching type of martial art, so they refused to try."

But Hanson kept trying, and it paid off. The fourth tae kwon do club he visited agreed to teach him.

For the first couple of months, instructors worked one-on-one with Hanson teaching him the nine or 10 techniques upon which all tae kwon do moves are based. Then he

was incorporated into a regular class.

Later Hanson moved away from Sioux City, but he returned to the community about 10 years ago. By that time he had a first-degree black belt in tae kwon do and a high brown belt in aikido, a martial art that's similar to judo.

Once Hanson was ready to enroll in a martial arts class, he opted for judo. He said judo isn't about kicking and punching; it's more like wrestling. And he felt that would be a better option for a person with his abilities.

"Really, from 4 or 5 feet away, I can't tell what you are doing to me," Hanson said. "But once you touch me, you're mine."

So Hanson joined the American Judo Club and began studying under Frankie Williams, a sixth-degree black belt.

"When he told me he had a black belt in tae kwon do and a brown belt in aikido, I thought it would be a challenge to see how we could work together, but actually it was very easy," Williams said. "In fact, he learned faster and better than a lot of those guys who have their sight."

Hanson has gone to competitions and done well. But he said the big thing for him isn't so much the competition as it is mastering the art of judo and teaching at the American Judo Club.

"He is exceptional at transferring knowledge to other people," said Johnny Tureaud, another instructor at the club. "He breaks down each movement into smaller parts and is able to relate that to a student without visual cues or other things so that the movement is reproducible by the person."

Today Hanson has a first-degree black belt in judo, and he'll be testing for a second-degree black belt in the fall.

About eight years ago, Boyok by chance came across Hanson at the grocery store. They shook hands and talked a minute as Boyok petted Hanson's seeing-eye dog. Hanson told Boyok about judo. Later she decided to come to class and check it out. Boyok was so impressed during her visit to the American Judo Club she signed up that first night. She was 47 at the time.

"It took a lot of courage," Hanson said. "She'd never done anything athletic at all."

To learn a new judo technique, Boyok listens closely as the instructor explains what to do. Then she might ask the instructor to demonstrate the technique on her so she can learn by feel.

If Boyok were used to demonstrate a choke hold, for example, she'd bring her hands up by her neck during the hold to feel her teacher's hands, arms and shoulders and where they were positioned in relation to her body.

"Darcie is tenacious and never stops asking why, and those two categories are the most important attributes that any student can bring to any type of study," Tureaud

said. "She always wants to understand why and wants us to demonstrate on her so she'll feel why."

Boyok said the neat thing about judo is that it's not about being strong enough to muscle someone over you. It's about the momentum of another person's body working with yours, and that makes it possible for her to throw people who are bigger than she is.

"It's all very possible, and it's really exciting," she said. "I feel like if someone gets in my space and they touch me, they're mine. I can defend myself."

Boyok has already mastered more than 45 throws to earn a low brown belt in judo, and she said some of the advanced throws she's learning these days are pretty scary for her. But her choices are either to quit or to move forward, and she's decided she's going to move forward.

Boyok said it's pretty common today for girls to go out for sports, but that wasn't so true back when she was young. She said she appreciates finally having the chance to be an athlete.

"I never realized how strong I was or how strong I could become," she said.

As for emotional strength, Boyok found a lot of that back in her early 30s when she first lost her vision.

"A lot of times, people will say, 'I couldn't be blind; I just couldn't handle it,'" she said. "Well, they would. You learn the skills you need to get through it."

Whether it's blindness, cancer or another hardship in life, Boyok said there are always people out there who went through that same experience before. She said other people made it through the hardship, so that means others can, too.

"We're a heck of a lot stronger than we think we are," she said.

These days Boyok can do almost everything she did when she still had her vision. She cooks everything from lasagna to lemon meringue pie, paints furniture, sews, goes shopping by herself and paints her own fingernails. Eventually she wants to pick up the piano or the cello -- this time playing by ear.

Boyok said she's not like Hanson. She doesn't want to go sky diving or riding in a hot air balloon. But she said she does think it would be fun to try pole vaulting.

"From her, I don't doubt it, and I bet you she'll be pretty good," Tureaud said. "She has no fear."

Black belt proves age is just a number:

From:

http://www.venturacountystar.com/vcs/ve/article/0,1375,VCS_251_4882474,00.html

(July 31, 2006):

At 76, Ann Zacher didn't question her ability to break boards with her bare hands during her tae kwon do black belt test in February.

Nor did she question her ability to take up tae kwon do five years ago, at age 71. Or, for that matter, to singly raise three young children 40 years ago, after her divorce, on wages earned as a typist for the County of Ventura.

"I believe in positive thinking," Zacher said last week, settled comfortably into a couch in the same house she grew up in near downtown Ventura.

"You can handle so much if you just realize how much strength we have," Zacher said. "It's just the idea of always accepting you can do things."

Zacher practices what she preaches — from taking tae kwon do to teaching folk dancing a couple of times a week. She loves movies, too, and is a self-described television rerun nut who corrects grammar and pronunciation during news broadcasts.

She writes with a senior writing group and reads books twice, because "you get more out of it."

She also sews. Last week, she donned a handmade dress in bright blocks of orange, red, yellow and purple. Gold and red beaded earrings stretched past her chin, swaying and sparkling. Her legs were cloaked in fire engine red stockings, and her feet sported red Birkenstocks.

Knitting is another pastime, one she picked up from her mother, Ada Zacher. "Mom used to make afghans and enter them in the fair," said Zacher, who just submitted her own knitting to this year's Ventura County Fair. "She was busy-busy, but she always had time to knit," she said of her mother. "The whole thing is fun. I love it."

Zacher says this a lot, her lavender-lined eyes lighting up with a sort of uncontained joy, as if she herself is surprised at the amount of fun she has.

Of her black belt test, she said, "It was really hard. I loved it. Oh! It's so much fun. Oh, it's fun to break those boards! You get out all your aggressions."

Zacher said her commitment to positive thinking came from her mother, a devotee of Christian Science. The religion, based on an interpretation of the Scriptures asserting that disease, sin and death can be overcome by understanding and applying the principles of Christian teachings, wasn't widely accepted in Ventura during the 1930s and '40s.

"Everybody thought I was very weird," Zacher said. "I would never say anything about it."

Today, she incorporates meditation into her life. "It clears your mind of all this earthly junk we put in it," she said. "If anything is bothering me, I'll just take it with me (into mediation) and just leave it there for God."

Zacher's son, Troy Taylor, is her tae kwon do instructor at Gen Jitsu Dojo in Ventura. Learning new patterns, or kata, brings Zacher the most joy in tae kwon do. "That's the best part to me — the patterns," she said. "To me, it's like a dance."

She's been dancing all her life and started a local group called "Gotta Folkdance" more than 40 years ago. "The thing that really got me is the music," she said. "And the people. The people are so fun."

"It's just so interesting to see the things that anyone can do. It's got nothing to do with age."

Wheelchair won't keep Rapid City man from making a difference:

From:

http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?BRD=1300&dept_id=156930&newsid=17015495&PAG=461&rft=9

(August 4, 2006):

Rapid City - Don Sitters was left paralyzed from the waist down at the age of 13, but despite the obstacles he has faced during his life he has always overcome them to achieve success.

He has been involved in martial arts for some 20 years and has won many awards and championships, but when he moved to Rapid City in 2004 it had been two years since he last practiced martial arts, and he was ready to pick it up once again.

Much to his excitement, he found out that Sanano Karate Club was just three minutes away from his home. Though he was a bit concerned that he might not be accepted due to his disability, he was overjoyed when he was welcomed and put through the paces just like any other student.

"We didn't treat him differently. We expect him to do what anybody else does," said grand master Andy Sanano. "He's a good student. He's here all day long practicing and getting back in shape. He's a great example that there are no limits for anyone no matter what you might face."

And Sitters doesn't just come and go. Sanano said Sitters spends anywhere from two to five hours a day at his club working on his skills and getting in shape. Being in a wheelchair has never slowed Sitters down, and now he's getting back into the kind of condition that has seen him earn numerous championships.

Sanano is a grand master with a 10th degree black belt in the art of Aikido which means "Learn to Fight, Not to Fight." It's a graceful, non-aggressive form of martial arts which teaches how to defend one's self but also how to avoid trouble without needing to fight.

"My first class was six months ago and Sensei Sanano and his instructors were very gracious. They didn't put me off in a corner or have me do anything less than anybody else," said Sitters, age 42. "I was treated just like any new student and was very happy to have found a new dojo."

For Sitters, martial arts was once about competing and proving to be the best. To an extent, it still is but not as much as it used to be. During his time he's amassed a number of martial arts honors. At the 2001-02 Diamond Nationals he was the limited ability national champ in kata forms, and placed third in weapons forms and third in open kata forms. At the Minnesota State Karate Championships in 2002 he placed second in weapons forms and fourth in open kata forms.

These are just two big events Sitters has competed in, but he's also won dozens of medals and ribbons in other competitions. And his victories have not just come against those with limited abilities like himself. He's won competitions against those who are fully able.

Today, Sitters is looking at other things he'd like to achieve. He's won enough awards, and he now wants to give back and teach people with disabilities there are no limits. He said the martial arts is a great way for people with disabilities to stay in shape. He's involved in the International Disabled Self-Defense Association, which makes those with disabilities like Sitters aware of what options they have.

"I just want to help open the eyes of some people. People who are in wheelchairs many times will feel self pity, but they don't need to," he said. "I've been in this chair a long time and I've had some problems, but you have to believe in yourself and start."

Sitters said he would like to start a wheelchair self defense class at Sanano's dojo, and that could happen soon. In the meantime Sitters is enjoying teaching youngsters martial arts. He is a second degree Blackbelt in Hapkido-Ju Jitsu, and he's studied numerous forms of martial arts including Kobu Jitsu, Karate, Tae Kwan Doe and Ju-Jitsu.

One person who had a great impact on Sitters was Jergens Schmidt, who taught Sitters combat hapkido, which basically taught him how to defend himself while in a wheelchair. Schmidt is the head of the International Disabled Self-Defense Association.

He's a member of Soldiers for Jesus Motorcycle Club and is also a member of an organization called Karate for Christ. An avid biker, he plans on attending this year's Sturgis rally. His nickname is "Wheels" and still drives a three-wheeler. "I found a way to live out the three M's which is motorcycles, ministry and martial arts," said Sitters.

Life has not always been easy for Sitters. When he was a young boy growing up in Long Beach, Calif., there were a lot of things going on that weren't good. He got involved with a gang at the age of eight, and then lost sight in his right eye when an errant dart struck him.

He was involved in motorcross, but even that resulted in hardship when at the age of 13 he lost control of his bike during an event, fell and cracked his spine in three places, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down. That was in 1978.

Eight months after the accident he was ready to tackle the world again, and he started playing wheelchair basketball. It was at this time that he met Ron Scanlon, who

became a Master in Kung Fu San Soo from his wheelchair. It was the beginning for a martial arts journey for Sitters that has lasted for 29 years.

Now Sitters has a new home and is following the philosophy of Sanano.

"There's a lot of serenity here. Master Sanano is teaching me how to breathe and I've found I can do a lot more when I'm breathing than when I'm not," said Sitters with a laugh. "

A lot of times Master Sanano will sit in a chair and teach me. In that way he can show me things that I can do from a sitting position. I really owe a great deal to Master Sanano. It's easy to feel bad for yourself but you have to keep busy. I always leave the dojo with more than when I entered."

Coping with hemophilia:

From: http://www.news10now.com/content/top_stories/default.asp?ArID=75805
(August 11, 2006):

Bill Ryan has met a lot of impressive people in his role as a Syracuse common councilor, but when it comes to heroes, he looks no further than his own home and his son.

"Billy was born with severe factor 8 hemophilia, diagnosed days after birth. As a small child, he had to wear pads on his knees and elbows and a helmet because if he hit his head, there could be catastrophic consequences," Bill Ryan said.

At the time, the outlook was bleak. By all accounts, Billy faced a life of pain and, in many cases, overprotection. But, the Ryans decided they would do all they could to provide their son with a normal life.

Advances in medicine helped. Billy could do more, and Bill and Jennifer Ryan allowed heir son to do just that.

"As a mother, it's just innate that you always want to protect your child as much as humanly possible. For me it was a challenge, everyday," Jennifer Ryan said.

Billy Ryan went on to be an athlete, even earning a second degree belt in karate. With an infusion three times a week of a factor that helps suppress his hemophilia, he has never limited his physical activity.

One of his most cherished times of year is summer when he travels to Camp High Hopes in Lowville, a camp designed for children with hemophilia.

"It's a good opportunity to be around other kids with hemophilia. There's not many people around here," Billy Ryan said.

Watching him perform at camp and back at home, it's tough to tell that Billy Ryan has any physical challenge.

"I look back, and I think of all the bumps and the bruises and the pain, and to him, it's a thing of the past. If you asked him what challenges he had to face, he'd tell you, nothing really," Jennifer said.

Bill Ryan asked his son once what his greatest wish would be. Billy said not to have hemophilia, but then he changed his mind.

"I've learned to live with this. I'm fine with it. As I go up to 5-C, I see a lot of kids that are a lot sicker than me, and I wish that they would get better. It brought a tear to my eye that Billy would respond that way," Bill Ryan said.

Taekwondo puts kick in man's life:

From: <http://torontosun.com/News/OtherNews/2006/08/13/1752005-sun.html>
(August 13, 2006):

Phillip Sherman gets quite a kick out of taekwondo.

In fact, over the past 13 years of slow but steady training, Sherman, 32, has given, and tried to block, quite a few during regular practice sessions.

Defensive kicking is the mainstay of taekwondo, the martial art that retired teacher Julia Sherman chose for her son -- who has Down syndrome -- to help him develop strength, discipline, respect, pride and independence.

Most devotees can qualify for black belts in about three years, said John Soo Park, a 38-year veteran Toronto trainer.

His prized student needed "special" tutoring over time, Park said prior to Sherman's black-belt ceremony yesterday afternoon.

"He is achieving a great deal in his life," said Park, who owns three studios, where he and others train 800 members of varying ages, skill and experience.

"We train with pride, honour and a devotion to character-building," Park said. "This is a discipline of mind, heart and body.

"Martial arts is more than just training," he said. "It is a way of life," and a black belt given after years of training, study and tests, "is a reward for dedication."

Using kicks while remaining upright, the training starts with workouts, then relaxation exercises. To demonstrate skill, taekwondo practitioners break boards and use the legs' reach and strength to disable opponents, as well as hand strikes and blocks.

In the beginning, "he had no idea what I was getting him into," said his mother, who runs a party-planning firm.

"We looked at all the self-defence sports," and chose taekwondo over judo, jui-jitsu and karate because "it strengthens both the upper and lower body."

The training helped focus Sherman's memory skills, especially when using the TTC.

"I look at the streets and the buildings ... I remember the signs and names," he said.

Park praised his dedication to learning. "He has an extremely strong body and I hope he will be more proud and continue training."

Sherman, who draws people "and faces" in his room at home, vows not to stop, taking classes three times a week and passing on his skill to youngsters.

Seasoned black belt:

From: <http://www.burbankleader.com/articles/2006/08/16/sports/blr-blackbelt16.txt>
(August 16, 2006):

There was an ugly pattern developing in Steve Urbanovich's life. At times, it even ate him up.

He was looking for something that would help him occupy some of his free time. Something that would hold his interest and something that would stimulate him. Thinking piano lessons would be fun, Urbanovich studied long and hard, but dropped out after one year.

He did the same thing with guitar classes. Learning Spanish was next, but after two years, he kicked that to the curb.

Was Urbanovich, a longtime Burbank resident who retired seven years ago, a quitter? Truthfully, he didn't know. But he desperately wanted to prove he wasn't.

It just so happened the very thing he was looking for was only a few blocks away from his home.

"I used to drive by [JK Taekwondo] every day when I was working because it was two minutes from my house," Urbanovich said of the martial arts studio at 1313 San Fernando Road. "It was always in the back of my head, but I was working and didn't have the time needed."

After everything he had tried, Urbanovich, who will turn 73 in October, figured he would give martial arts a try. What could it hurt?

"I retired in May of 1999, and two days later decided I was going to the studio and learn taekwondo," he said. "When you do something like this, you have to be committed. When you're working 12- and 14-hour days, you really can't. I figured now that I'm retired, I can give it my full attention."

Taekwondo became Urbanovich's passion, and it was exactly what he was looking for. Seven years after taking up the sport, Urbanovich has worked his way up to a second-degree black belt.

Urbanovich discovered taekwondo is not only a great physical activity that combines athleticism and spiritual strength and confidence, but the sport also has a rich history.

Taekwondo is an ancient Korean martial art that dates to 50 B.C. The word can be broken into three parts: tae, meaning foot, kwon, meaning punching and do, which means way of life.

There are 26 self-defense forms, 12 falling forms and several kicking techniques a student must learn.

A family man with three grown children, Urbanovich arrived in Burbank soon after graduating from Riverside High in Buffalo, N.Y. in 1951. He retired from Warner Bros. Studio, and prior to that worked at CBS and Republic Studios, where many classic westerns were produced.

Along with his work, Urbanovich has been active and has enjoyed sports his entire life.

"I always loved basketball, but I was a runt [5 feet 1, 110 pounds]," he said. "I tried out for the varsity basketball team, and during one practice made a really nice pass to our center. The coach asked, 'Who threw that pass?' When I said it was me, he said, 'He's just a little guy.' I didn't make the team."

Urbanovich said growing up in his neighborhood, sports was something most children participated in. He also admits that being athletic has helped him in martial arts.

"I played Little League baseball, hockey and ice skated," he said. "When it's really cold in the winter, and really hot and humid in the summer, you have to find things to do."

"I really love taekwondo. Not so much for the martial arts, but rather to stay active and keep in shape. I like the camaraderie and the friendships. You know, it's like a clique. You have tennis cliques, golf cliques, billiard cliques. I have a taekwondo clique."

Along with the obvious advantages of taekwondo, Urbanovich said there are other positives he has experienced since taking up the sport.

"It keeps my blood pressure down and it helps my cardiovascular system," he said. "I think I'm in pretty good shape for my age."

There are 13 belts Urbanovich had to advance through before reaching the coveted black belt. The process usually takes several years.

Robie Bakhos, the head instructor at the Burbank studio run by Grandmaster Jin Ki Lim, said Urbanovich is a true martial artist, the highest compliment given a student.

"I think he does very well," said the 25-year-old Bakhos, who hails from Syria, is a third-degree black belt and has been teaching for six years. "He has a lot of heart, and a lot of confidence. He never gives up."

Despite being the oldest student at the studio, Urbanovich has been able to enjoy success and has continued to progress through the belts. He just wonders how much more successful he could have been if he had began the sport at an earlier age.

Still, he tries to make the most of his advanced involvement in taekwondo by taking three one-hour classes a week.

"I could have been pretty good," said Urbanovich, who has 10 grandchildren. "But when you start at 65, it's pretty hard. A lot of the students start young. I'd say I'm not that good at it. I do enough to get by. You get what you put in. But it gets my heart pumping, and it's all-around good exercise.

"I'd like to take more classes, but my wife won't let me. It's pretty intense, but because of my age, I can't do what the younger students can. It's fun, and it keeps me going. You're in your own little world."

One aspect of taekwondo that especially appeals to Urbanovich is the reverence it pays to the elderly.

"The Korean culture, and really all Asian cultures, respect their older citizens," he said. "That's true even in the Latin cultures. In this country, that's not the case. When you get old here, they want to put you in a retirement home and see you once a month.

"[When I first started], I wanted to keep up with the younger students, and became frustrated when I couldn't," he said. "But Mr. Lim told me that I shouldn't try to keep up with the younger students. The goal was to keep at my own pace."

Urbanovich said he's learned so much from Lim, a seventh-degree black belt who has taught for nearly three decades.

"[Lim has] won tournaments all over the world, and even taught the Korean army self-defense," Urbanovich said. He wants his students to know how to defend themselves and not look for fights. He said it's important how you live your life."

Although he devotes his share of time to taekwondo, Urbanovich isn't always in the studio. Twice a week over the last four years, the 5-9, 190-pound Urbanovich has volunteered at Providence Saint Joseph Medical Center.

Along with his work at the hospital, he also finds time to garden, root for his beloved Lakers, watch the more than 1,500 movies he has on DVD and help raise cash to fight multiple sclerosis through bike rides.

However, it is at the martial arts studio where Steve Urbanovich works on himself, and there are a few specific accomplishments he is most proud of.

"If I had to pick some highlights, it would be getting my black belt and second-degree black belt, and meeting Mr. Lim," he said.

Not too bad for a 72-year-old guy who thought he might never find a passion to call his own.

Bullied no more:

From:

http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/local/states/florida/counties/broward_county/cities_neighborhoods/weston/15411326.htm

(September 3, 2006):

Ever since he started school, Mark Hunt pretty much knew what he could expect each day. There was the routine of class work, lunch and recess. But Mark, now an eighth-grader at Weston's Tequesta Trace Middle School, knew most days also would include something much more sinister: relentless bullying at the hands of his classmates.

With his slight frame, fair coloring and gentle nature, Mark became a perennial target for the other kids, who singled him out for nearly daily taunting, name-calling and worse.

"He's a generous and kindhearted kid, and all the abuse was making him terribly sad," said his mother, Cindy Beres.

"I was always caught off guard each time it happened and I never knew how to deal with it," said Mark, 14. "I just didn't know what to do to make it stop."

To help him learn how to defend himself, his parents enrolled him in group tae kwon do classes at Imperial Martial Arts in Weston. Mark immediately took to the program's discipline and camaraderie and especially enjoyed the connection he felt with his instructors, Grand Master Gus Alvarez and his wife, Master Carmen Alvarez.

While the initial goal was to teach him how to hit back, Mark and his family soon discovered that martial arts training espouses the opposite approach.

"Tae kwon do is a mind-body-spirit connection that teaches self-confidence and self-control," Beres said. "Students learn to deal with confrontation by simply walking away and not letting it bother them."

Mark's dedication and self-confidence swelled as he advanced through increasingly difficult skill levels, earning a rainbow of colored belts along the way. And though the bullying continued, he didn't rise to it, despite knowing he'd probably have to face it again the next day.

"Tae kwon do taught me not to act on my first impulse, which is to fight back, but instead to think things through and do what's right," he said.

After elementary school, the harassment escalated.

"Tequesta Trace was aware of what was going on, and they worked very hard to try to stop it," Beres said.

Mark befriended the school's resource officer, Tammy Young, who provided a safe haven and encouraged him to confide in her.

Last year, after seven years of hard work, Mark was awarded the coveted black belt, the 10th-highest level of skill.

His new self-confidence and refusal to react to confrontations wore his tormentors down. Finally, he could enjoy going to school.

"Tae kwon do has been wonderful for him, but it also helps anybody of any age improve their self-image and learn how to deal with peer pressure," Beres said.

Now that a new school year has begun, Mark is optimistic and excited about his final year of middle school.

"This year will be a lot easier because I've learned to not let those kids bother me and to let the things they do slide off my back," he said. "I just want to have fun hanging out with my good friends, not with the people who've proved they're not my friends."

A teen who sees with sounds:

From: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/09/06/eveningnews/main1977730.shtml>
(September 6, 2006):

At Sheldon High in Sacramento, Calif., 14-year-old Ben Underwood is a freshman like all the rest — well not exactly like all the rest. In his first week at school, a lot of people at the school haven't guessed that Ben has a secret.

You probably couldn't figure it out watching him in combat at karate class ... or hitting his mark in a pillow fight ... or zipping down the street on his roller blades. But in class, you'll notice that Ben takes his notes in Braille. He is totally blind. His piercing brown eyes are made of plastic. He says he lost his site two weeks before his third birthday.

Ben had cancer in both eyes. But he discovered a way to beat his blindness. When he was about 6, he started "clicking," and quickly realized that the sound he made with his tongue bounced off things around him, giving him an idea what was there.

CBS News correspondent John Blackstone says it's amazing to walk with Ben and discover what he can "see" with his ears.

"There's a fire hydrant on this side," Ben says a few clicks into their walk. "And a car on this side. Wait, is that, no, that's a trash can or a, hold on, let me see." After some more clicks: Ben walks up to a recycling can. "That's a trash can," he says, laughing as he gives it a kick. "A trash can or recycling bin, one of those."

Ben has much the same talent as the dolphins he visited at Sea World: the ability to use echolocation — returning sound waves — to sense his surroundings.

His clicks even told him to step around a fallen trash bin, amazing Blackstone. "I don't know how you do that," he says.

But the secret to Ben's success goes beyond his clicks.

His mother, Aquanetta Gordan, insists he should have every opportunity — but no pity.

"Why should he get a break — I can't get a break," she says.

Not even because he's blind?

"No, he's not," she says with a laugh. "I mean, to society he's blind, but that doesn't make him handicapped. He just can't see."

Aquanetta has always told Ben he can do anything.

"Once he said to me, 'Mom, I wish I could see.' And I said, 'But Ben, look at what you can do' I said, 'If we had a blackout right now, everybody would have to follow you.'"

Ben admits that during his first few days at high school, he got lost a couple of times. But, he says, so did every other freshman.

The more Ben manages to be ordinary ... the more it's clear that he's extraordinary.