

Inspirational Martial Arts Stories 2006-4

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

Not a doubt that this boy embodies karate spirit:

From: http://dailynews.com/ci_4351020
(September 16, 2006):

Fear and doubt never had a chance. Not from the minute Sam Flores laid eyes on 8-year-old Cole Massie wrapping both arms around a handrail at the Glendale YMCA and inching his way up the last 16 steps to make it to his karate class on time.

Those steps were supposed to be Flores' way out of this dilemma - the fear and doubt he was feeling.

The fifth-degree black belt sensei - a master karate teacher - feared no man. But he had come to fear this little boy with cerebral palsy who wanted so badly to learn karate.

For hours, Cole would sit in his wheelchair in his room watching pirate movies on TV and practicing karate moves to help the good guys win, says his mother, Michelle Massie.

For his 9th birthday, he wanted only one thing, he told her. Real karate lessons.

For weeks, Michelle called every karate instructor in the Yellow Pages only to hear the same answer:

"Sorry, we don't take severely handicapped children in wheelchairs as students. We are not trained to train them."

The Glendale YMCA was her last hope. A friend had told her about Flores, and how all the kids there loved him. Their sensei spent as much time in class teaching pride and respect as he did teaching them to fight and defend themselves.

If anyone could see past the wheelchair and her son's physical disability and know what to do, it would be this 50-year-old sensei with the big heart.

Michelle crossed her fingers and dialed his number.

Flores put down the phone and took a long, deep breath. Those old enemies of his were back, slowly crawling up the back of his neck. Fear and doubt.

"I knew I wasn't trained for this, and to be honest, I didn't want to do it," he said.

Flores thought long and hard, but in the end he called Michelle and gave her the bad news - couching it with a plausible excuse.

The elevator at the Glendale YMCA only went up to the third floor and his karate class was on the fourth floor. There was no handicapped access to get Cole to class in his wheelchair. I'm sorry, he said.

Flores hung up feeling as low as he had in a long time. Fear and doubt had won.

Michelle hung up and started to cry. She had nowhere else to turn. In a few minutes, she would walk into her son's room and tell him she had tried - but failed.

He was a great kid, never gave her or his father, Will, a second's worth of trouble or back talk. They had told Cole he could be whatever he wanted to be, not to let his wheelchair and cerebral palsy define him.

But it was defining him, and that made Michelle angry. She never made it to Cole's room that day. She picked up the phone and called Flores back.

"Are you saying the only reason Cole can't take lessons is because of those steps?" she asked him.

Sam smiled. He could see what was coming. This was one tough mother and kid that his fear and doubt were going up against.

"I'll carry my son up those steps if you'll take him," Michelle said, holding her breath.

There was a long pause. "Mondays and Wednesdays at 3:45 p.m.," the sensei said. "See you there."

And that's where Cole has been every Monday and Wednesday at 3:45 p.m. for the past nine months, arriving half an hour early so he can cling to the handrail and inch his crippled body up those last 16 steps to make it to class on time.

"I carried him the first six months, but now he wants to do it himself, show his sensei how far he has come," Michelle said last week.

Cole has nothing to prove to anyone, Flores says, watching the boy struggle up those steps last week.

"It used to break my heart watching him, but now I only feel pride and respect for him. This little boy is the essence of the karate spirit. Even though his body will not allow him to do what other kids can do, he never gives up.

"He has become the inspiration of my class, and teaching him karate has been the most rewarding thing I have ever done."

There was a special class last Saturday at the Glendale YMCA for Cole Massie's 9th birthday.

The sensei bowed and stood in front of his 20 students, who bowed back. Cole sat with them in his wheelchair, practicing all the modified moves Flores had devised for him.

Cole knew his test for a novice's yellow belt - the first color belt in karate - would be coming up soon. He just didn't know when.

Flores led the class through all the techniques, asking Cole before each one what it meant and how to say it in Japanese.

"I didn't tell him, but this was his test," Flores said. "Cole may be limited because of his physical limitations, but he grasped and excelled at the mental, spiritual essence of the karate spirit."

At the end of the session, the sensei announced that in 25 years as a teacher he never had one student score 100 percent on his yellow-belt test.

Cole Massie was his first.

Flores walked over to the boy and handed him his yellow belt as the class began clapping and cheering.

With a smile that lit up the room, Cole Massie looked up at his sensei, then over at his mom and dad. "I knew I could do it. I earned it," Cole said.

Yes, he had. One step at a time. Fear and doubt never had a chance.

A once-quiet, reserved, bullied youth learns confidence through martial arts:

From: http://www.tribstar.com/local/local_story_272153447.html
(September 29, 2006):

Terre Haute — Jimmy Hudson was a quiet, reserved boy who spent the past two years being bullied and picked on by classmates.

Now, the confident 9-year-old stands up for himself and looks forward to going to school every day.

Hudson began to change while taking summer classes in tae kwon do, a self-defense system similar to karate.

"He's more likable, he speaks up, he expresses himself," Cheryl Hudson said about her son.

During the past two years, Jimmy wasn't telling his mother or anyone else he was being bullied.

It was the few times that he came home with injuries such as nail marks or a hurt leg that gave it away to his mother, she said.

"I found myself wanting to keep him with me so I could protect him, but I knew that would just hurt him more," she said.

When the Hudsons took Jimmy to a tae kwon do instructor, they told him about his problems with bullies, a lack of confidence and battle with obsessive-compulsive disorder.

He was so compulsive, he once washed his hands so hard that they cracked and bled, Cheryl Hudson said. The boy's hand-washing compulsion is now not as severe.

This year, during back-to-school shopping, Jimmy was able to tell the saleslady what he was doing and what he was looking for. His mother said he would never have done that before the martial arts lessons.

If things start to get out of hand when he's playing outside, Cheryl Hudson said, she hears him tell the other children, "Stop, I don't want any trouble," just like he learned in class.

Cheryl Hudson attributes all of these positive changes to his martial arts lessons and the help of instructor S.J. Manning.

"I've never met anyone like [Manning] before," she said. "He's loved by us."

Manning said the Hudsons' issues weren't uncommon.

"All parents come here looking for a solution," he said.

He said a lot of times parents think they have to do everything on their own.

"We help take some of the pressure off," said Manning of Manning's Family Tae Kwon Do.

This year, Manning said, he's seen an increase in the number of people who have come in with bully problems, even among his current clients.

Since "your kid is young once," Manning said, it's better to prepare them for what they might encounter.

Master Bob Johnson from Johnson Tae Kwon Do also sees many children come in because of bullies; others come in just to meet other children.

Senior master Bill Minton from Minton's ATA Black Belt Academy said people come in to build self-esteem, gain confidence or learn physical fitness and self-defense.

Tae kwon do can help children, Manning said, because it's one of the few activities that combines physical and mental development. Sports only develops students mentally for that specific sport, and school has little physical stimulation beyond physical education classes, he said.

Tae kwon do allows people to learn about their bodies, develop positive habits and build confidence, Manning said. It's all about self-accomplishment with little goals that add up to a big goal.

“If you take a bath today it doesn’t mean you don’t take one tomorrow,” he said.
“You’re not clean forever.”

Johnson said the training is what makes tae kwon do stand out.

“It’s a whole different ball game,” he said. “They learn how to be respectful.”

What Jimmy does now to deal with bullying, Manning said, will benefit him 10 years from now after high school and in college.

Minton notes that it’s good to start telling children things such as to never give up, or practice until it’s right, so they can use it when they’re older.

“It’s a combination of what we do here and if they follow up at home,” he said.

Having a black belt helped one of Minton’s former students get into law school. The admissions people said it shows dedication and that the student would finish what he starts, he said.

Love and praise at United Cerebral Palsy breakfast:

From:

http://www.hudsonreporter.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=17294735&BRD=1291&PAG=461&dept_id=523591&rfi=6

(October 8, 2006):

Closkey Burns may have cerebral palsy, but he doesn't consider it a handicap.

Even though the 30-year-old Bayonne resident is confined to a wheelchair, he participates in an activity he always wanted to do, namely studying karate.

"I was a big Bruce Lee fan as a kid and I always wanted to do karate since I was a little boy," Burns said. "I've been going to UCP [United Cerebral Palsy center, located on Kennedy Boulevard in North Bergen] for 26 years now. I asked UCP if they could help me out, see if there was someone who could teach me karate."

Burns is part of UCP's ASN (Adults with Special Needs) program.

Last year, Burns was introduced to Sensei David Tirelli of the Tiger Schulman Karate School in Hackensack.

"That's how I got started," the affable Burns said. "It gave me something else to do. I think I'm doing pretty well. This is my first year of karate, but I already know I want to become a black belt. I think I'm doing pretty well for only one year. I take it very seriously."

Last Wednesday morning, Burns, who has been given the name of "Killer Closkey" by Tirelli, got to display some of the techniques he has learned over the past year.

Even though he was in the wheelchair, Burns showed all of the approximately 150 people who attended the UCP of Hudson County's annual VIP Breakfast, held at the Chandelier in Bayonne, exactly what he has learned with Tirelli over the past year.

Burns was one of three UCP patrons who showed off their finest karate moves. Burns actually sparred with Tirelli, displaying his punching ability after Tirelli was impersonating a would-be robber.

"You better get back, Jack," Burns told the pseudo-thief. "You don't want my money." With that, Burns unleashed a flurry of punches that caught the instructor off guard.

"He got me pretty good a couple of times," Tirelli said. "I never expected that. Killer Closkey can throw a mean punch."

The display brought the audience to its feet.

99 year old champions tai chi:

From: http://wusa9.com/news/news_article.aspx?storyid=52865
(October 16, 2006):

"Push away those distracting thoughts and empty everything," says physical therapist Tom Hobin.

One of his most faithful students is 99 years old.

All the students are between the ages of 69 and 99, but they say if you just bring them their Tai Chi, they'll be happy.

"Get ready for that deep punch down low, and punch in the calf. Now come up for the bow and arrow," Hobin says to his students.

He says his pupils have humbled him, especially Kathryn Thames.

"She taught me not to call anybody 'old', and because of all of these wonderful people my stereotype of aging has changed. All of them, all of us just want to be treated like people," said Hobin.

Thames figures she is just being smart. She loves arguing politics (she is a staunch Texas Democrat) before class and working out the stress during the moves, which resemble martial arts techniques done in slow motion.

She says it worried her when she started walking with a bit of a shuffle. She was afraid of falling and maybe breaking a hip or a shoulder.

Falls can be devastating in this age group of patients, easily landing them in nursing homes and threatening their independence for good. Falls can even be fatal.

However, Thames is not focused on dodging death; her eyes are squarely set on living well. Gone is her shuffle and the strength and balance she has gotten from the Tai Chi has also given her confidence that she is not as fragile as many would think her to be.

"Oh, it's amazing the things I have seen in my lifetime. I've lived through so many wars. I was only 13 for the first World War and sent my husband off to World War II," she said.

And she says she is not done yet, not by a long shot.

"I believe I was put here for some reason and I've been here 99 years so there must be some reason I'm still here. So I keep working at it to see what that is," said Thames.

So she places her arms in the 'grab the ear of the tiger' pose and clasps her hands together to salute her teacher and her classmates, even the Republicans. "This is a far cry from the way I grew up," she said.

Challenge of black belt:

From: <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/metro/20061028-9999-7m28tae.html>
(October 28, 2006):

After tae kwon do master Anthony Hong met his newest pupil, he was up all night, trying to figure out how he would teach the boy.

The Korean martial art is known for its high and fast kicks. But Hong's student, Colin Waltari, couldn't kick. Tae kwon do fighters use their arms to block and punch. But Colin's arms were busy holding onto his crutches.

Hong had taught a blind man before, but never someone with the physical challenges that Colin had with cerebral palsy. Hong knew he'd have to be creative.

"Why don't I make some techniques with the crutches and see if it works?" Hong said he thought.

"And it works."

Now, 3½ years later, Colin is 12 years old and about to test for black belt. He will test before his instructor and other students at Hong's Poway studio today.

Hong said it typically takes his students more than three years to attain a black belt. First, they begin with a white belt, and then will test for higher levels, symbolized by the colors of the belts: yellow, green, blue, red and then black.

With each level comes a student's expanding knowledge of tae kwon do philosophy and mastery of new skills.

The graduation to the next level comes after a student passes an oral and skill test. For Colin's black belt, he also must write an essay about how his study of tae kwon do has changed his life.

Over the past few decades, tae kwon do and other martial arts have become more of a cross-training tool for people, said Jim Wolff, chief executive officer of the American Taekwondo Association.

At the same time, martial arts have become more accessible to people with disabilities. Wolff estimated that about 1 percent of people practicing tae kwon do have some sort of disability.

“Instead of focusing on what people can't do, we focus on what they can do. We have people in wheelchairs who can't walk, but they can do the upper-body techniques.” Wolff said.

The physical skills of tae kwon do are important, Wolff said, but are secondary to the discipline a student learns.

“It's about the individual growing physically and mentally, sharpening the body and the mind to their best ability.”

Since starting his private lessons with Hong, Colin, a seventh-grader at Marshall Middle School in Scripps Ranch, has grown stronger and more confident.

“At first I couldn't lift up my crutches,” Colin said.

Now, he lifts them in high arcs and wide, horizontal sweeps in a series of complex maneuvers. And he can stand without crutches, and, with a long staff known as a bo in his hands, mimic the moves of his teacher.

Off the mat, Colin, like many preteens, is a person of few words around new people. He shrugs and uncomfortably looks to his mother, who smiles and provides a little prompting.

He plans to continue with tae kwon do indefinitely.

“It helps me with my balance and it's fun,” Colin said.

Colin, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy when he was a year old, has walked with crutches since he was 2.

Cerebral palsy is caused by abnormalities in the parts of the brain that control muscle movements. Most people are born with it; some develop the condition in infancy.

There is no cure for cerebral palsy, but treatment and therapy can help improve muscle function.

The national organization United Cerebral Palsy estimates there are about 764,000 American children and adults who have one or more symptoms of the condition. Each year, about 8,000 babies are diagnosed with cerebral palsy.

There is a range of severity in symptoms. Colin has been able to play soccer and baseball, and golf and ski.

He has had three surgeries to help improve his movement, the last one four years ago. Colin's parents, Don and Mary Waltari, thought tae kwon would help their son.

“It's good for athleticism and it's a confidence-builder,” said Don Waltari, who had practiced the martial art years earlier.

“This is a nice one (sport) because it teaches him agility and speed and balance,” Mary Waltari said. “And he has to say 'sir.' ”

A recent lesson began with Hong asking Colin to do 30 push-ups.

Colin let go of his crutches and dropped to the mat. Hong stooped over him, counting off each one.

Then it was on to sit-ups.

“Try not to use your neck,” Hong said. “Good.”

After leg lifts and stretching, the two rose to their feet for a series of maneuvers. Hong held cane sticks, used for sparring. Colin used his crutches.

They faced the mirror, teacher behind student.

Hong wove his sticks through the air, ending each maneuver with “Ay-ah.”

Colin, his eyes peeking out from under his sandy bangs, then followed, ending his moves with a soft “Ay.” Over and over it went like this.

“Ay-ah . . . Ay . . . Ay-ah . . . Ay.”

“In the three and a half years he's been with me, he's progressed so much,” Hong said. “He inspires me to be a better teacher.”

Weimar girl says she'll walk on her own 'one day':

From: <http://www.colfaxrecord.com/articles/2006/11/02/news/community/04help.txt>
(November 1, 2006):

Weimar - When Hope Adrian was first diagnosed with spastic deplegia (stiff legs) Cerebral Palsy, she was too young to understand her condition.

The Weimar 8-year-old was an infant at the time. She and her identical twin sister Sierra, who does not suffer from any conditions, were born 10 weeks prematurely due to a complicated pregnancy.

The complications caused damage to Hope's brain when she was born and resulted in the neurological disorder, which she knows all too well today.

"I am able to keep my balance when I walk, the only difference is that I am not able to stop quickly - I have to grab onto something," Hope said. "I can get up on my own too, it just takes a little more effort for me."

Hope walks on her toes rather than using her heels. It has caused her to go through shoes quickly because she wears out the tops and gets holes in them. Throughout the day, she has to walk with hiking sticks, to help her keep her balance and retain strength.

Hope said the hardest part about her condition is not struggling with walking correctly, but dealing with classmates who don't understand what she has.

"I stand out from the other kids," Hope said. "A lot of kids will just stare like they are afraid to ask me what is wrong with me. Sometimes they ask and I just tell them I was born with a disability and it is sort of like I have mixed-up wires. I tell them I can't walk as well so I have to use sticks to keep my balance."

Though she doesn't have complete control of her legs, Hope doesn't let it slow her down too much.

She is active during recess at school and participates in soccer, karate, gymnastics and Girl Scouts.

"She still does everything other kids do," said Hope's mom, Ginger Adrian. "She has always taken life head-on and has done anything she has wanted to do."

Hope, along with her sister and mom, left last week for Poland to receive a second round of special therapy called "Spider" therapy, which she needs to help her learn to walk on her own.

Ginger Adrian said similar therapies are offered in the United States, but are much more costly and Poland is where the treatment originated.

The Norman Rehabilitation Center in Poland has been providing Spider therapy to children with neurological disorders, like Cerebral Palsy, since 1994.

The "Spider" consists of a number of elastic cords of different elasticity attached to certain points on the patient's body at one end and to the different points on the surrounding construction on the other one.

The unique suspension device enables independent and controlled movement as well as strengthening of the affected parts of the body.

Therapy for Hope will be six days a week, four hours a day.

The intensive sessions will help Hope gain strength and learn new skills, which are expected to help her eventually walk on her own.

Joyce Bradshaw, a pediatrician with Sutter Medical Group in Auburn, has had about four patients travel to Europe for similar therapy.

"I think they usually make progress, but in my experience, I haven't seen what a lot of people go over there hoping for," Bradshaw said. "They do make gains and every gain is huge for these kids."

She said a few families have even gone back to receive the therapy and that, in her opinion, shows that her patients are satisfied with the way the child is responding to the therapy.

"You never know how your child is going to respond," she said. "But I think, if kids are making progress, it is a great thing - every little bit is a big thing for children with this condition."

Hope said the therapy can be a little hard on her body.

"Usually I'd be really tired after it," Hope said. "A lot of times it doesn't hurt while I am doing it, but then my muscles would get really sore and it will hurt afterward."

But she doesn't let it get her down because she knows, one day, all her hard work will pay off.

"I know one day I will be able to walk on my own," Hope said. "I am just focusing on my upper body right now. I spend most of my time thinking - instead of exercising physically, I just like to exercise my thoughts."

Visakhapatnam teenaged girl practices Karate with one hand!:

From:

<http://www.dailyindia.com/show/90469.php/Visakhapatnam-teenaged-girl-practices-Karate-with-one-hand!>
(December 7, 2006):

Watching the 12-year-old Nadipalli Akshita practice various Karate steps with the ease of any national Champion is a sight that hardly anyone would like to give a miss. But for this single-handed teenaged girl, it's just another day of life devoted to martial arts.

Akshita, during the last six-year association with the awe-inspiring game, requiring an extremely tough practice routine, has vanquished hundreds of opponents in various bouts.

She has won her matches despite being a one-handed player.

She resides in Visakhapatnam and never allowed her physical disability to dissuade her from chasing her passion.

A first-degree dan in Kung Fu and an Orange Belt in Karate, Akshita is practicing for the international Karate championship in Brazil next year.

"I have got 73 gold medals, 30 silver medals, 25 bronze medals. In Kung Fu, I have a Black Belt whereas in Karate, it's an Orange Belt. In 2007, I am going to Brazil," says Akshita while showing her long list of medals.

According to E. Srinivas, Akshita's coach for six years, she needs proper encouragement.

"There is no encouragement for people like her from the government. She has a chance to win medals at the international level, but nothing so far been done to keep her motivated," says Srinivas.

In India, there are about 22 million disabled people, who undergo discrimination on various platforms in daily life. Over the years, martial arts have gained popularity with Indian girls, with thousands learning it both for physical fitness and self-defense.

The requirements for each belt vary as a student progresses, and each form of karate has a different grading system.

Karate may be practiced for many reasons, but was developed for self-defense. The kata contain a variety of techniques intended for this purpose: hand strikes, kicks, locking, and grappling. However, proper training is required to make these techniques usable against a determined aggressor.

Karate (or, empty hand) is a martial art of Ryukyuan origin.

The word "karate" comes from "Kara", meaning empty, and "te" meaning hand. Karate has a rich and diverse history of development, incorporating countless influences from other martial arts and cultures.

Student doesn't allow blindness to keep her from trying new things:

From: <http://www.heraldonline.com/109/story/10165.html>
(December 11, 2006):

Nancy VanderBrink wanted to join Winthrop University's Chinese Martial Arts Club but knew her parents wouldn't approve.

VanderBrink has retina problems as a result of being born three months premature. Cataracts complicated the matter. She already is legally blind and if she were to receive a hit in the head, she might go completely blind.

Parents worry about things like that.

The martial arts club has never had a member with a disability before.

While contemplating the idea, revelation struck VanderBrink.

"My logic is I'm going to lose (my vision) anyway," she said. "I might as well enjoy it while I got it."

She signed up.

Coming to Winthrop was a challenge in itself but since the Spartanburg student arrived, she has become actively involved. In addition to martial arts, she co-hosts a radio show on the Winthrop station and sings with the chorale.

Her decision to try martial arts came as a shock to some.

"I was surprised at the fact that she was interested in martial arts and what surprised me even more was the fact that she kept with it," said Delmar Minor, the club's president.

The martial arts instructors had to learn new ways of teaching VanderBrink the Kung fu moves, but Minor said she's improved dramatically and others can benefit from her example.

"I think it's amazing how she doesn't let (her disability) limit her and even though her eye sight is not the best, she puts 110 percent into everything she does," Minor said.

Vanderbrink's sight has progressively gotten worse since her childhood. One day she will lose all of her sight. She uses Braille to read and has a seeing eye dog. Anything more than a couple feet away is a blur of color. But that hasn't stopped her from striving for goals.

VanderBrink entered Winthrop in August as a mass communication major with a focus on broadcast. She said her mother wasn't happy at the thought of her attending Winthrop at first.

"Why can't you go to one of the school's here?" she remembers her mother asking. But VanderBrink responded by telling her mother that most things she needs at Winthrop are within walking distance.

"That's my whole reason for being (at Winthrop)," she said. "I don't have to wait on anybody to take me anywhere."

She's adapted well and having a blast.

"The people at the radio station have been great," she said. "They let me put Braille all over the studio and label all the buttons I needed to know."

Reaching this point of her life wasn't easy. VanderBrink credits her choral teacher from Spartanburg, Lane Moore, with helping her come to grips with her disability.

"If I screwed up he'd sit me down and tell me 'you screwed up,'" she said. "I needed that."

"He was the person who really helped me accept the fact that I was going to lose all my vision and that rather than it being an 'if,' it was a 'when,' and to know that I would still be alive," she said.

She said one of the hardest things was when she realized she wouldn't be able to read music anymore.

"To realize that I'm not going to be able to do that anymore and that all the time I had invested in that and how much freedom and enjoyment I got from being able to read music and being able to understand something that was written 250 years ago and then to realize that was all going to go away. That was tough," she said.

She said there are times of self doubt, but she deals with it and does what she has to do.

VanderBrink's dream is to one day do sound for movies.

"I think I would like sound performance. I really do," she said. "I think it would be so much fun to sit there and create sounds."

If she brings as much determination as she has brought to Winthrop University, VanderBrink is sure to succeed.

"I think she would love to be able to see as well as we can and she doesn't have that ability," said Minor, the martial arts instructor. "But, even though she doesn't have that ability it does not limit her in whatever she does. If she wants to do it, Nancy will do it and I respect that and I appreciate that about her."

With pride and honor:

From: <http://www.journal-news.net/Living/articles.asp?articleID=5672>
(December 16, 2006):

All Jane Couser had to do was ask.

Couser's son, Ryan, 20, had been involved with Special Olympics for years. And although he had enjoyed playing basketball, volleyball and track, he had fallen into a routine. "He was just really getting tired of it," she says.

Couser then thought of Master Timothy Clyde of Clyde's Karate in Inwood. She had taken a women's self-defense class with Clyde and wondered if Soo Bahk Do, a traditional Korean martial art, could help her son.

"I said, 'I want to know if you could teach my son karate,'" she says watching as Ryan and two other students work with Clyde in the room next door. "He said, 'Sure, bring him in.'"

But Couser told him to get all the facts. First, Ryan was then-19, but more importantly he has Down Syndrome. Still, she says, Clyde agreed to meet with Ryan and go from there.

Couser says at the first lesson she and Clyde talked again. "I told him, 'Honestly, if you get in there and think that isn't for me, that's fine,'" she says.

After the first lesson, Clyde came out of his classroom. "He said, 'He's not leaving,'" she says with a smile.

Clyde says he and Ryan had an instant bond. "We made a connection," he says later after class. "It wasn't a verbal connection. It took us a few months for that."

Today, Ryan is one of five active students with a physician diagnosed physical or mental disability who take classes at Clyde's Karate. The main objective is to work with each student so he or she can be included in Clyde's mainstream karate classes, depending on each student's abilities.

When Couser approached him about working with Ryan, Clyde says he needed to do a little research. "I have friends who taught special needs (students) and I contacted them," Clyde says.

He also had to ask special permission from U.S. Soo Bahk Do Moo Duk Kwan Federation on how to move forward with the lessons. Clyde started the discipline

himself in 1983 and earned his 1st-degree black belt in 1986. Comparing Soo Bahk Do to other disciplines of karate, Clyde describes it as being “less sport and more art.”

Clyde says he knew he would have to modify his classes for the students. “Soo Bahk Do is very standard and very strict,” he says.

The federation let him know that as long as the students were making a good effort, Clyde could recognize and promote them. Ryan has earned an orange belt.

Couser says she has noticed that the classes with Clyde have benefited Ryan in helping to understand what is expected of him. One day, she says, he was acting up in class at Musselman High School, the same day he was scheduled for karate. Couser shared the information with Clyde.

“He told him, ‘My karate students don’t act that way, ... so you can’t come to karate class,’” Couser says. For two hours her son kept on telling her that he was sorry. “It just devastated him.”

But, she says, she hasn’t had a problem with him acting up at school since because he doesn’t want to risk missing another class. And, she says, the excitement he has with the classes don’t even compare to how much he enjoyed competing in Special Olympics.

“He always asks if this is karate day and he carries his karate bag,” she says.

Sharon Barahona has enrolled her son, Sal, 12, with classes with Clyde as well. She had taken Sal’s younger brother to Clyde’s Karate and thought her older son could benefit from karate as well.

Barahona says she can see results in working with Clyde. “A year ago, he wouldn’t go 2 inches off the floor ... his balance and coordination has improved so much,” she says. “The man does wonderful work in there.” She nods toward the room.

She says she has noticed in something as simple as the way her son moves that the karate has helped him. “And he’s slimmed down,” she says.

Barahona says her son enjoys coming to classes and working with his friends. And about two months ago, Sal, who attends Musselman Middle School, started taking regular classes with his brother. “He just loves it,” she says.

More importantly, she says, his self-esteem has increased. “He’s just so proud of himself. He knows the orange belt is next — he can’t wait.”

Couser says she too has noticed changes in Ryan. There are physical ones like more muscle tone and improved balance.

Ryan (communicating by shaking his hand behind his back) says he enjoys taking the class. And he says he’s learned a lot.

During buddy night in March, Ryan brought along fellow Musselman High School student Sean Grove, who has Down Syndrome.

Carolyn Grove says in a telephone interview that her son Sean needed help with coordination. She knew talking with Ryan's mother that it might benefit Sean as well. She says Sean was eager to go to class. "He just loves 'Karate Kid,'" she says.

Grove says she has seen so much improvement in Sean, 20, who will receive a certificate from Musselman High School in May.

She says she was really hoping karate would improve his coordination, his balance and that he may get some exercise. "He has learned so much from karate. He has been able to do so much," she says.

"He does a lot of exercises with him," she says. "I've really noticed muscle tone on Sean."

Grove credits Clyde himself for the improvements she has seen in her son. "Master Clyde is really good with special kids. He has a lot of patience and takes his time to work with them. And he keeps working with them. ... The kids really respect him."

Lori Stiles, a teacher at Musselman High School, has worked with Sean and Ryan for five years. She says she has noticed an improvement in both students and encouraged Clyde to apply for grants through the West Virginia Developmental Disabilities Council.

Ryan, she says, used to be "so quiet in class" and she often had a hard time hearing him. But after taking classes, she hears his voice more.

She says she noticed in both Ryan and Sean that their agility and mobility have improved. "Fire drills used to take forever," she says. "Now, Sean and Ryan are leading the pack."

And during a recent trip to the Dulles Air and Space Museum, Stiles saw how Ryan's ability and stamina have increased. Although Ryan had been working with intervals using a hoop at Clyde's, the museum there has a long staircase. Stiles says she was a little worried. "He always had a problem with stairs," she says.

But before she had a chance, Ryan flew up the steps. "I fully attribute it to karate," she says.

Stiles says she has also noticed changes in Sean. "In one year, he lost weight, has more stamina and his breathing has improved," she says.

Sean, she says, was also diagnosed with sleep apnea and losing the weight helped. "He also has more energy," she says.

Clyde says he approaches each class, similar to how a school teacher would complete a lesson plan. "But then I have to adjust accordingly," he says. "Maybe we were going to work on endurance, but they're worn out from school."

He says for Ryan he had to modify how to teach him how to do a high block. For months, Ryan would hold Clyde's fingers as he attempted each high block. Until finally, Ryan was able to do it without holding onto Clyde.

Sean, too, has made an improvement. “Sean couldn’t do a sit up. Now he does 100,” he says.

Clyde says he enjoys seeing his students grow. “It makes me proud. It’s no different than with any other student,” he says.

In order to qualify for the grant from the West Virginia Developmental Disabilities Council, Clyde says the application process was “page after page after page.” He says one of the main objectives was to include 10 adults and children who have developmental disabilities into martial arts training classes. Clyde will also produce a DVD by the end of the grant period that will show other martial arts instructors how their schools can also integrate adults and children into their programs.

He says he is extremely grateful for the council’s support and belief in Soo Bahk Do and Clyde’s Karate. “The continued success and the future of Clyde’s Karate working side by side with disabled community members is being made possible by the trust you have in our vision,” he says in a prepared statement directed at the council. “You are special people that obligate yourself to perform nothing less than excellent. The members of our community will highly benefit from your pure, unselfish mission. Again, thank you for tolerating my persistence, and thank you for becoming a strong influence in bettering our community.”

But it seems the students say it best. Sean says his favorite part about the classes is learning how to punch and kick. He also enjoys working with the students. “I like the kids,” Sean says, then flashes a smile.

Clyde says he’s also learned a lesson when it comes to special needs students. “Be creative –it goes a long way.”

Blackbelt Ethan is an inspiration:

From:

http://www.stockportexpress.co.uk/news/s/221/221595_blackbelt_ethan_is_an_inspiration.html
(December 27, 2006):

Teenage black belt Ethan Ward should be an inspiration to all parents with autistic children - according to his karate instructor.

The 15-year-old, who has Asperger Syndrome, successfully completed his black belt grading in Karate, at Meadow Mill's Bushido Martial Arts Club last week.

And his sensei John Robertson has been so impressed with the Ethan’s determination to succeed that he recently awarded the Bridgehall teenager the club's Outstanding Achievement Award.

John, who has a daughter with autism, said: “Ethan had to work hard for nearly four hours to get his black belt and surpassed the adults along the way.

“He has been given no special treatment and is an absolute pleasure to teach.

“It is an amazing achievement for him and he has really won the admiration of all the students and parents at the club.”

He added: “Some people think you can not teach children with autism but if you give them something to aim at, Ethan has shown just what can be achieved. He should really be an inspiration to all parents of autistic children.”

Ethan - who attends the Together Trust school Inscape Cheadle - was diagnosed with autism when he was four-years-old.

His father Robert Ward said: “This is a big milestone in Ethan's life. I'm very proud of him. It's the hardest I have ever seen him work and he really really impressed me.

“Ethan has had his ups and downs but the way things are going for him at school and karate I know he is going to have a decent standard of living in future.

“Through karate he's is developing life skills and meeting people. He is doing brilliantly.”

Dojo recognizes two with Down syndrome, three new black belts:

From: <http://www.sungazette.com/news/articles.asp?articleID=13109>
(December 29 , 2006):

“Anyone and everyone can achieve their goals once they're dedicated and committed, regardless of obstacles.”

With those words, karate instructor Anthony Dew, a 10th degree international grand master, on Wednesday recognized five athletes for their hard work under his training in martial arts at Anthony's Karate Dojo.

Receiving black belt certification were brothers Angelo and Anthony Barberio, ages 10 and 11, of Muncy, and Colby Lowmiller, age 14, of Cogan Station. They will be inducted into the USA Hall of Fame on March 3 for being among the country's youngest black belts, Dew said.

Missy Brower, 27, of Cogan Station and Roger Turner, 32, of Nisbet, who both have Down syndrome, were praised by Dew for their commitment as they received self defense certificates and demonstrated the skills they have acquired on the path to obtaining the coveted prize of black belt themselves.

Dew, dapper in a black tuxedo, led a two-hour demonstration that included performances by the black belt candidates, instructors and other students. At the end, the two Barberios and Lowmiller held their hands high as their instructors tied the new belts around their waists.

Dew, 56, has taught Shotokan Karate for 36 years. Originally from Philadelphia, he moved to the area 12 years ago to take a job as a clinical supervisor in a residential facility in Lewisburg.

Between demonstrations, he repeatedly spoke of the virtues of setting goals and reaching them.

“Turn a stumbling block into a stepping stone,” he repeated.

Brower and Turner are an excellent example of persistence and dedication to overcome adversity, Dew said. The pair demonstrated their skills together, following commands barked out by Dew.

Brower’s eyes looked to the ground as she made each move, her face fixed with determination, while Turner’s face was bright and eager.

Brower’s grandparents, Don and Jean Winters of Cogan Station, who have raised her since she was a toddler, looked on proudly as she performed.

Though Brower began taking lessons in the spring with the help of a sponsor, she began honing her skills long before, Jean Winters said.

“Actually, she started a long time ago watching Walker Texas Ranger. People would ask me, ‘Does she take lessons?’ ”

Her enthusiasm was evident, but the Winters were hesitant to enroll her in lessons, she said.

“I kept telling her girls don’t do that!” Jean Winters said, laughing.

Turner began training two years ago.

He came to parents Bob and Pat Turner through foster care when he was 11 years old, Bob Turner said.

“They told us, ‘Give him a lot of love but don’t expect a lot from him.’ ”

Since then, the 32-year-old has excelled in many athletic fields and won three medals at the Special Olympics World Games in Alaska in 2001. Beginning with therapeutic horseback riding, he has since taken up basketball, cross country skiing and soccer, Bob Turner said.

“Anything athletic he would be good at.”

Also a Special Olympics competitor, Brower enjoys bowling, basketball, and has just begun ballet, Jean Winters said.

“Anywhere where she’s active, she loves it,” she said.

“She loves it,” she said. “If she thinks she can’t come she has a fit.”

During their demonstrations, Dew asked students how karate has improved their lives.

“I’ve learned how to defend myself,” Roger Turner responded.

After the presentation, he and Brower were glowing with pride. Roger Turner's progress has stunned his case worker, who did not have very high expectations for his progress, Bob Turner said.

"He saw Roger a year or so ago, and he was just overwhelmed. It brought tears to his eyes," he said.

Karate Helps Reading Girl:

From: <http://wfmz.com/view/?id=42313>
(December 29, 2006):

She's looks sweet, but this Reading teen packs a punch.

14-year-old Marilyn Sanchez has been taking classes at the American Martial Arts Studio in Reading since October.

She's already earned her yellow belt, something that usually takes about three months. But beyond proper punches, she's also been able to extend her right arm and leg further than ever before.

Marilyn has Cerebral Palsy, but her instructors say it doesn't hold her back. "She started standing out right away in the beginning; advancing at a rather quick rate."

"My goal is to get my hand stronger and maybe try to finish all the belts, something like that."

Marilyn says after karate, she wants to be a boxer.