

Inspirational Martial Arts Stories 2007-2

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

Kicking in obstacles:

From:

http://www.newsgleaner.com/site/news.cfm?BRD=2340&dept_id=488594&newsid=17886037&PAG=461&rfi=9
(February 22 , 2007):

Pennsylvania -- When Eric Cohen began taking Tae Kwon Do lessons back when he was four-years-old, he loved it so much he was dressed and ready for his dad to take him to the dojo every day, even on Sunday. Problem was, it wasn't open on Sunday

Eric did not want to believe he would not be able to go, so his father, Mark Cohen, had to drive him past the Red Tiger dojo at 1912 Welsh Rd to prove to him it was closed.

He did that three weeks in a row before Eric would finally accept the fact he couldn't go that day.

The now 21-years-old, Cohen, a who is a senior attending special education classes at George Washington High, did find enough time in the six days a week to become an expert at Tae Kwon Do.

He is currently a fourth-degree black belt and a certified international instructor and helps teach classes at Red Tiger.

As far as dojo owner Master Mario Cancelliere knows, and he has traveled around the world for competitions, Cohen is the only special needs person who has reached the fourth-degree level (there are nine degrees of black belt in Tae Kwon Do).

"I feel proud to have him as a student," said Cancelliere. "Not only does he compete in tournaments, he wins trophies. He inspires others.

"We have a little girl who is in a similar situation as him who came here two years ago. When her parents saw him, they signed her up."

According to his father, Eric is mildly retarded but Mark Cohen brought his son to Red Tiger actually to help with another condition he had, Rheumatoid Arthritis. He had an older son Jason who had gone through the program.

"My wife thought I was crazy at the time," said Mark.

But Eric immediately liked Tae Kwon Do, which is a modern martial art from Korea that is characterized by its fast, high and spinning kicks.

"It's fun to do," he says.

Pretty soon, Cohen was spending 5 to 6 hours a day at Red Tiger.

"He vacuums the basement, he cleans the mirrors, I feel proud to have him as a student," said Cancelliere. "He's an example of what a Tae Kwon Do student should be."

There are no Tae Kwon Do events for special needs people but Cohen loves to compete.

He has gone as far as Saskatchewan, Canada and Puerto Rico for tournaments, and he is in regular tournaments just like any other Tae Kwon Do expert.

And make no mistake about it, Cohen is not there just for fun. In his last tournament, he came in second in the sparring competition and third in form.

"He wants to win so badly," said Marcello Cancelliere, an instructor at Red Tiger who usually competes at the same tournaments as Cohen. "When he loses, he's back the next day training and wanting to know when the next tournament is. The other competitors are respectful of him, but they have to watch it or he'll get them.

"When he was 15, he won a match at the national championships in Orlando, Florida. He was so happy, you would have thought he had won the world championship."

After graduating from Washington this year, Cohen is planning on enrolling at Orleans Tech and learn a trade. But his biggest goal involves Tae Kwon Do.

"I want a ninth-degree black belt," he said. "That might take a while."

'I'm hitting the cancer':

From: <http://ledger.southofboston.com/articles/2007/02/23/news/news04.txt>
(February 24, 2007):

It's 8 p.m. on a Wednesday at a mini-mall in Foxboro. Helen Taylor, 49, of Mansfield and 14-year-old Nisha Shah of Foxboro are warily circling one another. They wear helmets, gloves, body pads, mouth guards and no-nonsense expressions. "Hiii-yeh!" shouts Taylor, landing a punch on Shah, who deftly lifts her leg and kicks Taylor's helmet.

Taylor has one particular adversary in mind.

"I'm hitting the cancer - that's what I'm thinking about when I'm punching," she says during a break, sweat running down her face.

When her colon cancer was first diagnosed in January 2004, Taylor had surgery and was declared cancer-free. She fought to stay healthy through her diet, lifestyle, kick-boxing and karate, but in October 2005, the cancer returned in her liver. It was inoperable.

"It's treatable, but in the end, the cancer usually wins," a surgeon told her.

"Win? I'll decide who will win - and it won't be the cancer," she thought.

Taylor, who is classified advertising operations manager for The Patriot Ledger and The Enterprise of Brockton, has been asked by her nurse at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute to share her positive approach to cancer with other patients and the public.

She promised her husband, Joseph, and two teenage sons, Christopher, 16, and Matthew, 13: “Whatever it takes to beat this, I’ll do. I have way too much to live for.”

From November 2005 until last May, she underwent six months of grueling intravenous chemotherapy and kept up her martial arts as she could. In June, she resumed her training and a month ago, on Jan. 19, her instructor, karate classmates and family celebrated her success in a ceremony at Sharon High School.

Along with 100 other candidates, Taylor received her first-degree black belt. She was chosen to give the student speech.

“I knew this was a fight I had to work really hard to win,” she told the gathering. “I had to be around for my sons, to maybe see Chris play his first NFL game, or see the first video that Matt would design. I wanted to be there for my husband Joe, to play with our grandkids.”

On Feb. 9, she had her latest scan at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute to check the tumor in her liver. It is half the size it was a year ago and continues to get smaller.

She is now taking chemotherapy drugs indefinitely and says, “I’m hoping it still shrinks further. The doctors are thrilled and said some studies indicate that exercise during chemotherapy can improve survival rates.”

Taylor has resumed a reduced schedule at work. She teaches kick-boxing one night a week at the Foxboro YMCA and takes karate classes two nights a week at Personal Best Karate. She also teaches the Bishop Feehan High School Band Color Guard in Attleboro and is training for her second-degree black belt in two years.

When she talks to others about her cancer, she doesn’t downplay the initial shock or fear. Because she had no family history of colon cancer, is a nonsmoker, and has always been athletic and healthy, she was stunned by the diagnosis at age 46.

“For a moment, everything stood still,” she says. “I thought, ‘Cancer happens to other people, not me,’ wildly knowing that countless others must have had exactly the same thoughts.”

Her odds for a cure were good after she had surgery in early 2004 to remove a section of her colon, was found to be cancer-free, with clear lymph nodes, and required no further treatment. Soon she was back on track, training to qualify for the black belt with long predawn runs. In January 2005, she had a follow-up colonoscopy with clean results.

That fall, she became bloated but still felt fine. She went for a CT scan and on Halloween, she learned the cancer had returned. A three-mile run she needed to complete to qualify for the black belt was just two weeks away.

“I knew I needed to do that run - and I knew I needed to pass,” she said. “The morning of the run, I decided that, for that one day, I didn’t have cancer. I was going to run as fast as I could and make my family and friends proud.”

She ran her fastest time ever - three miles in 23 minutes, 15 seconds.

Two weeks later, she started the “heavy duty” chemotherapy, four different drugs, every two weeks for six months.

“At that point, I decided I needed to take myself off the black-belt training cycle, but I kept up karate as I could. It kept my body strong and gave my mind a rest from the chemo.”

Pam Freitas, 44, of Foxboro, met Taylor seven years ago through kick-boxing. When she heard that Taylor’s cancer had returned, Freitas feared for the worse.

“I’ve known other people whose chemotherapy treatment absolutely stopped them in their tracks, whose treatments ended up almost being worse than the disease,” she said.

“I could not believe how well she did - I don’t think she missed any of her classes, which are at 8 at night. She didn’t want to let her students down. She didn’t complain, she kept up with everything and put a lot of effort into her health.”

Tracy Rappold, co-owner of Personal Best Karate, has watched Taylor over the past three years.

“She has such a positive attitude, and she has surrounded herself with positive people,” Rappold said. “At times, you could see Helen was tired, but she never let up. She’s been an inspiration to a lot of people.”

Motivated by faith:

From: <http://www.infocusnews.net/content/view/4010/135/>
(March , 2007):

Riverside man devotes life to helping disadvantaged youth.

Mentor, professor, psychologist, chaplain, and a karate black belt, Edward Muneer Abdulmumin is a man who does not sit idle. The 60-year-old resident of Riverside reverted to Islam in 1975 and views his faith as the motivating factor in making a difference in his community.

Born and raised in South Central Los Angeles, Abdulmumin is no stranger to the violence, drug, and gang problems plaguing this area. Much of Abdulmumin’s life has been dedicated to mentoring and providing opportunities to underprivileged youth. He heads the Du Bois Institute to provide positive alternatives to street life for youth through fitness, academic and creative research and tutoring, as well as gang and drug prevention.

Abdulmumin's own life is testimony to how good mentoring and a good environment can make a difference. Coming from a disadvantaged background himself, through positive role models, he went on to become the first African American to receive a Ph.D. in social ecology from the University of California at Irvine.

InFocus got a chance to speak with E.M. Abdulmumin recently.

InFocus: You grew up on the streets of South-Central Los Angeles. What are some of the lessons that you learned from that experience?

E.M. Abdulmumin: It was a very poor and tough neighborhood. I learned how to be strong and how to struggle to achieve. We did not have a lot within the environment and we had no good examples.

I became a gang leader, but our gang was not really bad. We just protected the community. This led me to be a good guy but in a very rough, bad neighborhood. It helped me and some others to begin to think about our future. We began to try to think about changing our circumstances.

IF: You have devoted much of your adult life to helping disadvantaged youth. What initiated your interest in doing that?

EM: It stemmed from my own childhood. My parents had a very limited education so I was doing things that my family had never done before. It was the strength that I got out of my parents and also the neighborhood that helped me become disciplined and have a strong personality.

A lot of people believed in me for some reason. So many bad things were happening like gangs, a lot of fighting and older people using heroine. It was depressing and difficult. I remember when my parents would take us to Orange County or Disneyland; you could see the difference in the neighborhoods. It began to make me think about the situation I was in. Why was I in that neighborhood? Why were my friends and I living in poverty? That helped me to never forget that situation.

IF: Recently, a US Mayor in Macon, Georgia explained his conversion to Islam as going back to his African roots. When did you revert and is this something that holds true for you as well?

EM: I reverted in 1975. I was a graduate student at UC Irvine. As a kid I had been introduced to the Nation of Islam but I never joined. I had a brother-in-law who always talked about it. I saw them - they dressed nice, they took care of themselves, they didn't use drugs and they were all about their family.

It really had an impact. In the back of my mind I always had Islam. So when I got to graduate school I was reflecting and asked how to keep my life positive and constructive. Islam became my hope to getting to the top and continuing having principles, having philosophy, having the Qur'an and having all the friends that come with Islam. With Islam, yes I felt like I was going back to my roots, especially when I began the study about Africa...about Malcolm X.

IF: Despite you coming from a disadvantaged background, you excelled in your pursuit of knowledge and obtained a Ph.D. in social ecology, becoming the first black

person to do so in that field. What made you interested in this subject? How has this subject helped you in your work today?

EM: Social ecologists marketed themselves as being able to create social change agents. They told us that learning social ecology and all its principles can help us become social engineers to change our community. I was about 24 or 25 when I went to school, and I believed that it would be very helpful. It was the hope of learning multiple things, not just psychology, not just sociology, but it was also social planning, law, it was all these different topics coming together to try to solve problems.

Now I am able to understand the psychological aspect of what's going on with the kids. I also understand the politics, the racism, the society and the struggle that the parents have. When I was little I was upset with my parents because I couldn't understand the condition that my parents were in.

So now it helps me when I talk to the parents and when I talk to youth. It gives them a wider perspective that it's not really the kids' fault; the parents have responsibility. When you put a child in a bad environment or a very bad school they will have to struggle. Overall, it helped me understand the bigger social, political, and economic picture of why people become bad or get into trouble.

IF: What did you learn from working as a Muslim prison chaplain? Were there any inmates who converted to Islam when you were doing this work?

EM: It was at least over a hundred whom I mentored that converted to Islam. I think they were curious about what we were talking about in the Islamic services. I could really relate to them, I would talk to them about Islam, the Qur'an, I would use the Hadith [Prophetic sayings] and I would also use plain examples that related directly to them. Some of them said that both their mother and father are in another prison. It was very serious stuff. It is painful to talk to a kid whose mother and father are in prison. That is the kind of population and situation I was working with.

IF: What was the rewarding aspect of working as a chaplain?

EM: The large number of people who accepted Islam began to live the Shahada that they took. They began to develop into Muslim scholars. One man received a Muslim youth award...another man started a non-profit organization to prevent gang violence. I learned to really believe that people are able to change through religion and education.

IF: What motivated you to start the Du Bois institution? What does it do?

EM: It is an outreach for the really tough community of east side Riverside, where most of the gang shootings and problems occur. This is the way to bring all my outreach to the community. We tutor kids in the community in after school and college prep programs. We are an official provider of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The whole idea is to make these kids more academically successful. Research shows that kids who are successful in school don't get into trouble, which is part of my prevention philosophy. I also teach them karate and drumming, and we try to teach

music and other arts.

IF: A recent study says that after 25 years, there are six times as many gangs in L.A. As someone who works with these youth, why do you think they get involved in gangs?

EM: I think it is because they are overcome by the subculture that exists in their schools and neighborhoods. It's the environment that creates a bad psychological state. One of the key things, which exists in Islam, is to get the parents involved. The kids must learn to be successful in school and be reinforced for it.

IF: How has your religion motivated you in the different capacities you serve?

EM: The large number of people who accepted Islam began to live the Shahada that they took. They began to develop into Muslim scholars. One man received a Muslim youth award...another man started a non-profit organization to prevent gang violence. I learned to really believe that people are able to change through religion and education.

I think that when we look at the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh), we realize that our religion is about mind, body, spirit and that we should be as healthy as we can. We are taught in the Qur'an to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. So what I do, whether it is for Muslims or non-Muslims, I see as something good. It helps the individuals and the community.

IF: You teach a karate class and provide other youth sports programs. Why do you think it is important for youth to participate in fitness activities?

EM: I think that a lot of the kids are having problems with their health and are malnourished, and that leads to their problems with studying and ability to focus. I think that health is critical to anything that we want to do. I have a paradigm. The six priorities that these kids should have are spirituality, good health, family, career, finances and sixth would be our associates.

IF: Who has been the most influential person in your life?

EM: I have had a few. But the most influential people in my life are my mom and dad. Also Dr. Joe White at UC Irvine. He was the reason I was pulled out of the ghetto and got my Ph.D. Another would be my karate sensei. Karate is life. Through it, I gained strength and learned principles, tolerance and strategies for succeeding.

IF: You have worked tirelessly to give and change this community for the better. Do Muslims need to get more involved in giving back to the community?

EM: Definitely. It would make a big difference. We are focused on Allah and our religion and we know that it is charity, or sadaqa, to help people, so it benefits us spiritually, it cleanses our sins to get to our ultimate goal of Jannah and it also helps these people.

The better we make people feel results in less violence and the fewer problems we will have.

Woman literally fights off her demons:

From: <http://www.9news.com/news/article.aspx?storyid=66508>

(March 16, 2007):

Colorado -- Lauren Sugihara was living the dream of many young women. A professional deejay known as Ms. Vicious, she was in Hollywood, enjoying the "scene" when she hit the moment only other alcoholics can understand.

"(It) got to a point where I was suicidal," Sugihara said. "I was just not on a very good path. I wasn't a very honest, good person."

A little more than a year later, Sugihara's remained sober, in part thanks to training for a different kind of fight.

"I started kickboxing, originally, as a way to get me sober," she said. "I thought that would be able to get me sober because I would be training so hard, I wouldn't be able to party."

Daily workouts at 3-D Martial Arts under the guidance of former kickboxing champion Clarence Thatch helped transform her life. After months of training, Thatch believed she was ready for her first amateur fight, against an experienced amateur fighter with a third degree black belt in karate.

"She has great perspective," Thatch said after a recent workout. "She has goals, she has desires."

"The best thing about training Lauren is she adapts. We teach people to adapt to every situation in the ring. If they can't make those adjustments, it's sad to say some people will never be fighters, but she adapts, not just to fighting but to life. If they can deal with life, they can deal with just about anything," he said.

For 11 years, Lauren fought the demons of alcohol and drugs, pushing her friends and family away in the process. Her mother, Virginia, chooses to remember the daughter who stood up for other kids on the playground rather than the numerous unanswered phone calls as Lauren became an adult. Now, she's ecstatic her daughter is standing up for herself.

"Lauren is an inspiration for me," she said. "She's spent a lot of years being afraid of many things, running away and she's facing her fears now. Facing her fears in every day life is the more courageous thing."

As she entered the ring for the first time last month, Lauren did not know what to expect. She's heard those people who said "you're going to mess up your pretty face, cute girls shouldn't do this," but isn't listening to doubters. Win or lose, she believes the result for her is a positive one.

"All I know is that for once in my life," she said, "I've seen something through."

After being knocked down by her opponent Lavidia Givan in the first round by a push kick, Lauren fought back. A flurry of punches and kicks and the woman, who will be

photographed for a Playboy centerfold in the near future, turned the bout around. A series of punches knocked Givan down, left her wobbly and Lauren Sugihara with a TKO win.

The woman known to her friends as a "fighter" has won this one bout. A daily battle against alcohol continues for the rest of her life.

'More than just karate':

From: <http://www.thestarpress.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2007703180347>
(March 18, 2007):

Portland -- When Keith Turpin enrolled in the first grade last fall, things didn't go too well.

The seven-year-old has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyper Deficiency (ADHD). He was on medication and he was bringing home Ds and Fs.

"I would pray every day that we would have a good day," said his mother, Catherina Turpin. "Keith has trouble accepting change even as minor as my having to work late."

Then she had a chance encounter with Clay Christal, who was in the process of converting a former store in a martial arts studio.

"One day we started talking about his school and what it could do for my son," she said. "So I enrolled him."

The effects have been positive.

"Since Clay started working with him, Keith has brought home As and Bs and some Cs," his mother said. "He has gone from taking 10 milligrams of his medication daily to five milligrams on weekends."

Christal does a reward system with the kids he works with. If they make the honor roll, they get a special patch and recognition in front of their peers at the martial arts school. If their grades go down they can't participate.

Or they might have to sit during instruction and do their homework or receive some other penalty that the parents agree on.

"I support parents wholeheartedly," Christal said.

"Keith is involved in a lot of other activities," Turpin said, "but none of them has helped him as much as martial arts because he is so focused on getting his next belt."

Keith knows that in order to get that next belt he has to listen to his mother at home, make good grades and on focus on what Christal tells him.

"Keith has received one promotion so far and it really registered with him," she said.

Keith said he was very proud of his first promotion as he fondled the white and yellow belt wrapped around his waist.

Bleu Donnelly said the program is working for her six-year-old son Taylor.

"I think it's good for him," she said. "He needs the structure and discipline."

She's seen improvement in him even though he has been in class just since January.

Her other son, Quinton, 11, says he enjoys the martial arts class.

"It's fun and it helps me learn about another culture," he said. "And I'm learning how to defend myself."

The program seems to work for older people, too.

"I'm ADHD and it (martial arts) helps me control my anger," said Ryan Green, 27. "I'm very active and this helps me calm down."

He says martial arts has taught him to walk away from trouble, and that it helps him focus on what he really needs to do.

"It also helps me to know that I can defend myself if I have to and that I don't have to prove myself to anybody," he added.

Christal said he got involved with martial arts about nine years ago.

"I got my son into it because he is small for his age. I thought it would be fun to get in there, work out and learn together. He moved on to other things but I stayed with it."

He has a second degree brown belt and the title of Ko-sensei, which means minor teacher.

He continues to take instruction "because martial arts is a lifelong training process." The former Army sergeant opened his school in Portland in November after assisting others for about five years.

Martial arts is not only good physical exercise but is also a good mental discipline, according to Christal.

"You have to focus constantly," he said. "You have to think. If you get angry, upset or lose your emotions you will lose."

Martial arts can strengthen your religious beliefs, he said, because its code stresses fidelity, politeness, truthfulness, simplicity and respect among many other virtues. He tries to put a Christian spin on his teachings.

Martial arts is also full of customs and traditions. Bowing, according to Christal, isn't a sign of weakness but a sign of respect.

"It shows that you respect your opponent because you will take your eyes off of him."

Keith said he was learning a lot of things at the martial arts school.

"Sometimes we talk in Japanese. I can count to 10 in Japanese. I'm learning more than just karate," he said.

Local autistic kids qualify for Karate Nationals:

From: <http://www.wdef.com/node/3719>

(March 29, 2007):

Last summer, Lookout Valley's Brandon Earnshaw, who trains at Green's Karate in Chattanooga, became the first autistic person to ever qualify for Karate Nationals. His story had quite an impact.

He became the subject of research papers for psychology students. But more importantly, Brandon inspired another local kid to succeed in karate.

When Alex Davidson's parents saw Brandon Earnshaw qualify for Karate Nationals last year, they felt karate might help their autistic son as well.

Randal Davidson, Alex's father: "It seemed like the consensus was that this was a good thing for a child with autism. Autistic children are very repetitive. They're very structured oriented. And once they get something, they grab it."

Nine-year-old Alex from Dade County certainly grabbed it. He even sounds like a karate master.

"I've been enjoying karate with master Green for many months."

And now both Brandon and Alex have qualified for the Karate Nationals this July in West Virginia.

Reporter: "Are you excited to be going back to nationals again?"

Brandon: "Yeah."

Reporter: "Are you getting excited to go to Karate Nationals coming up this summer. Is that going to be exciting?"

Alex: "Sounds exciting."

Even instructor Corey Green can't believe what is happening.

Corey Green: "I didn't plan on this at all. This is something that just happened."

The benefits of karate have been a blessing for both families.

Alina Earnshaw, Brandon's mother: "I mean he eats lunch with his class. That's something every parent of a normal child would expect their child to do. But Brandon had never been able to do that."

Randal: "When we were in Memphis a couple of weeks ago for the tournament. Alex was sitting with the other kids and being very good. Just sitting there and blending in, and he looked just like all the other children. And that's what you want."

Alex: "I kind of really like karate. Really, really so much. (whispers) really so much."

Finding strength in karate:

From: <http://www.postindependent.com/article/20070330/SPORTS/103300054>
(March 30, 2007):

As Pam Whittington glanced down at the framed certificate, an overwhelming look of pride and accomplishment consumed her face.

The 53-year-old's smile was mirrored by her instructor, Brian Mable, who, after teaching her step-by-step for six and a half years how to get a black belt, knew she deserved it.

Getting a black belt is remarkable for anyone, but it meant a little more to Whittington.

Not only did earning that black belt, which she achieved on March 10, give her a new outlook on life, it became a steadfast rock in a life that had been on a turbulent journey filled with hardships.

The journey started in 2000. The idea of picking up a new sport at the age of 47 didn't deter the kind-eyed Glenwood resident.

"I felt like I was getting frail, wimpy," said the 5-foot-4 Whittington.

A friend told her about karate, and after observing a class, she knew the sport was for her.

"Some people can be intimidated by martial arts and think that it is very powerful from start to finish, or full impact. Mr. Mable's group, we do Tang Soo Do and we do a balanced passive and aggressive style," Whittington said. "We are not a full-contact group. As we get into the sparring part or the activities where you make contact with a person, by then you have enough experience and knowledge to know your distance and there are very rare times if any one is injured at all."

Practicing three days a week and maneuvering through the awkward stages of learning karate, Whittington slowly moved higher and higher in belts, working toward the black.

Three years into her training, Whittington's life was turned upside-down when she returned to her home after a martial arts seminar in Las Vegas and found her husband had committed suicide.

Despite the unimaginable pain Whittington felt, she leaned on her martial arts training to get her through.

"That was just after three years of martial arts when this happened and I realized the strength karate gave me on the inside, to where when you mentally are hit so hard with not just something that happened, but you saw it yourself," Whittington said fighting back tears. Her involvement with karate gave her the strength to stand up, she said. "I never realized it was there until something like that happened."

Whittington credits holistic treatments and also friends for helping her through by giving their time - what she says is the best gift - to help her during the tough period.

While grieving and sorting out her husband's business situations, Whittington continued to go to her martial arts training. It's a part of her life she says she will continue forever.

"It's a safe place for me to go work out. It anchors my life so that I don't get off balance and be too emotional," she said. "The way I have approached my life and still do, I like to use the words, 'Despite what has happened to me, I choose to step forward.' You have to. You have to visualize that ladder to reach up and pull yourself up."

Many people view Whittington as an inspiration, an embodiment of the core belief of martial arts - the idea that with determination, focus and hard work, goals, however hard they are, can be reached.

When Whittington, who occasionally helps Mable instruct kids, passed her black-belt test, her mother and four sisters were on hand to celebrate. Tears filled their eyes in seeing Whittington honored, knowing full well the battle she fought to get there.

"The biggest reward for me is not just getting there, but seeing the kids just beaming," Whittington said as her eyes filled with tears. "They saw me finish the last part that was needed for the black belt test and it inspired them that they can get that far as well."

Physically, Whittington doesn't look a day over 40. Thanks to her training, she doesn't feel any older either.

"I figure the last five, maybe 10 years of my life, I will be confined to my house mostly, or even halfway. But until then, I choose to use my body to keep it fit. And believe it or not I have a low pain tolerance," Whittington said with a glowing smile. "As I keep my muscles stronger, I am healthier. I have less headaches, I had neck and lower back problems when I started, I dreaded when I had to fall to the floor because then I was in my chiropractor's office. Now it is very rare that I see my chiropractor. I don't go to the doctor."

Mentally, Whittington knows she will always be confronted with tough situations, like the one that changed her life forever. The personal struggles she has gone through are much like her martial arts training - it's a long process filled with dedication and hard work, it demands focus, but it's worth it in the end.

"When you start karate from the beginning, there is so much detail to create your initial foundation, it is like you are in kindergarten. And now you just graduated college," Whittington said of her journey to getting a black belt. "That's the power

martial arts has. And you can take it with you. It's not in a box, it's not in a picture frame, it is not in a suitcase. You have it and it is all yours."

'Karate grandfather' earns black belt:

From: <http://morningsentinel.maintoday.com/news/local/3780697.html>
(April 5, 2007):

For most 70-year-olds, getting a black belt is about purchasing an accessory. Not so Bob Willette of Sidney.

He acquired his black belt through karate achievement.

Sunday he earned this mark of martial arts expertise from Club Naha at Alford Youth Center, the culmination of a three-day test that involved a mountain climb, a rigorous written exam, a long distance run and fighting 13 seasoned black belt opponents.

Not bad for a retired man who started his martial arts training just five years ago. Willette said at the end, after passing the final test, he felt a mixture of joy and exhaustion.

"When I saw my wife and daughter and grandchildren and son-in-law outside (Alford Youth Center), that was kind of emotional," Willette said. "You don't realize how much energy and concentration it takes to get to that point."

Ken Walsh, chief executive officer of Alford Youth Center, is the founder of Club Naha. He also is a black belt in karate.

He supervises the three-day test, participating in many of the activities, and thus knows the hardships firsthand. That Willette overcame them at age 70 is especially inspiring, he said.

"I had no doubts about his character," Walsh said of Willette, "and that is what we really focused the most on. But the test is physically taxing, especially at the end. Bob proved that no matter what age, there are goals and passions that people can still pursue and accomplish."

Willette's pursuit of a black belt started Friday on a Passamaquoddy reservation at Pleasant Point. With 11 companions, most of them Passamaquoddy, Willette endured the 200-degree heat of the tribe's steam house -- a structure constructed of birch, blankets and tarps -- for about 90 minutes.

Willette said water poured on heated rocks in a small pit generated the steam. Walsh said the experience is meant to be spiritual, an opportunity to reflect on yourself in an environment that is both strange and cleansing.

Later that day, Willette took a written exam on martial arts terminology and philosophy at Camp Tracy, the Waterville Area YMCA camp in Oakland. Camp Tracy served as the home base for the testing period.

The following day Willette donned snowshoes to climb up and down Tumbledown Mountain in Weld.

"This is part of the journey of reflecting on who you are and what you are all about," Walsh said. "And there's no better place to reflect than on top of a mountain."

Willette estimated the effort took him four hours.

"It was pretty vigorous because of the snow conditions," he said. "The temperatures weren't bad, and I had a nice pair of hiking boots, but I had no gaiters, so my feet got drenched coming down."

Sunday brought the final steps, starting with a five-mile run at the Colby College track that left Willette's joints aching.

After the run, Willette had to exhibit his abilities as a martial artist at Alford Youth Center, including separate sparring sessions with 12 black belts. Each session lasted three minutes.

At times the 5-foot-6, 155-pound Willette had to battle opponents who stood 6-foot-2 or better and weighed more than 220 pounds.

As his final challenge, Willette had to score three points against his instructor, black belt Craig Sargent.

"Fortunately, he is about my size," Willette said, "and the thing is you don't have to worry about him scoring on you. In this case, all we have to do is score so you just reach deep and find any way to score a point."

Willette found that way, and his black belt is proof.

Down's Syndrome man gains black belt:

From:

<http://www.eveningstar.co.uk/content/eveningstar/news/story.aspx?brand=ESTOnline&category=News&Brand=ESTOnline&Category=News&itemid=IPED19%20Apr%202007%2015%3A17%3A15%3A927>

(April 20, 2007):

When Andrew Brooks was born with Down's Syndrome in the 1970s his parents were told not to expect much of him and were even given advice to "put him away" in seclusion.

Despite the bleak prognosis and severe learning difficulties, Andrew has proved his doubters wrong in magnificent style.

Today he is celebrating something many would have thought impossible - he has gained one of the top ranks in karate, a black belt.

With a steely determination 31-year-old Andrew, of Penfold Road, Felixstowe, has spent the last 11 years dedicating himself to the ancient martial art.

Thanks to the gentle encouragement of his parents, the patient guidance of his instructors and sheer desire to succeed, Andrew, who cannot read or write, is now a role model for other martial artists.

His mother Cathy Brooks told The Evening Star he is an inspiration to all for his "give-it-a-go" attitude and steadfast resolve.

She said: "When he got his black belt I burst into tears. I am so proud. It is absolutely wonderful because he has worked so hard for it."

As well as karate Andrew also plays football, bowls, snooker and has taken up ballroom dancing.

He is also studying at college to learn how to read and write.

Mrs Brooks said: "When he was born I was told to put him away."

"Children with Down's Syndrome did not get much of a chance back then."

"He liked school but couldn't read or write."

"Despite that he always wants to give things a go. He doesn't just want to be sat in front of the TV."

"People with Down's Syndrome are always put down but this just goes to prove they can do it."

Andrew's coach, Sean Hollobone, who runs Foxhall Karate Club, said he is immensely proud of the achievement.

He said: "Andrew is very easy to teach. Although he can't communicate very well he takes everything in that you tell him."

"He's very determined and I am really happy for him."

Amazing Gregg!:

From: <http://www.leightoday.co.uk/viewarticle.aspx?articleid=2850494§ionid=69>
(May 3, 2007):

An inspirational 10-year-old boy who lost both legs below the knee still manages to be a high-kicking karate student.

Gregg Warburton, of Telford Crescent in Leigh, was born with deformities in both legs and underwent major surgery when he was just a year old.

But the spirited Leigh CE Junior School pupil does everything his peers can do and more, earning his green belt in karate and even playing for a football team, Hindley Juniors.

Gregg's mum Janet said: "A lot of people don't even realise Gregg has a disability when they first meet him. To me he's just a normal kid.

"But giving the impression of being able bodied really wipes him out. Just to do normal things takes a lot of extra effort but he never complains."

Morehouse woman earns black belt at the age of 70:

From: <http://news.mywebpal.com/partners/865/public/news803503.html>
(May 3, 2007):

Missouri -- Very few have the dedication it takes to earn a black belt in a martial art. Fewer yet are able to do so at the age of 70.

On March 2, Janet Hinson of Morehouse became the most senior student in the area to successfully test to the rank of first degree black belt in taekwondo.

"I started when I was 65 I think, about five years ago," Hinson said. "My doctor required me to exercise. I do not like exercising at the gym on those stupid machines and I get bored walking around a walking track. And I like watching martial art movies."

Also, she added: "One person who did inspire me was my own son, who is a 2nd degree black belt in Okinawan Kenpo."

Hinson ultimately decided it was time to stop just watching martial arts and give it a shot herself.

"I started out with tai chi, and then I thought, 'I'll just try the taekwondo,' so I did," she recalled. "I wanted more movement, more exercise. Tai chi is gentle - it does give you excellent exercise but I wanted more."

In May 2002, she made the switch to the harder, faster Korean martial art and stuck with it. "I like it and I need the exercise," Hinson said.

"Janet has always been great about helping the younger students in their training and preparation for belt promotions," said Jimmy Duncan who tested Hinson for her black belt. "One student said she is like our class grandmother and we love her."

Duncan noted Hinson is not only the most senior student he ever promoted to black belt rank, but she is also the first female he has tested to that rank. Hinson said she would recommend taekwondo for anyone looking to get in or stay in shape.

"It is excellent for balance, for cardiovascular conditioning. It's also good for weight loss, muscle toning and cholesterol - I got the right one up and the bad one down," Hinson said. "It is also excellent for learning self-respect, self-control and it also helps with memory: you have to learn so much."

"Janet has not let her age stop her from any of the activities in class, though she sometimes alters them to work in her favor, which is a lot of what the art of taekwondo is all about," Duncan said. "Janet says her age is just a number."

"Older people should get their doctor's permission, naturally," Hinson cautioned. "My doctor happens to be very much in favor of it."

"She is a very determined person," Duncan said, adding that he hopes he will have the energy and mobility she has when he reaches that age. "She's worked so long and so hard; it was important to her."

Smashing times for Korean grannies:

From: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/world/smashing-times-for-korean-grannies/2007/05/18/1178995412934.html>
(May 19, 2007):

Shattering stacks of roof tiles with a single powerful punch is part of the daily training routine for the formidably tough members of the Grandma Taekwondo Federation demonstration team, aged in their 60s and 70s.

About 20 women in white robes - including 12 proudly sporting black belts - practise various chops, kicks and other sparring techniques at a gym in the city of Incheon, west of Seoul.

Sharp yells of "Ha!" "Hap!" or "Pasha!" resound through the second-floor matted gym during the gruelling two-hour work-out.

One black-belted granny dexterously cruises past her peers who hold rubber target boards at different angles. She knocks them down in the blink of an eye with a series of graceful kicks and punches.

"All these women have won black belts through an official test at the Kukkiwon (world taekwondo headquarters)," said Yoon Yeo-Ho, a taekwondo master and founder of the team, which started in 1989.

"They use actual roof tiles and wooden boards to break for public demonstrations. They practise a lot and harden their bones enough to smash them (the boards) into pieces."

The team's 22 members are aged between 58 and 78, with 16 of them in their 70s. They exercise at least two hours a day and six days a week under Mr Yoon's guidance.

"At the beginning, it was a simple idea that taekwondo could help these grannies improve their health and that uniforms would look good on them," Mr Yoon said.

The team now performs about 16 times a year at ceremonies or festivals at home and abroad — in China, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines.

At the start of the session the team recites "hello" in Japanese, Chinese, English and Thai to prepare for future foreign tours.

The tours fit the aims of the Seoul-based World Taekwondo Federation (WTF).

"As the nation where taekwondo was born, we're responsible for making the sport enjoyed and loved by men and women of all ages," president Choue Chungwon said.

"What matters is how we can let taekwondo take root in the world." At the Incheon gym, each grandma seems full of confidence.

"If any punk gets drunk and tries to do something stupid, I think I can knock him out in a single blow," said Park Yeong-Ja, 72, a second-grade black belt practitioner.

She is the team's "smashing ace" who successfully broke a stack of 10 wooden boards during its latest public demonstration.

"Is my husband afraid of me? No. I am healthier than I used to be, he likes it. He even brags about it to his friends," Mrs Park said with a smile.

Jiu-jitsu gave Nancy her life back:

From: <http://trurodaily.com/index.cfm?sid=32380&sc=70>
(May 25, 2007):

Living in a physically abusive relationship had taken Nancy Harrington's life away. Then she found it again thanks to jiu-jitsu.

After seven months of taking classes at the Truro Jiu-Jitsu and Mixed Martial Arts Club, the 42-year-old Harrington has gained back her self confidence and shed the fear she once lived under daily.

"If someone asked me the definition of jiu-jitsu, I'd probably say it means new beginning," she said. "It empowers you. It allows you to get your life back. I used to be afraid to answer the door or walk down the street."

Harrington got involved in the sport through her son Chance, who had been taking classes and wouldn't let his mother's hesitation get in the way of what he knew would be exactly what she needed.

But the road to find herself again wasn't an easy one. She couldn't do five pushups while others at the club could do 50. Not only was she the only woman at the club, she was also the oldest person there. But Harrington's biggest obstacle was she would constantly have flashbacks of her past experiences when sparring with others, especially when she was mounted and pinned on her back.

"That was the toughest thing because I would just black out," she said. "I couldn't control my breathing and I would panic."

Chris Hughes, the club's instructor, said he could see the difference in Harrington as soon as she started sparring.

"She was very timid when she first came in and as soon as you started to get physical with her she would just freeze up and go into another world and almost cower."

After working at her own pace, Harrington was able to overcome her feeling of helplessness and routinely spars with men at the club up to 280 pounds.

"It's like night and day," Hughes said. "She's not meek and mild anymore. Now she's getting by guys defences and getting into positions where she can attack."

Harrington said she's still not completely comfortable when sparring and isn't entering any competitions. She said the effects of abuse are longer lasting than most people think.

"People seem to think that when you leave the situation then life moves on, but that's not so," she said. "No matter how long you go you still live in that fear wondering if they're going to come back, will it happen again. The fear is debilitating."

It's for that reason why she's encouraging all women and girls, especially those who are abused, to take the jiu-jitsu or some type of self defence course.

"You're never too old to learn," she said. "Chris doesn't expect you to keep up right away, all he asks is that you do your best. My only regret is not doing jiu-jitsu earlier in my life."

Harrington loves the sport so much she never misses her three classes per week. "She's one of the most dedicated students there," Hughes said. "It's really changed the way she sees herself. It's a good feeling to hold your head high and feel good about yourself."

Karate kid gets green belt despite having no legs:

From: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=458220&in_page_id=1770
(May 28, 2007):

Miracle boy Gregg Warburton can deliver a killer karate kick and cutting blow on his opponents - despite having two artificial legs and a small, deformed hand.

The determined youngster has been amazing his parents and friends since he was baby and had both his lower limbs amputated at the shin.

Brave Gregg, who also dreams of being an amputee footballer, never lets his disability stop him joining in sports with his mates.

The ten-year-old wears custom-made false limbs over his stumps so that he can run about - but has to use a wheelchair when he gets tired.

Proud mum Janet, 38, a nurse, said: "Greg has quite a severe disability but he can do all the right karate moves - he just has to adapt some things.

"It is more difficult for him to balance than the others and used to fall over a lot - but he's got much better and has learned how to stand on one leg to kick.

"There's also a move where you face your partner and grab their wrist and they twist their arm over the top and grab your wrist.

"But Gregg can't grab with his left hand so instead he pushes with it.

"In another move you are supposed to be able to grab a stick out of your opponent's hand. Gregg can't do this with his left hand - but he blocks the stick and knocks it out of the way."

Gregg passed his yellow, orange and green belts at the same time as his mates and even takes part in competitions.

The rules are bent slightly to allow Gregg to wear his trainers - because it is difficult for him to balance and grip the floor properly on artificial legs.

Gregg, of Leigh, Lancashire, took up karate at the age of six after an instructor came to his school for a special one-off session - and he begged his parents to let him go to the classes.

Janet said: "We talked to the instructor about it and he said that he was quite happy for Gregg to have a go.

"Gregg just took everything in his stride and started adapting moves and concentrating on ones he can do well.

"He can do the kicks, the balances and the punches with his right hand, although he can't make a fist with his left.

"If he gets pushed, he does go over a lot easier than other people. He can fall quite badly sometimes because he has only got one arm that he can put out to protect himself.

"But if he has to adapt the traditional moves, he just works something out for himself, he doesn't have to be told how to do it."

The Manchester United fan, whose hero is Wayne Rooney, also plays football for a local club, and one day dreams of being in the British amputee team.

Dad Darren Warburton, 40, a water network engineer, taught Gregg to kick a ball when he was just two-years-old and wobbling about on his artificial limbs.

"He loves football and I'm sure this is something he will carry on when he is older," said his mum.

"His dream would be to play for the England amputee team - but the rules say you should have one amputated leg and one normal leg - which is quite discriminatory in the disabled community. So he may have a battle there in the future.

"Gregg has a worse disability really and would love to set up a team for double amputees like him - but so far he's doing fine playing with the other boys.

"The only problem is that running for a long time makes his legs hurt. The day after football he is always very tired and stays in to rest after school, or has to use his wheelchair.

"But he doesn't like using his wheelchair all the time because people make a fuss of him. He tries to do as much as he can for himself."

Gregg, who has a younger brother Lucas, seven, who also enjoys karate and football, was born with a deformed shin and feet which twisted upwards so he could not stand on them.

Janet said: "When I had my six-months scan the doctors noticed there was something wrong and I was warned that I was going to have a seriously disabled child.

"I was devastated. Any parent suffers a huge shock to learn your child is going to have severe problems - even though you love them no matter what.

"All the doctors could say was that the baby would have a severe disability with his legs, but we weren't told what it would be.

"Gregg only weighed 4lb 4oz when he was born and had to be taken to an incubator. But when they brought him to me I didn't even notice any disability - I just saw a beautiful baby, alive and well."

But the little boy's legs were deformed and twisted, making it impossible for him to use them without some kind of surgery.

Each of his shins was made up of just one thick bone - instead of the double bone made up of one thick bone and one thin bone, which other people have.

Janet explained: "When he was six weeks old we took see an orthopaedic surgeon, who told us: 'This little boy needs his legs amputated'.

"We were both really shocked because we thought Gregg would have surgery to sort out his legs. But the doctor told us it would involve years worth of operations, and there would be no guarantee it would make any difference."

When he was just one-year-old, little Gregg had both feet and ankles amputated.

As he grows, his legs need to do the same, and every six months he was measured up at the Manchester Limb Centre in case he needed bigger ones.

As soon as he was running, Gregg was in the back yard playing football with his dad, and learned to kick a ball about like any other youngster. "Playing football with your son is a big thing for any dad," said Darren. "I didn't want to miss out on that. To begin with we were just having a bit of a kick around.

"It was hard to think he'd never play for Man United - but he actually got quite good for someone with artificial legs. Now he can join in a proper game, I'm really proud of him."

Brave Gregg said: "Karate is great because you get to fight with people. But you have to be clever to think of the right move to defend yourself.

"I don't fall over much now and I can use my left hand to block people.

"I would love to carry on until I got my black belt and maybe take part in competitions."

He added: "Football is my other favourite sport. My dream is to meet all the Man United team, but mainly Wayne Rooney.

"I would love to play in a proper league and maybe get good enough so I could be in an amputee team.

"My legs don't hurt when I'm playing because I love doing it. But sometimes they hurt the day after because I get sores on my legs.

"But I try not to think about it - it's worth it so I can do things."

Janet said: "We never told Gregg that he couldn't do anything because he is disabled. We've always allowed him to try things out, to see what he can do."

"I wouldn't change him for the world and I'm sure he'll manage whatever life throws his way in the future."

Limitations led teacher to expand his own world:

From: http://www.theoaklandpress.com/stories/052907/bus_20070529130.shtml
(May 29, 2007):

Sit comfortably. Close eyes. Observe the breath. Meditation is the foundation of any true martial art. To still, thus control, the mind. Sifu Robert Brown starts every practice at the School of Chinese Martial Arts in Berkley with these words, and with good reason. Brown lives by his words.

Brown meditates daily and encourages his students to do the same. While the physical techniques they practice can help them grown strong and physically healthy, Brown insists mediation is the key to a strong mind, which is just as necessary for overcoming obstacles.

Brown is no stranger to adversity. Born with cerebral palsy and severe dyslexia, Brown grew into a highly respected member of the international martial arts community and runs one of the most successful dojos in the United States.

When he was living in Waterford Township at age 8, Brown's cerebral palsy made it impossible for him just to walk without the use of braces. Most of the time, he had to use a wheelchair.

"Kids teased me, there were a lot of fights and my mom decided it would be a good thing, not only for self defense but confidence and self esteem, if I studied martial arts," he said.

After much searching, Brown found an isshinryu karate school that would allow him to stay in the back of the room and practice basic punches with his limited mobility.

The exercises helped build upper body strength. Eventually, he was able to hold himself up long enough to start moving his legs and practice kicking.

"It was actually a form of physical therapy to me," Brown said. "By the time I was 12 or 13, I was fully mobile without the braces."

In the next seven years, he spent nearly all his time training. Though he could move freely, his disability made learning new techniques increasingly difficult. His determination outweighed any discouragement, and he forced himself to practice for hours daily.

He admits that during his teenage years he was largely attracted to the idea of breaking bricks with his hands, fighting full-contact and bringing home as many trophies as possible. But by age 20, he began looking for something more.

"I started to realize there is a lot more to martial arts than just fighting, and I wanted to know what it was," he said. Brown's spiritual journey took him across the country, then to Japan, China and India.

His search led him to become a practitioner of yuchia kung fu, the style he now teaches. It didn't happen overnight. It wasn't until he practiced for 20 years, earned four black belts and made several journeys around the world that Brown decided to teach.

"Very few people will spend 20 years doing something before they ever teach," Brown said. "I just wanted to teach real martial arts, both internal and external, to people that are really hungry for it."

One such person was Jeri Donahue, who became a private student of Brown's before he opened his own dojo. Donahue now helps Brown run the dojo. Her son, Patrick, is a student teacher.

Though she had learned self-defense prior to meeting Brown, Donahue said the internal aspects of his teachings were life-changing for her.

"A lot of people think martial arts are just selfdefense. But in fact, as hard as we work out, it's only 10 percent physical. It's a mental discipline," Donahue said.

"True martial arts are designed to affect all of you. There are a lot of schools that teach great physical programs, but they're not teaching martial arts. You have to discipline your mind as well as your body."

Donahue said the mental discipline is what set her lessons apart from any self-defense she had previously learned. With the school open, she said she has seen it have a tremendous effect on students, especially younger ones.

"Our kids generally do better in school and have better relationships," she said. "They learn to respect their body and mind, which has resulted in a great track record of kids going from the kids' program to adults and off to college without some of the problems that a lot of teenagers and young people seem to encounter."

"I'm not saying it's a cure-all, but it's a huge confidence builder."

Though younger students in the school's wushu program are not taught meditation, the classes are centered on discipline and self-respect. When students reach the appropriate age, usually between 14 and 16, they can progress to the adult program, where meditation becomes key.

Brown said meditation often is not a part of martial arts schools, likely because the owners fear people will be reluctant to practice something with a spiritual aspect, which could be bad for business. Brown, on the other hand, has his students meditate before every practice and even holds a weekly class on meditation. Conversely, one thing visitors won't find is a wall filled with trophies, a common sight at other martial arts schools.

Brown said he's not interested in such display items, and trophies don't indicate the growth he's trying to nurture in his students.

"Our paradigm is a little different," he said. "Our goal is to teach people how to be partners, not opponents, and really work together to help each other become great martial artists. This idea of competition breeds the Twinner and loser' mentality. What we want is to create an environment where everyone grows, not just wins. It's an art, rather than a sport."

Even so, Brown's students are shown every day the practical uses for techniques they learn. Brown frequently reminds students of the many degrees of selfdefense and encourages them to strive for the highest, where they can control a potentially dangerous situation without anyone being seriously hurt. Brown says a disciplined mind is the way to achieve such results.

Within his school, he wears the title of "sifu," Chinese for "teacher," even though he earned the higher title of "sijo"(master) over a decade ago, in China.

"In our culture, it seems everyone is a master," Brown said. "I've practiced for 34 years. I've dedicated my life to the teaching and spreading of martial arts. Teacher is good enough. Anything else just seems like hubris."

Even as a teacher, Brown continues to learn and grow, studying aikido and jujitsu. In doing so, he says, he sees how his teaching grows over time.

"What we're really teaching is principles, principles of movement, principles of motions, ideas, concepts," Brown said. "There are only so many ways the body moves. So what we're doing is continuously uncovering ways that the body moves. We're not really discovering them, we're attaching the principles to these techniques. We're revisiting ancient truths."

In the 15 years Brown's school has been open, hundreds of students - both adult and children - have learned from him. But his teachings have spread further through his "Lessons in Mindfulness." He started the program, which he calls a "systematic approach to teaching the deepest aspects of martial arts" nearly five years ago.

The lessons include the philosophy and history behind the kicks and punches students are eager to learn. Grounded in ancient tradition, the two-year course is the modern equivalent of the talks teachers would have with their students over dinner and the many hours spent together, regardless of what martial art they practice.

Brown said he realizes that, in today's society, students do not have the luxury of time to devote to these ancient ways, so the program works as an alternative.

Now with his teachings crossing oceans, Brown's reputation precedes him. Donahue said there has been a large demand for Brown to expand his dojo over the years, and at the end of 2006, he announced his response. Feeling the time is finally right, Brown decided to open a second school in Rochester. The doors to the new dojo, on the corner of Rochester Road and University Drive, were to open Monday.

"We're very excited," said Brown. "Our goal is just to have real martial arts taught as well as possible to as many people as possible."

Donahue also voiced her excitement over the opening of the new school. With the prospect of new students, Donahue said she sees the opportunity to grow under the guidance of Brown, from whom she continues to draw inspiration.

"It's just amazing to me that someone with so many strikes against them was not able to give up," Donahue said. "I'm sure it's what kept me and it motivates me to get up and do what I can every day."

Like the original dojo, the new school will offer classes to adults of all ages and fitness levels, as well as a wushu children's program.

"It is never too late to start practicing martial arts," Donahue said. "I've heard it said that it might not be right for everyone, but I have not met anyone yet that couldn't benefit from martial arts taught under Sifu Brown's guidance.

"I encourage anyone with a desire to lead a happier, healthier and more productive life to come in and give kung fu or tai chi a closer look.

"More energy and a stronger body and mind should be available to everyone."

He transcended his handicap to excel in martial arts:

From: <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2002/20020720/windows/odds.htm>
(July 2, 2007):

It was just another hard day's work for 26-year-old Puran Chauhan. He was returning from Delhi to his home in Ghaziabad on his bike. At a traffic signal, he heard a cry for help. He glanced across the line of cars and saw four burglars making good their escape after snatching a gold chain from a woman in a car.

In a dash, Chauhan jumped off his bike, leaped over a car and gave a perfect side-kick to one of the fleeing thieves. The thief, who was armed with an eight-inch dagger, fell to the ground in a daze. He quickly spat out the chain he had stuffed in his mouth and immediately surrendered. His companions, meanwhile, ran for their lives.

This is as it should be, for ever since he can remember, Puran Chauhan wanted to emulate his icon, Bruce Lee. Over the years, he taught himself karate, judo, kung fu and taekwondo and earned three dan in taekwondo and karate. Today he can kick more than eight feet in the air, land a punch before you can blink an eye, dive over seven feet and perform stunts that would do Lee proud.

But the spectators, who saw Puran Chauhan in action against the thieves that day, were flabbergasted. For this street-hero they saw pulverise a bunch of armed thieves had only one leg!

"They all surrounded me and asked me how I managed to do it", says Chauhan. This incident which occurred in February this year, was however, just another feather in Puran Chauhan's cap.

Till now he has won more than 13 gold medals in martial art championships and has been felicitated by authorities ranging from sports ministers to the Delhi Police.

But, be it his one-legged karate chops or daredevilry on his motorbike, one question that is hurled at him almost every other day is, "How do you manage to do it?"

Ironically, people who don't know Chauhan sympathise with him and even offer to help kick-start his bike or help him put it on a stand. "But when they see me do it all by myself and drive away they are amazed", says Chauhan.

Chauhan lost his right leg in a road accident when he was only five. Ever since he has been on a crutch. His desire to prove that there was nothing others could do with their two good legs that he couldn't do with one leg, propelled Chauhan to take up martial arts.

He approached martial art academies but was laughed away. "They all asked me whether I wanted to break my second leg too", he recounts. Not to be deterred, Chauhan like the mythological Eklavya, learnt on his own. He read all he could on martial arts, saw martial art movies and began practising in isolated parks.

Learning was difficult but his zeal to succeed was greater. Soon the very martial art institutes that had ridiculed his ambition had to accept him and Chauhan was awarded three dan in martial arts.

Today Chauhan is a martial arts coach. With his crutch for support, he has mastered all the nuances of fighting and self-defence. He rides his bike over 40-50 kilometres to and from his house in Ghaziabad to Delhi where he teaches self-defence to his students at their homes. These are mostly children of IPS and IAS officers who hire him for a small fee.

He also runs a martial arts academy, Shikhar Martial Arts, near his house in Bhopra district of Gaziabad but does not charge any money from the students.

"These are students who cannot pay the fee. How can I forget the days when instructors showed me the door. I cannot do the same and deny others the opportunity to learn," he explains.

Almost half his students are girls who are taught self-defence. According to him, keeping in mind the growing incidents of eve-teasing in cities and towns, learning martial arts is a must for girls. "If a girl knows martial arts, she is secure as she will know how to defend herself," he says.

But the greatest moment of his life came when Chauhan was hired to teach Delhi policemen last year. Chauhan was so elated that he decided to teach free of cost. "It was the greatest achievement. Teaching the cops affirmed the fact that I was just as much capable as anybody else," says Chauhan.

He taught the North East Delhi district police personnel his "lock and choke" techniques for over three months. "The lock and choke technique is best for the police as they have to deal with armed criminals. In this technique one can incapacitate the criminal before he can harm you," says Chauhan.

The then DGP, North East district, S.K. Gautam, who hired Chauhan has many words of praise for him. While on an early morning walk, he had spotted him practising martial arts in a park and was greatly impressed by what he saw. "He is more than a man if you see him in action. He is too quick on his crutch and his footwork is simply amazing", he says.

Though Puran Chauhan has received numerous awards and felicitations, there is little help in terms of employment. His earnings from his martial art classes are meagre. Chauhan has two brothers but it is he who shoulders the responsibility of looking after his ageing parents.

Puran Chauhan has not only transcended his disability but has also excelled in his vocation. According to a census, some 60 million people are disabled in India alone. Chauhan is a paragon of fortitude and courage from whom the disabled can seek inspiration. It is a pity, therefore, to see him running from pillar to post for a job. "All that I want is to teach people what I have learned," he says.

Chauhan has now enrolled for a MBA course to look for an alternative source of income.

Despite government indifference, Chauhan has not lost his cheer and is grateful for what he has.

"I never felt I was lacking in any way. I can do everything that anyone can. In school, I was the naughtiest kid and more often than not I won all the fights," he laughs.

Then turning to his crutch at his side, he says: "This is not my crutch. This is my right leg."