

The idea that martial arts can make the difference between life and death is hypothetical to most people. For me it is a fundamental truth, as my training in Hapkido saved my life in 2006.

I entered the multipurpose room at the University of Ottawa that day to do some training. After I had completed all the Hyung up to red belt (my rank at the time), I started working on my techniques. Without a partner for throwing, I would perform the motions on my mirror image, taking a moment to check the pressure points on myself to make certain I was hitting the right nerve clusters. It was during one of these self checks that I discovered a lump underneath the skin on my neck, just above the collarbone. Deeply concerned, I sought medical advice immediately. It was only after a CT and biopsy that they confirmed my worst fear; cancer.



I had started training in Kuk Sool Hapkido at Grandmaster Timmerman's school in Sault Ste. Marie in 2003, before leaving in 2005 to pursue a Master's Degree in Mechanical Engineering in Ottawa. I enjoyed the challenge of learning the proper application of techniques, as well as conditioning my body and mind through the various Hyung and strikes. It was a struggle to maintain both the required precision and endurance at

times, but the experience helped to teach me patience and humility. I progressed under the tutelage of Kwan Jang Nim Ronda Bourdage and Sabum Nim Frank Morrison to the rank of red belt.

I was extremely lucky on two counts – I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma, one of the most treatable and curable forms of cancer, and I caught it in the very early stages. The doctors were impressed that I had caught it at such an early juncture while displaying none of the early symptoms, and this early diagnosis increased my chances dramatically. However, I still had to endure a very harsh regimen of chemotherapy and testing. I decided to take a leave of absence from my graduate studies

and returned home to be with my family and friends during this trying time. When I returned, I was welcomed back by Grandmaster Timmerman and the rest of my instructors at the school. On those rare days when my treatment and physical condition permitted it, I attended classes and continued my training. Again, it was the patience and conditioning which helped to focus my mind on something other than the discomfort of chemotherapy, as well as providing me with goals to strive towards after the end of my treatment. The positive encouragement of my instructors was an inspiration to help me along my path.

Six months after my initial diagnosis, I had completed my treatment and was relieved to discover I would not require radiation treatment; the doctors believed that they had completely destroyed the active cancer cells. They then told me that given the harshness of the chemotherapy that it would take a year to recover my stamina and co-ordination. Again, I dove into my training, continually pushing myself, and was rewarded by making that recovery in less than 8 months.

It has been three years since my therapy ended; I completed my graduate studies and again returned home to work and to resume my training. In August 2010, it was with a humble heart that I received my first dahn at Gathering of the Grandmasters. Promoting along with the pedigree of exceptional students that I've trained and worked with in the presence of these distinguished and amazing grandmasters was an honour without equal. I know that my black belt is merely a signpost on a much longer journey; one I am proud to share with all my fellow martial artists.



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