



## *A Hwarang's Journey*

By Master David Kijek

### *Preface by Grandmaster Taejoon Lee:*

As mentioned in the last article, we will be featuring some of our most loyal Hwarang Warriors of the Modern Age, chronicling their journey to Hwa Rang Do® as a common man to becoming and transforming into a "Flowering Knight," in the service of humankind.

Master David Kijek, 5th Dan Black Sash in Hwa Rang Do® and a Board Member for the World Hwa Rang Do® Association (Non-profit Humanitarian Organization) began training in the martial arts while in high school over 41 years ago.



# GM Taejoon Lee Master

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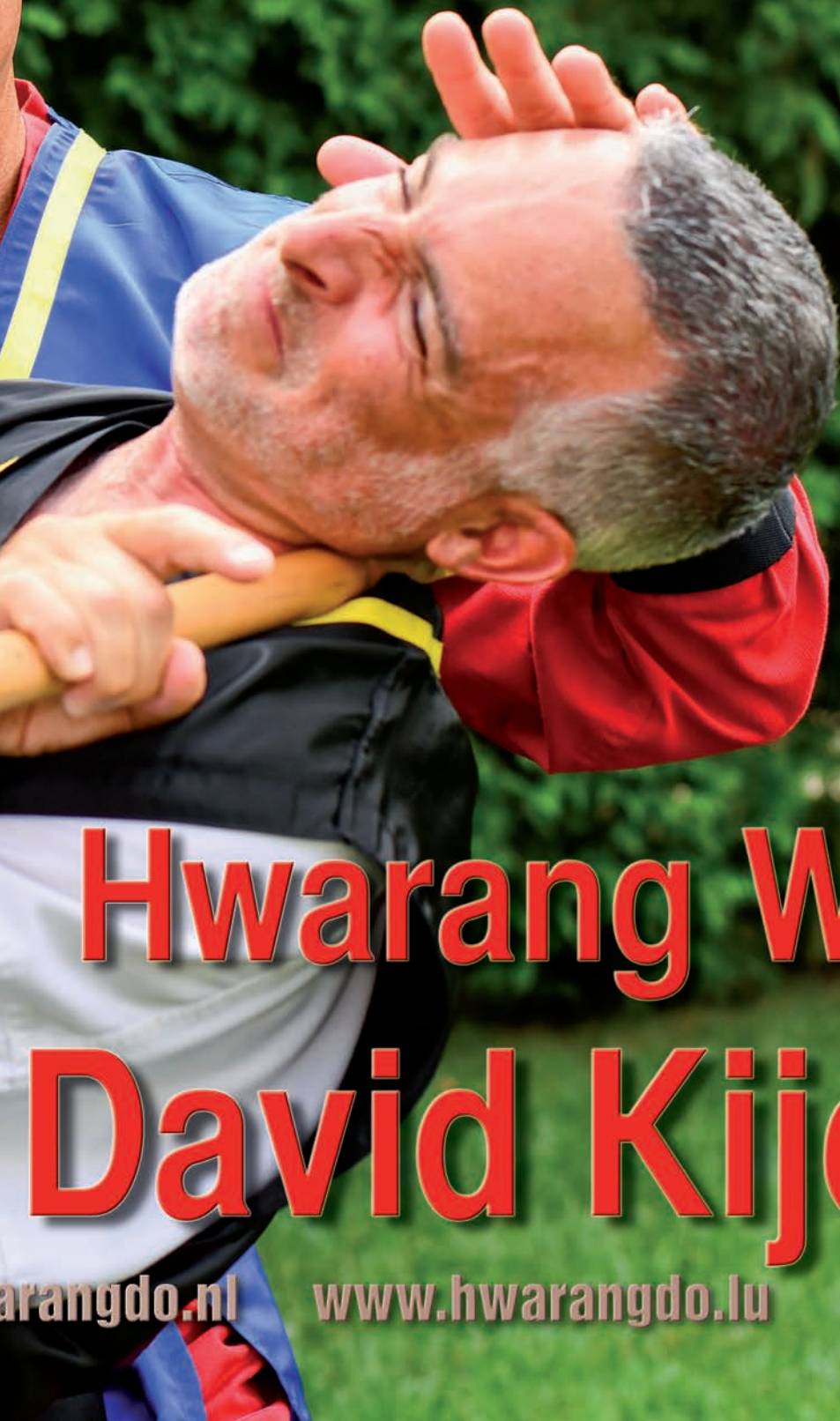
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# David Kijek

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**In this article he explains his journey from growing up in a small rural town in the middle of Wisconsin to serving as a leader in the World Hwa Rang Do® Association. In addition to his martial art responsibilities, Master Kijek serves as the President and CEO WEA Member Benefits, which is a company that provides insurance and financial services to educators.**

**Millions of people participate in martial arts around the globe, but how many will still be training 40 years from now? Why is it that so many start but so few continue their training for their lifetime? I believe the typical person begins martial arts because they (or in the case of a child, their parents) are in search of self-defense skills, fitness, or discipline. Others begin because they think it would be cool to be able to move like the actors they see in the movies. Regardless of the reason why a person begins, it is unlikely that same reason will be why someone continues their training throughout their lifetime. In this article, Master Kijek explains how he got involved in martial arts, the lessons he learned, and the reasons he continues to train in Hwa Rang Do.**

## *The Beginning*

I have been fascinated by the martial arts as long as I can remember. My father was a very handy man and loved woodworking. As a child, I remember after dinner going down to his workroom and watching him work. As most kid's typically do, I would lose my patience and start to goof around. That didn't sit well with Dad, because there were many ways I could get injured given the power tools in his shop. Rather than just tell me to leave, he gave me the option to sit quietly and look at books on his bookshelf. I was only around 4 years old at the time, and I could not read. So, I looked for books with pictures. That is where I saw my first martial art book, and that is when my love for martial arts began.

There were two books, American Police Jiu Jitsu and Thirty-Six Secret Knock-Out Blows Without The Use of Fists. Both books were written and copywritten by S. J. Jorgensen in 1930. These two books met my needs in that they were very small and fit in my hands, and they had pictures. I would often ask my Mom to be my practice partner so I could act out what was being done in the photos. My Dad had a woodworking widget called a push stick, used to push wood through a circular saw. I liked using that with my Mom because it resembled a handgun. I even drew a cylinder and trigger on it to add an element of realism. My Mom recounts the stories of me spending hours with her going through the different techniques from those books. After my Dad passed away, my Mom found several other books my Dad had collected. There were books on Jujitsu, boxing, grappling, along with notes and drawings of techniques. Although I didn't realize it growing up, I have come to realize we both shared an interest in martial arts.

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As I got older, my interest continued to be sparked by shows like The Green Hornet, KungFu, and I Spy. I found that whenever I wrestled with my buddies, I always pretended I was a martial artist. My friends thought I was a bit odd because they liked boxing and wrestling. In large part because back then martial arts were not as popular as they are today.

Finally, in 1979 when I was 17 years old, my brother told me about a guy he met who recently relocated from Utah. He said this guy was planning to teach martial arts in his basement, and he was hosting a demonstration for interested students. Needless to say, I went. I took a couple of friends with me and we became his students. At the time, I had no idea what art it was, and frankly I didn't care. All I knew was that it was a martial art and I was finally going to be able to really train.

On the first day of class he gave us a handout with a brief history, training rules, and some terminology. He charged \$18 per month and classes were on Tuesday and Thursday nights, and Saturday mornings. He called his school the Korean American Hwa Rang Do Club. He told us his father was a career military man, and that growing up he lived on different military bases and that is where he studied martial arts. Along the way he met a master of Hwa Rang Do and that's how he learned it. From then on, I believed I was in Hwa Rang Do. He encouraged us to buy the book called, The Ancient Martial Art of Hwa Rang Do, written by Joo Bang Lee. He explained that it was the same system, but from different masters. So, I bought the book and studied it relentlessly. That book was one of three books in the series, so I eventually bought volume two and three. I was hooked! I trained constantly and eventually became a senior student in the club. One day at the end of class, my teacher announced that he was going to be moving back to Utah for a job opportunity. I was shocked by the news. What was I going to do? I was only a ½ black belt and there was no one else to teach me. My options were to join a rival school that had recently opened in a nearby town or quit.

A month before I began training, I met a girl named Wendy who would eventually become my wife. This year marks our 35th wedding anniversary. She has supported my passion for martial arts from the beginning. She knew the predicament I was in and knew that I would not be happy quitting or switching schools. Fortunately, she insisted I couldn't do either. After discussing things with my teacher, he told me I could take over the club even though I was not yet a black belt. Given my options, I had no other choice. So, I went to my parents and asked them if I could open a school in our basement. To my surprise they said yes. Knowing now about my Dad's interest in martial arts, I shouldn't have been surprised he would agree to it.

A handful of students continued to train after my teacher moved. I was 18 at the time and attending a junior college, so I also began recruiting students from school. To continue my training, I would travel to Utah for private lessons and weeklong seminars in the mountains. When it came time for me to move away for college, I left my club to my brother and then eventually my cousin. While away at college, I started an intermural martial art club at my University. It was there that I really expanded my network and was able to delve into many other systems. Along the way, I met an assistant professor who had heard that I was teaching Hwa Rang Do. He was familiar with the art from his work teaching law enforcement and bodyguards. He was a handgun expert and taught defensive firearms tactics at a bodyguard school in Aspen, CO. It turns out that Supreme Grand Master Dr. Joo Bang Lee and one of his students founded that school. Rather than travel back and forth to Colorado for training, my professor friend decided to train with me. In exchange, he would teach me about handguns and defensive firearms tactics. One day, he invited me to go to Aspen Colorado with him to assist in teaching handgun tactics and to meet with Supreme Grand Master's student. After meeting him and comparing techniques, I knew that what I had been studying was NOT Hwa Rang Do! It had similarities, but it was different enough for me to know I had been lied to.

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I was crushed. Discovering after all that time, that I was not actually training in Hwa Rang Do was extremely discouraging.

Over the years, I spent time collecting all the books on Hwa Rang Do, copies of every magazine article ever written about Hwa Rang Do and educated hundreds of students on the history of Hwa Rang Do. To learn that my training was not in Hwa Rang Do was devastating to say the least. Soon after, I confronted my teacher and stopped training with him. I then started teaching under my own name, Dave Kijek's Martial Art Academy. Despite the let down, I was determined to continue my training. After college, I moved to Minneapolis, MN, and started a job selling insurance. I began teaching in a friend's basement while also conducting corporate wellness classes for a Fit-for-Life program. Six months later, Wendy and I got married and we moved back to Wisconsin to start a new job in Madison, WI. It was there that I started to attend a Tae Kwon Do club at a local YMCA. After a short period of time, the director of the program offered me my own club and I began teaching again under my own name. This continued for the next few years.

Along the way, I decided it was time from me to find my own location. One day I drove by a dance studio that was under construction and I met with the owner to see if she was willing to sublease to me. She agreed and I was in business.

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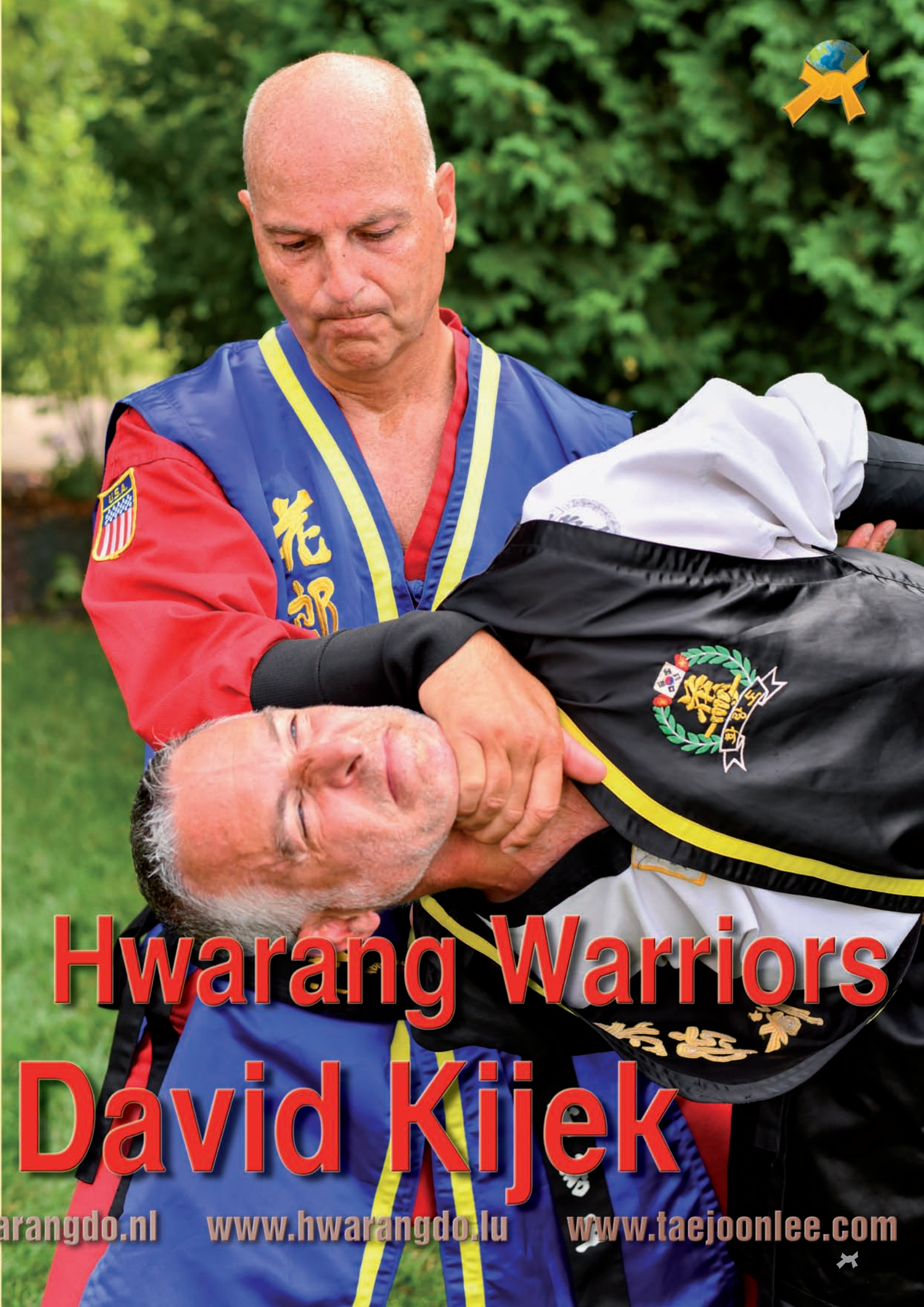
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In 1989, I was reading a martial art magazine and there was a full-page ad offering memberships into the World Hwa Rang Do Association. I couldn't believe my eyes! I completed the application and received my membership passport. I was now officially a member of the World Hwa Rang Do Association. Being a member, I learned that I could train at any Hwa Rang Do school and I could buy official Hwa Rang Do equipment, so I ordered a Hwa Rang Do duffle bag. This bag would ultimately be responsible for introducing me to Grand Master Taejoon Lee, the eldest son of Supreme Grand Master Dr. Joo Bang Lee.

Several months passed and I did not receive my bag. I was informed it was back ordered. Being persistent, I continued to call on a regular basis checking in on the status. One day I found myself talking to Grand Master Lee. I was so excited but nervous to speak with him as I had been following him and his family in books and magazines for many years. He asked me where I was from and what style I studied? Feeling embarrassed and somewhat intimidated, I did not have the courage to tell him I was training in a fake Hwa Rang Do system for the past 10 years, so I decided to tell him I was in an Americanized Tae Kwon Do system and that I had my own club. I told him I was interested in becoming a student of Hwa Rang Do. He explained what I would have to do in-order to make that happen. The list was challenging and included hosting a seminar, conducting a large-scale marketing campaign, and if accepted, I would have to discontinue teaching my students the old curriculum. I, along with my students, would have to start from white belt again. In order to learn, I would have to travel to CA for training. After spending a significant amount of time on the call, I felt I could not hang up until I came clean. So, I apologized and explained my story to him. He was extremely gracious and understanding. He assured me that he had heard similar stories countless times. He gave me assurance that if I met the requirements he laid out, I would be able to convert my school to an authentic Hwa Rang Do school and continue to train.



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### *Challenge Accepted*

The seminar happened and meeting Grand Master Taejoon Lee changed my life forever. Seeing him in action was simply amazing. I had been to several martial art seminars and around a lot of other martial artist, but I had never witnessed someone move with the speed, power, and grace as he did. In addition to being a phenomenal martial artist he was very kind and extremely personable. At the conclusion of the weekend, he invited me into Hwa Rang Do and agreed to convert my school. I received an honorary 1st degree black sash and began my official training. On my first trip to headquarters, I met Supreme Grand Master. I will never forget the overwhelming emotions of that moment. I was in a room visiting with several black sashes and masters when all of a sudden, everyone jumped to their feet and a master called us to attention. I had no idea what was happening. Then I looked towards the door and there was Do Joo Nim, The Owner of the Way. My heart was racing, and I barely could put two words together. I am pretty sure he realized I was a mess, because after the bow he came over to me and wrapped his arms around me and welcomed me to headquarters. Then he invited me into his office, and we talked for hours. Both Do Joo Nim and Grandmaster Lee emulated the concept of Um/Yang. They were as nice as they were powerful. I knew I was in the right place.

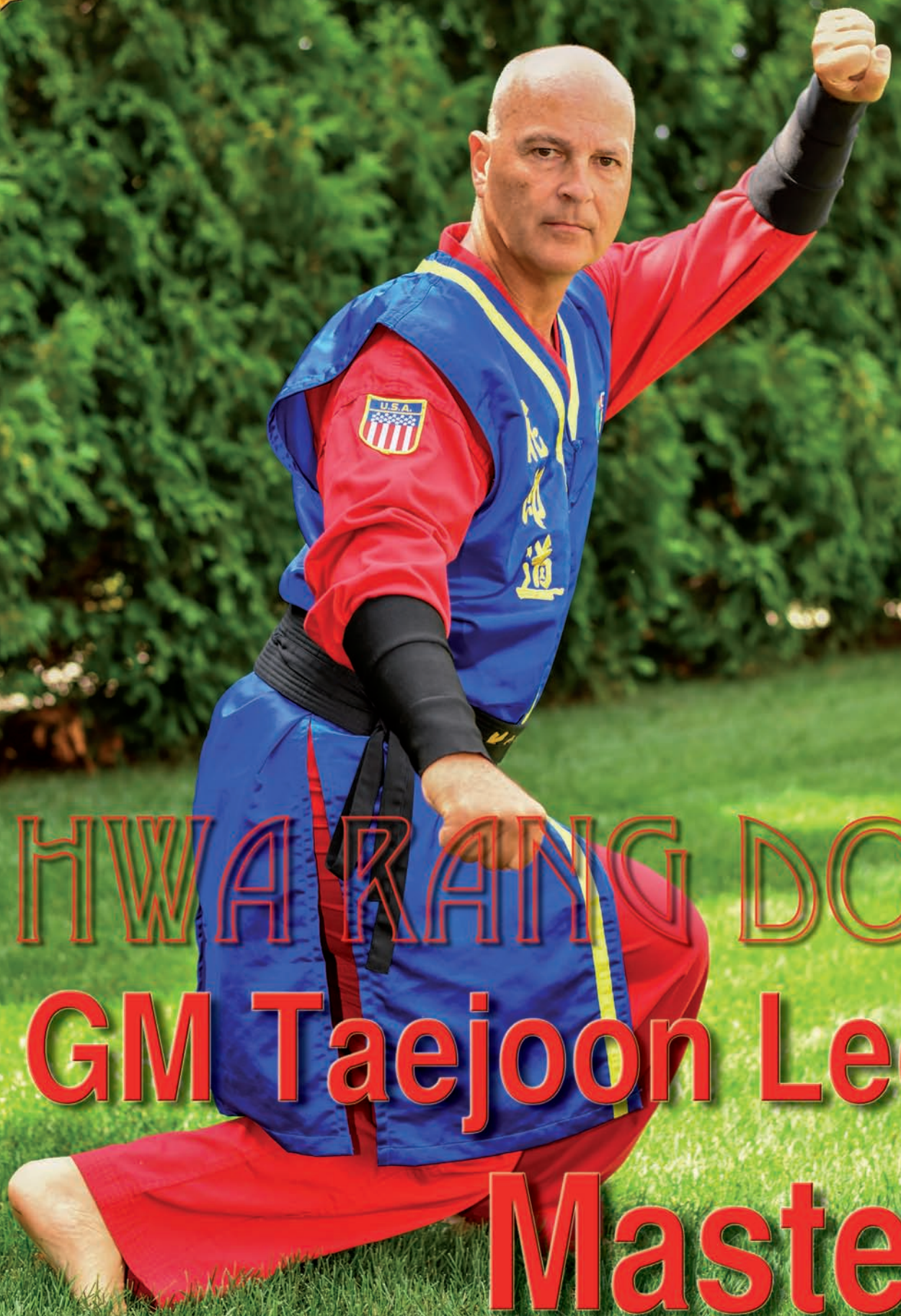
I would continue to travel back and forth and tested for my official first-degree black sash in April 1992. It is interesting to note that my first test in the World Hwa Rang Do Association was for my black sash. I had no idea what to expect having never gone through the color belt ranks. What I did know is that I was standing before Do Joo Nim (The 58th generation owner of the way), Grand Master Lee, other masters, and many black sashes. I also knew that only one person out of thousand ever made it to their black sash. Fortunately for me I passed.

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With my black sash test behind me, I had a renewed confidence and energy that allowed me to focus on growing Hwa Rang Do in the Midwest. Over the next 25 years my team and I developed scores of black sashes and implemented nine schools in WI, three in Illinois, and two in Minnesota. In addition, our black sashes opened schools in Oregon, Washington, and Florida and we sent three apprentices to work at the World Headquarters in CA.

During this same period, Wendy and I raised our son, I continued building my career in the insurance and finance industry, and I went to graduate school to earn my M.B.A (Masters of Business Administration). I mention these things because all too often people use family, work, and school as reasons why they are not able to continue training. When in fact, I believe these things provide even more reasons why we need to train. Hwa Rang Do teaches us a great deal about maximizing our potential, and it gives us the skills necessary to stay focused and mentally strong. One of our training principles states; "If one's mind is made up to learn, there will be success."

## **Lessons Learned**

Grandmaster Lee says, "We want our members to live in a way that their actions meet their intentions. Too many people live a life with good intentions, but don't have the discipline to take action to see things through." Longevity in anything requires perseverance. Perseverance means, persistence in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success. If you are going to sustain your training over a lifetime, you are going to have to learn to persevere through many challenges. Remember, just as diamonds are formed under pressure so is transformation. The more you stay the course and push through challenges, the more it will become a habit and the more valuable your knowledge will be.

When explaining what training in Hwa Rang Do is like, I tell people that it is everything you'd expect a true martial art to be. Hwa Rang Do literally translates to the Way of the Flowering of Manhood (Knights). It is a traditional system that focuses on developing our maximum human potential. Regardless of our age or physical abilities, it meets us



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where we are at and it makes us better. Hwa Rang Do is based on the universal principle of opposing forces Um/Yang (Yin/Yang in Chinese). It is represented by a circle divided by an "s" shaped line in the middle. The two halves swirled together signify they are not two independent forces but rather two opposite forces which interact with each other to form a whole. It is a fundamental truth that you need to know what hot is in order to understand what cold is, what dark is to understand what light is. (good and evil, fast and slow, heavy and light, male and female, tall and short, strong and weak, straight and circular, etc.) This fundamental truth is present in all that is, and it is at the center of Hwa Rang Do. As a result, Hwa Rang Do incorporates both hard style and soft style movements in one complete system. Unlike most systems that incorporate different martial arts into their school in an effort to offer both hard and soft techniques, Hwa Rang Do is one consistent system that has been that way since its formation over 2,000 years ago. In addition, it incorporates 4,000 offensive and defensive empty hand techniques, 108 weapons broken down into 20 categories, mental training including breathing exercises to develop internal energy and passive and active meditation, and oriental medicine techniques including acupuncture, acupressure, bone-setting, revival techniques, cupping techniques and herbal medicine.

Training in an art like Hwa Rang Do is a blessing and a curse. The blessing is that there is so much to learn. The curse is the same! To this day, whenever I train with my teachers, I still feel like a beginner. And I believe that is one of the main reasons I continue to train. When you stop learning, you stop growing. Do Joo Nim states, "When a goldfish lives in a cup, the cup is its whole world." It is a wonderful reminder that we are to remain humble and never tire of learning. No matter how much you know, there is always more you can learn.

Another valuable lesson I have learned throughout the years, is that being accountable to others is a wonderful motivator to keep pushing ahead and improving. Whether in your personal life or in your martial art life, being accountable to others pushes us to step-up and be better. When you are ready, I highly encourage you to teach and pass-on your knowledge to others. This helps to motivate yourself to train when you are tired, sore, stressed, or whatever. Knowing people are relying on you gives you extra energy to do more than you might otherwise do.

Be grateful. No matter what you have accomplished in life, it is likely that you could not have done it without the assistance of others. For this reason, you must remember to always be grateful for their help and to pay it forward. I am forever grateful for the trust, love, and patience shown to me by Do Joo Nim and Grandmaster Taejoon Lee. For without their teaching, sacrifice, and leadership, neither I nor generations of martial artists would know about Hwa Rang Do and all the benefits it provides. I am also grateful to the students and their family members who assisted and supported me over the years. I am confident without their help, the success we saw in the Midwest would not have been possible.

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Finally, being a Christian, I believe that God opens and closes doors. In reflecting back to my experiences as a child and finding the books on my father's shelf, learning from my first teacher that there was a martial art called Hwa Rang Do, meeting my wife and listening to her wise counsel to not quit, meeting my professor friend who introduced me to Do Joo Nim's student in Aspen, and opening the martial art magazine to find an application to join the World Hwa Rang Do Association, I know that God was there. So, for me, I go back to what I said at the beginning of the article. What brought me to the martial arts is not what has kept me training. I started off because I thought martial arts was cool and I wanted to be able to move like the people I saw in the books and in the movies. My desire was inward focused and based on training for my own personal benefits. Over time my reasons to train changed.

Today, my reasons to train are outward looking rather than inward. I train to help others and to pass Hwa Rang Do on to the next generation. I tell my students that Hwa Rang Do is like a vitamin that simply makes everything we do better through developing our body, mind, and spirit. If my reason to train remained constant from the day I started, I would likely have quit years ago. But fortunately, I have learned over time that Hwa Rang Do offers so much more than that. Do Joo Nim says it best, "Even a monkey can be taught to kick and punch; human beings are not measured by their physical nature, but their spiritual nature." A true warrior pursues truth. And by doing so, embodies the desire to learn and challenge themselves to continually improve. For me, Hwa Rang Do provides the tools needed to live life to its fullest and to become better human beings. No matter where you are in your training, my hope for you is that you will find the benefits of Hwa Rang Do, a true martial way, and you will ultimately train not for yourself, but to improve the people around you, thus improving the world and honoring God.



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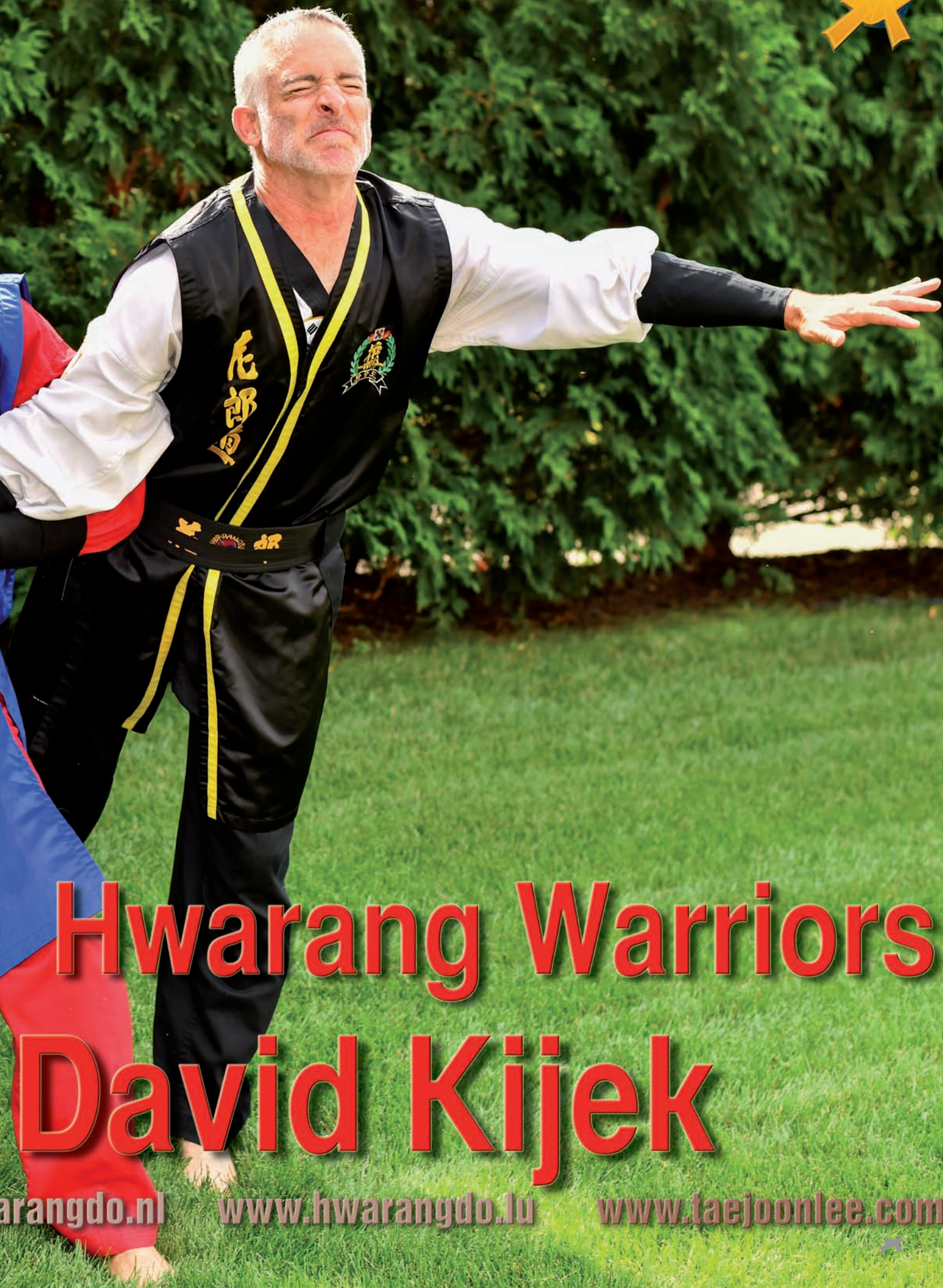
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