

Our Journey to Achieving Black Belt

SUBMITTED BY: **MASTER BRANDON OLIVEIRA.**

All of us have set goals for ourselves at some point in our lives and some of them are big ones, like earning a college degree, or scaling a mountain, or even cleaning out the garage. Three years ago, two Tualatin residents set a pretty big goal for themselves - to earn their black belt in Taekwondo. While they may have had different reasons to begin their training both shared similar inspirations along the way. They share their story here as they reflect on their journey together.

What motivated you to start training in Taekwondo?

SARAH: My days were filled with working, paying bills, and watching TV. It didn't take long before I knew something needed to change. I am always up for a new challenge but I don't know what I was thinking when I decided to check out a local Taekwondo school. Driving by, I remember thinking how much fun it would be to try something so different, but what I didn't realize was that Taekwondo would end up changing my life.

ALLAN: I started my Taekwondo training soon after signing up my two young boys, Gordon and Canon. Over these three years I've watched them grow in their confidence, discipline, and patience, and this has been a true blessing and inspiration to me. I have also seen a transformation in myself, both inside and out. My wife recently began her training as well, so now my entire family has been on this journey together. The boys are now preparing to test for their black belts in April.

What are some life lessons that you learned these past 3 years while earning your black belt?

SARAH: Master Brandon had faith in me and helped develop courage to not only try anything, but to persevere until I could do it to the best of my ability. I have learned that being a black belt is more than being able to do the full splits or having sky-high kicks, it is about trying my best at everything I do.

ALLAN: The word, "Fortitude" comes to

mind, which is defined as having the "mental and emotional strength in facing difficulty, adversity, or danger courageously." I love that definition because it doesn't just focus on facing the difficulty or hard times, because we all have to face challenges at some point in our lives. The word reminds me that I am not afraid or intimidated by anything or anyone and I am mentally prepared to persevere through whatever is in my path.

What were some things you learned to overcome and did you ever think about giving up?

SARAH: Earning my black belt means that I have worked hard both physically and mentally to overcome obstacles that once seemed impossible. It means I have pushed myself to do things even though they were way beyond my comfort level. Not far into my training did I realize I can do anything I put my mind to.

ALLAN: I definitely learned from my shortcomings to be patient and to persevere through learning a new movement and trusting my body to adapt. I also learned to be humble when I finally did succeed at whatever eluded me at the time and to encourage others to achieve their own success.

What has this black belt journey meant for you?

SARAH: Hundreds of classes later, it is safe to say I have fallen in love with Taekwondo. I cannot say what exactly attracts me to the sport. Perhaps it is the excellent physical condition it has required or the increase in my ability to deal with stressful situations. During my journey to black belt I have come to realize that no other sport could have given me the sense of accomplishment and power as Taekwondo has.

ALLAN: I couldn't agree more. I've noticed a change in myself and my two boys, especially. We've all learned the meanings of our 5 tenets of Taekwondo: Courtesy,

Integrity, Perseverance, Self Control, and Indomitable Spirit. Those are all tenets of life, really.

What has been the most enjoyable part of this journey?

SARAH: Seeing myself grow as a martial artist and a better person. Making lifelong friendships and working together toward a common goal – earning a black belt.

ALLAN: I have definitely enjoyed seeing how far I could challenge myself, mentally and physically, but I have most enjoyed watching our fellow students find their own success. I feel lucky to be part of a school whose instructor continually promotes an environment of encouragement for all to reach their goals.

So what is next for you?

SARAH: Taekwondo has taught me that anything I dream, I can achieve. I never started this journey intending to get a black belt, nor did I intend to become a martial artist, but I began this journey to find myself. And what I found was a martial artist—and an improved me.

ALLAN: Master Brandon reminds us that achieving your black belt means you have "mastered the basics," and I interpret that to mean that there is still so much more to learn and earning my black belt is only the beginning of the journey. I look forward to what lies ahead, in Taekwondo and in life.



Taekwondo Black Belts, Allan Lombos and Sarah Brown

FUN FACT: The origin of Taekwondo traces back to the three ancient kingdoms of Korea: Koguryo (37 BC-668 AD), Paekche (18 BC-600 AD), and Silla (57 BC-936 AD). The first World Taekwondo Championships were held in 1973 and in 1980 the World Taekwondo Federation was granted recognition by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Shortly thereafter, the adoption of Taekwondo as an official event was followed by the World Games in 1981, the Pan-American games in 1986, and finally by the 2000 Olympics held in Australia.

Sarah Brown has lived in Tualatin for 6 years and is an ultrasound technologist at Legacy Meridian Park Medical Center. When she is not training she is cheering on the Portland Trailblazers.

Allan Lombos lives in Tualatin with his wife Sherilyn and two boys, Gordon and Canon. He is a Sr. Manager with a Big 4 Firm who works with clients in an around the greater Portland area.

Both Sarah and Allan train at US West Coast Taekwondo – Tualatin (www.TKDtualatin.com) under the instruction of Owner/Chief Instructor and 4th degree black belt, Master Brandon Oliveira.