

Statement of Philosophy  
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We hear many stories about people who are determined to overcome adversity. People diagnosed with life-threatening diseases vow to beat the disease and live. Others have their businesses and homes destroyed by tornadoes or hurricanes, and they have to find a way to pick up the pieces and start over. It is difficult, but they find a way to make ends meet, and in many cases, their life after facing the adversity is changed for the better. What all of these people have in common is a desire to achieve a goal and a will to overcome any obstacle that may be in the way of attaining that goal. Each one has an indomitable spirit. They are strong, brave, determined, and they do not give in to any fear that may obstruct the pathway to their goals.

Throughout my life, I have set goals for myself, and I, like many, have an unspoken list of things I want to accomplish in my life. One of these goals involved martial arts. I remember on the night before my first day of college I wrote a list of short- and long-term goals. Some of these items were related to my studies, some were simply “cool things to do,” and others were long-term career goals. One of the goals that I placed on the “something cool to do in life” list was to get a black belt in a martial art. Little did I know that one day in October of 2005, I would be so close to attaining this goal. And, back in 1995 when I authored that list, I had no idea how much hard work would be involved in “getting a black belt,” and I did not realize how much I would learn about myself and my life. As I prepare for my decided black belt test, I can reflect upon my journey to this point and see how having an indomitable spirit and not giving in to fear has become a part of how I train, and how I live my life.

As a white belt, my most immediate fear was not “looking right.” In a sense, I was afraid to mess up. I didn’t want to look stupid. I soon realized that “looking stupid” was a fear I had to overcome to learn any of the basic white belt techniques. As soon as I focused less on how I looked, and simply let the techniques happen no matter what the outcome, I was able to do things I never thought I would be doing. I made mistakes, of course, but I also knew that every mistake I made would teach me something about the particular technique I was trying to do. Even as a recommended black belt, this has not changed. For learning to occur, we have to allow ourselves to mess up and take notice of how to fix our mistakes.

A fear is an obstacle that stands in the way of attaining a goal, and another huge fear I had (and still have on occasion) is a fear of air falls. When it came time to learn how to air fall, I was petrified. But, I really enjoyed being in Hapkido and I wanted to continue on and test for my orange belt. So, I tried to silence my fear, I gave myself permission to mess up and fall on my head, and eventually air falling came naturally. If I had let my fear get in my way, I would not have tested for orange belt, and I would have quit Hapkido, consequently giving up on my goal of becoming a black belt. But, I was determined, I overcame my obstacle, and I progressed on my path. Soon I began to notice the parallels between practicing Hapkido and making your way through life. And, the five tenets of courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control, and indomitable spirit are essential to overcoming any obstacle in life, as well as in the dojang.

As I write this, I am getting closer to obtaining a PhD in music theory, one of my academic goals. The only hurdle between me and the PhD is my dissertation. Since my course work is complete, I have the freedom to choose my own work and study schedule.

Writing a dissertation in my field is a very independent, yet lonely process, and it is easy to procrastinate, choosing to watch television rather than writing about the latest book I have read. Why do I choose to procrastinate when it seems that I am so close to reaching one of my goals? It is because of my fear of what is in store for me after obtaining my PhD. Will I be able to get a job in the field? Do I really want a job in the field or am I just scared of the uncertainty of my future? If I choose to acknowledge my fear, I do not progress toward my goal. Just as my fear of air falling stood in my way of progressing in Hapkido, my fear of the uncertainty of my life beyond school stands between me and my PhD. I must remember what Hapkido has taught me about fear and the power of the indomitable spirit. I have a specific goal in mind, and if that goal is truly one I want to accomplish, I must trust that my indomitable spirit will help me conquer any fears that stand in my way.