

Training in Malaysia by Garry Denman 1st Degree

I was busy doing Knuckle push-ups on unfinished concrete, in the midday heat of a tropical country. By this time I had lost the skin on both my knuckles & feet, the sweat dripped off the end of my nose forming a small stain under my head. I had trained in Malaysia under Master Tan for about three weeks now. It didn't seem to matter what I ate the weight seemed to come off & the muscle go on. I had already decided to resign my post in England, enabling me to train full time. I finish the push-ups & for a brief & painful moment I think I may have taken leave of my sanity. I stand up and attempt to do reverse turning kicks, I've rubbed anaesthetic gel into the soles of my feet & it seems to help for a while. Later I will work the punch bag. At least I had acclimatised to the heat!

I arrived in Malaysia on February 4th 2002.

The intense heat hits you the moment that you step out of the airport terminal; this was late in the afternoon, not even midday! As someone who had lived their whole lives in a temperate environment training here for any length of time was going to be hard.

Master Tan was waiting for me in his 4 x 4, which he always kept in an immaculate condition. Ms Cheang spots me, waving me over. It's not long before she persuades me to part with my trainers for a pair of slippers. (Malaysian sandals, finding some in my size wasn't easy)

A couple of years previously I had promised Master Tan that I would return to train with him. I had trained with my Instructor Mr Phillip Lear for four years. Mr Lear himself had spent two years training under Master Tan.

At the time I had no idea that the training would be this hard or intense. Not only physically but mentally. I found that I had to draw deeply on strength that I didn't know I had in order to keep going.

One time Master Tan asked me why I had been to the top of the Petronus Towers (one of the tallest buildings in the world. I replied that it looked a long way up & I wasn't too keen on the idea of going up there. A few days later a new element was added to my training regime. I would stand next to a waist high wall at the top of a building 4 stories high. I would side kick and back kick over this wall, with Master Tan reminding me "better not drop your Knee with the side kick Garry...."

My resolve was further tested a few months into the training, when I was sparring one of the other students who was preparing for a national competition. I had dropped my right hand to chest level, a habit I had been repeatedly warned about. This time I was caught hard with a reverse turning kick, slicing open my eyebrow from one end to the other. In the end it requires 15 stitches. The whole Tan family are extremely patient with me, in the next 6 hours I see three doctors before I find one I feel is competent to do fine sutures to my face.

The hardest test of my resolve was the black belt grading. I complete the patterns without fault, but lacking the sharpness I had hoped for. After kick combinations, and one step sparring it came down to the destruction. The rule is five of seven items must be broken to pass, each technique is allowed two

attempts. I managed to brake with punch, elbow through boards & Knife hand through a house brick. At this point I relaxed a little & lost focus, then failed to brake with turning kick & side kick, both of which should have been no problem to me.

I was now faced with having to brake with flying side kick & jumping high kick, two techniques which I had never managed to brake with. The first flying side kick attempt didn't even reach the board, I new that if I didn't make it this time I would fail for sure. The second attempt I ran at full speed, putting my foot straight through the board. Everything now rested on successfully braking with a jumping high kick. I ran at the board throwing myself as high in the air as I could & just touched the board with my toes. It all came down to the last attempt on the last technique to have any chance of passing this test. I ran & jumped throwing my hips high to get a little extra height. I landed poorly as the two halves of the board hit the ground. Even so, I couldn't be sure of passing until the results were given out.

Receiving my Black Belt has to rate as one of the best memories I have, I have never worked so hard for anything else. Looking back at some of the things I undertook to reach this point, I'm sometimes amazed that I made it. I owe a large debt of thanks to the excellent instruction I have received from the Instructors of Vision Taekwon-do, both in England & Malaysia.

Master Tan once said to me that it is after receiving the black belt that students truly start to learn Taekwon-do, I realise now the truth of this.

Master Tan, Mrs Tan & their family showed me every consideration & kindness during my stay in Malaysia, Often I would eat with them, trying out things I didn't know existed. One enduring memory is the first time I saw the strange exotic fruits at the night market in Chow Kit.

Their hospitality was excellent, I learnt much more than the techniques of Taekwon-Do from them. I went with them on family holidays, twice to Thailand, & to many places all over Malaysia, the mountains, Penang, the northern borders & the Islamic states to the east amongst others. Often we would stay up into the early hours to watch English football, then catch a few hours sleep before training.

I learned a great deal about other cultures, some of which are quite different to any I had encountered before.

I would like to thank both Master Tan, Mr Lear & the other students who have helped me to reach this point in my training, with the knowledge that training in unending, there is always more to learn & perfect.