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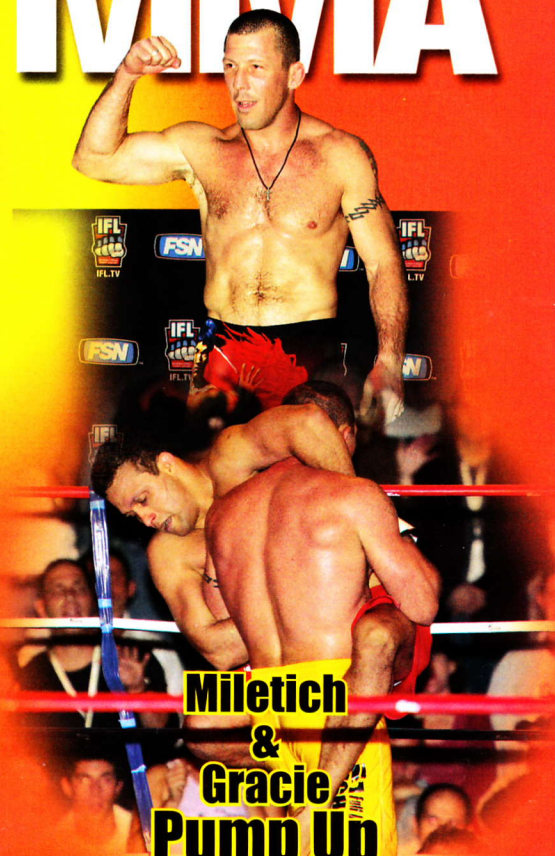
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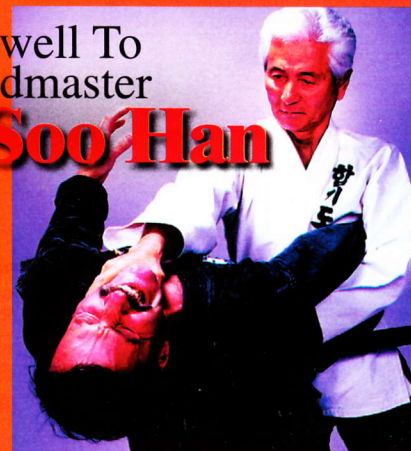
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By Dorothy Irwin



“Self defense is more an attitude than a fighting skill. It is first and foremost a preparation of the mind with: self-respect, respect for others; self-confidence a sense of justice and righteousness; self-esteem; knowledge of when to fight and when to be still; courage; patience and understanding. Secondly, it is the preparation and training of reflexes, abilities, and skills to develop the individual to his or her fullest physical potential. It gives the student tools with which to help self and others. Lastly, and very importantly, it is learning to blend all of the above into a strong person of character who can combine knowledge, skill, and wisdom to enable them to face any situation. It is learning that force is not sought or used except when it is the only answer left, after all other efforts are exhausted.

But when it is used, it is used with responsibility and courage, and then only to the extent that it is necessary. It is learning to temper power with discernment and good judgment.”

Grandmaster Eunggil Choi

Eunggil Choi

A Man of Compassion, Perseverance and Promise

For some, Tae Kwon Do is about fighting, competition, aggressiveness and even “showiness.” For others, it is about defense, being prepared in situations that call for fighting to defend self and others.

Yet for a few, Tae Kwon Do is so much more. It is a manner of living that includes more than aggressive fighting and self-defense. It is about training both the mind and the body to be the best you can be. It is about being prepared mentally and physically to face whatever challenges life tosses your way and to handle those challenges honorably, courageously, and adeptly, while being morally responsible in every way. This is the world of Tae Kwon Do in which Grandmaster Eunggil Choi thrives. This is the focus of his style of teaching.

“Nothing is Impossible” is the motto behind Grandmaster Choi’s instruction. In keeping with the need to learn how to focus, his school is called the “Home of Discipline.” Most beginning students have little concept of the true meaning, or even the need, for self-discipline.

“The attitude of a true Tae Kwon Doist is one who thinks beyond self and who is prepared to help those who are weaker. A true Tae Kwon Doist is not self-seeking or self-important and does not use his or her skills to show off. A true Tae Kwon Doist is strong in self-discipline, accountability, justice, and caring.”

The Grandmaster demands discipline when necessary, but mostly he inspires in his students the desire to develop their own self-discipline. He gives them a reason to want to excel.

Though he has many outstanding qualities, two in particular stand out. His ability with children is remarkable. Somehow, even the toughest of street kids recognize something special about him and respond immediately to his unspoken and quiet authority. They become still and responsive when he enters the room. Over time, their respect and love for him grow—and their lives change for the better as they progress under his sensitive guidance. They will respond to him when they hadn't and wouldn't respond to others. They sense his sincerity, his love, his care—and his authority.

There is a tremendous difference between “power” and “authority.” As explained in the book *The Servant* by James C. Hunter, who quotes Max Weber from his book, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, power is defined as; “The ability to force or coerce someone to do your will, even if they would choose not to, because of your position or your might.” On the other hand, authority is defined as; “The skill of getting people to willingly do your will because of your personal influence.” Building authority with children (of all ages)—inspiring and gaining their immediate trust and respect—requires extraordinary skills. This is one set of qualities Grandmaster Choi has mastered.

In 1994, Choi offered his school to teach a free three-year black belt course to 21 students from public housing. The day the children (ages 12 to 19) arrived en masse is unforgettable. It seemed as though none had even the slightest concept of respect or concern for others. They stormed into the building, jumping up and down, trying to grab the attendance cards out of the hands of the office assistant while totally ignoring what she was saying. Some didn't even wait for instructions and ran straight into the dojang with their shoes on. They laughed, yelled, fussed and fought. They ignored the three black belts inside on the dojang floor who were trying to bring about some sort of discipline and order.

After a few moments of near chaos, the door to the Grandmaster's office slowly opened and he quietly stepped out onto the floor of the dojang, not saying a word. Within two seconds a gentle wave of stillness spread out and settled on all who were in the room. Still unspoken, he slowly and silently walked among the new students, occasionally looking at one or two. Gradually, the students found themselves gathering into a semblance of lines, astonished and silent, eyes

“Learn to look and listen before speaking. Understand the heart of martial arts, the training it gives and the direction it points. Look beyond the surface. Seek wisdom and understanding instead of glory and self satisfaction.”

glued on the Master. When they were lined up, Choi went to the front of the room, turned and faced his new class. Speaking softly, yet with authority, he began to explain what was expected of the students and what Tae Kwon Do was all about. These previously loud, undisciplined and disrespectful students responded, and without them realizing it, their lessons began.

Over the next three years, a few of these students dropped out. One especially challenged student required many tests at most belt levels, for his discipline, concentration and skill levels were below par. But Grandmaster Choi knew he was capable of more and pushed him to reach previously unknown limits; to learn to achieve and to not quit, no matter the problems he faced. The student, to his credit and to Choi's patience and skill, persevered and ultimately achieved his black belt.

Two other students went on to qualify for and enter national Tae Kwon Do competitions. All who didn't quit changed dramatically for the better and, for the first time in some of their lives, responded to and grew to understand and appreciate discipline and respect.

Another distinct quality of Grandmaster Choi is his remarkable talent to judge a person's abilities and how far—and when—to push that individual to become better than his/her self-confidence previ-





TOP TO BOTTOM: Grm. Choi speaks at his annual benefit for cancer. The Grandmaster's son helps a youngster break a board. At an annual cancer benefit, Choi executes a flying kick to break a board.

Eunggil Choi

ously allowed. Those who learn to trust him will go farther than they ever believed they could go. Those who refuse to trust him ultimately quit, unfortunately never learning what their true abilities could be.

One year, an overweight and older (by many years) student was preparing to test for black belt. She was practicing on the floor with another classmate (young enough to be her son) who would test on the same day. They were alone on the floor. Thinking there was no one around to hear, she and her classmate were discussing the upcoming test. The older student shared her fears of testing with such a younger, more athletic group and what might happen if she could not keep up.

Suddenly Grandmaster Choi's door slowly opened and he walked quietly up to the two students. Looking at the oldest he asked her, "Do you trust me?"

She replied, "Yes." Choi looked at her and said nothing. After a moment, he turned and walked away.

After a few steps, he turned and asked again, "Do you trust me?"

"Yes, of course I do," she replied. "Why?" she asked in puzzlement.

Once again, he walked away without a word. The students looked at each other, surprised.

When he reached his office door, the Grandmaster turned around, looked at the students still silently watching his retreat, and asked a third time, "Do you trust me?"

"Yes, Master Choi. I do!" was the immediate but puzzled response. He quietly turned back into his office and gently closed his door. He didn't say another word. Looking at each other, the confused students asked, "What

was that all about?" They could not think of any reasonable answer.

Testing day came. The older student, full of fear and trepidation, asking herself why she ever put herself in this position at her age and weight; jumped right in to face the day and all it contained. Embarrassed, she had not even told her family what she was doing that day, for she didn't want to shame them with her lack of perfect athletic skills in the dojang. But for better or worse, she was determined to participate in all the day held. No holding back; no excuses; no consideration for advanced age was requested. What the younger ones had to do, she would attempt.

After testing, she learned that she did more pushups, sit-ups, and other exercises than her two classmates on either side (they told her that they had done one for each two counts - but with eyes closed to concentrate and not seeing what the other students were doing, she did one for each count). All considered, she made it and did better than she'd anticipated. Thanks to Grandmaster Choi.

She had just learned another lesson from her instructor, one that answered the question from weeks earlier. Her trust in the Grandmaster had been well placed. He certainly pushes his students out of their comfort zones, but not so far that they must fail in the process. This

Receiving his Master's Degree in Physical Education was a high point in Choi's life. OPPOSITE PAGE: The Korean Ambassador, representing the South Korean President, presents Grm. Choi with an award recognizing his contribution, as an Asian-American, to the Washington, DC, area.



quality inspires his students to trust him and to keep trying. The student now fully understood the repeated question, "Do you trust me?" that Choi challenged her with prior to black belt testing.

Children and adults of all abilities benefit from attending Grandmaster Choi's school. It is not a school just for the athletically gifted. There are many lessons, other than forms, board breaking, and fighting skills that he has to offer. But those who receive the full impact of his teaching quickly realize that his methods are not like those in our public schools. School teachers of today tend to offer their teaching on a silver platter, "This is what you will learn, here is how you will do it, and that is what you just learned." They do the thinking for the student. To the contrary, the longer students stay with Choi, the more they learn that his teaching comes from the examples he sets and what he has the students do—or face. He does not tell them what they will learn or identify the lesson; instead they must observe and question, seeking their own answers. He teaches them to think and reason for themselves as he guides his students into discovering their own answers.

In this process, two of many important lessons students learn are: Don't make a suggestion unless you are prepared to act upon it and...if you are afraid of something, that is exactly what you will find yourself facing—and conquering.

Every action taken in the dojang has a sound reason behind it; everything is a lesson. But only those who seek to learn and who contemplate what they are learning will realize the true impact of the physical lessons. The physical leads to the mental; the true substance of what Choi teaches. Many lessons are intangible, such as patience, giving, understanding, and helping. The mental, character-building lessons that students gain from Grandmaster Choi's Tae Kwon Do will ultimately be appreciated as the most important and valuable of all the lessons learned. Once students recognize them, they realize a new road toward mental growth has been opened should they desire to travel a new learning path.

To get where the Grandmaster is today is a lifelong journey. He has not only learned many lessons, but is still learning. There is no final end to learning nor is it a final achievement. There is only "more."

Grandmaster Choi, an eighth-degree, began learning his lessons from Tae Kwon Do at the tender age of three. His father was his first teacher and the most influential person in his life. With his father's help and early training sustaining him, young Eunggil Choi continued Tae Kwon Do instruction during college, through many world competitions and beyond, even into the Korean military. Tae Kwon Do had long ago become a chosen way of life for him, though he has studied other disciplines such as Kung Fu. Once his initial physical training was mastered and the mental training he acquired had proved itself in life's lessons, the realization hit home even more that the door to continual growth is always open, no matter the level of competency reached.

There is a saying that states, "If you want to get something done, ask a busy man." This certainly fits Grandmaster Choi. Believing in giving back to the community, his various charities have included helping with the Women's Shelter as well as with underprivileged





FAR LEFT: Receiving a congratulatory plaque from Grm. Lee of the visiting Children's TKD team. **LEFT:** Displaying his eighth-dan Kukkiwon certification.

children. He has participated in various leadership forums and gives generously to his community, both in time and in donations.

However, Grandmaster Choi's biggest contribution is his continuing dedication to his "Kick Cancer Out of the World" Cancer Benefit. Held in Leesburg, Virginia, the benefit includes sponsoring a Tae Kwon Do tournament for fourteen years, a golf tournament for the last ten years, and a Masters/Grandmasters Tae Kwon Do Demonstration each year since the beginning. Continuing to grow, five years ago he added the Blue Ridge Hospice Annual Demonstration in Winchester, Virginia. Why is a cancer benefit so very important to such a man? Why does he love doing this so much?

Picture for a moment a three year-old toddler who absolutely loves his daddy. Picture son and father working, laughing, growing and planning together from earliest memories; father teaching son year after year in the many aspects that build a strong, morally just, conscientious man; using Tae Kwon Do as a tool for his teaching. With his dad as his hero, Grandmaster Choi grows up knowing in his heart that he has been taught and guided by the best; someone who always cares and is always there for him no matter his age. Picture the strength, knowledge and power of a loving father who knows how to guide and inspire his son into finding the right answers in a tough world, who is his son's Rock of Gibraltar and his greatest inspiration. Picture such a man always behind his adoring, loving, appreciative son, with a gentle, loving tie that forever binds with respect and trust.

And then one day, from a country far, far away, there comes a dreaded phone call. "Son, Dad has cancer. The doctors here cannot do anything for him. Please, help!"

In that moment, Grandmaster's mind is filled with fear and desperation for this person so important in his life, for his beloved father. Tears pushed hard, painfully against his eyes. His throat dried up and tightened in a knot. Then, without warning, he is assaulted with a myriad of conflicting emotions. "NO!" the son wants to shout to the heavens, "It cannot be!" But the inescapable facts reveal themselves. Is there no shred of hope left? "Yes, there must be hope! We must try!

"When you reach the point through many hours of hard work and some struggles, use this as a stepping stone to greater growth and potential. You are learning the basics needed to build a firm foundation. Now continue your journey and always seek wisdom to use knowledge correctly."

We cannot just give in. We must try until there is nothing more to be gained." He set out to get help to save his dad, to help the one who was always there for him.

Grandmaster Choi wrote to the American Consulate. He conferred with authorities, spoke with doctors and prayed. He worked hard to maintain a positive attitude throughout the continual pain of facts he was tossed. He put on a calm, brave face so his students would not be exposed to his distress. He told no one at school. Only his closest of family and friends knew of what he was suffering. He kept his business going on as usual, an arm's length out from his shell of agony. He

quietly sought help wherever he could, and finally managed to bring his dad from Korea to America where he hoped to care for him

and to find doctors who could surely cure him.

It was a time of desperate hope and waiting for good news, any good news. A time to think, "But this case is different. Dad can beat this; we won't let him die. He can't die; we need him too much. It isn't fair. The doctors can't be right. Perhaps if we take him to someone else..."

The doctors did their best, but ultimately, the same conclusion was reached. The dreaded facts finally became undeniable. There was nothing more that could be done. The emotional pain was overwhelming for the son watching the strongest person in his life, fade away before him, slowly and painfully.

The day came when his father asked to be taken home again. He wanted to die in his own country, in his own home, in his own bed. He was so ill that he couldn't even sit for but a few moments. But he wanted to go home. Choi set everything aside and flew his father back home to Korea, to care for him and be with him in his final days.

Before his father's final breath, Grandmaster Choi declared war with this cruel disease. He made a promise to his father that he would do anything and everything he could to raise a million dollars to help fund cancer research and ultimately "Kick Cancer Out of the World," forever. He wanted to help spare others the pain he felt and avenge the death of a loving father who died too soon, too cruelly, and too painfully.

And then his beloved father, the hero of his life, died.

After a long absence of several weeks, Grandmaster Choi returned to America, to his family and to his school. The scars of loss were still fresh, the demons were still there to battle, but his mind was made up. He would hold a martial arts tournament and demonstration.



FAR LEFT: Leesburg, VA, Mayor Kristine Umsattd presents Choi with a certificate of recognition for his 20-years of service to the community. **LEFT:** Presenting a check to Blue Ridge Hospice representative Ernie Carnevale.

Eunggil Choi

Color and black belt students of Grandmaster Choi

He would begin the journey of fulfilling a promise he made to a victim of cancer, to show empathy for other families suffering the same pain, and to offer hope for the future. The Annual "Kick Cancer Out of the World" Cancer Benefit was born. Born of sorrow, but thriving today because of a promise and because of a lesson; "Keep going; don't quit."

This continuous journey has not been easy, having many challenges along the way. The painful feelings that assailed him after his dad's death fought for control for a long time, but Grandmaster Choi never quit, never completely gave in to them. Instead he just kept on going, and ultimately defeated them. Denying the temptation and desire to quit, fighting the emotional pain that wanted to pull him down and destroy him, Grandmaster Choi would just start over again each successive year. He put into practice the words he

"The person you become is the self you hold constant in your thoughts - good or bad, successful or unsuccessful, nice or ugly. Your thoughts will determine your destiny. Learn to be aware of them and learn to control them."

heard from his dad; "Keep going; don't quit."

The first year taught what it took to plan such an event. Mistakes were made and noted so the following year could be better and more productive. The second year brought more challenges and recognition, but it also began to set a pattern of what was to come.

Then the third year arrived. This year came the "keep on or quit" challenge; a time to decide whether or not to give in to problems or to reconfirm his promise and push on. Heavy thunderstorms kept away many would-be attendees this year, leaving attendance so low that it challenged the worthiness of the event. But soul-searching and character shaped by his father left Grandmaster Choi only one answer.

Choosing character over the temptation to quit, made Grandmaster Choi's commitment even stronger. Today he says, "I keep on going because I didn't quit. I keep on going because I can hear dad saying, 'Keep on going. Do not quit.'" Through this he knows his dad is still with him, guiding and encouraging him to carry on despite the problems. It gives him strength and conviction. At the end of each year's set of three events in Leesburg and one in Winchester, he quietly looks up and says, "Dad, I didn't quit. I did it this year too." This is his focus. It reminds him of the promise made, and he will keep his promise. Character will not let him break such a promise.



The "Kick Cancer Out of the World" Benefit is truly much more than a promise made. It is a way of giving back to the community and an example to his students. It gives others a venue to discover the blessing of giving without thought of return. It helps his students grow in many ways: through the challenges of competition; through the planning and presentation of diverse events; through developing courage and self-esteem to display one's skills and talents in front of a judging audience; and through being accountable to promises made and challenges accepted. It is group effort fighting together in a worthy way to rid the world of a common enemy.

And that makes people feel good.

"Kick Cancer Out of the World" is not just a worthy end to a challenge but also it is a journey that develops character. It teaches lessons in how to keep going when the desire to quit is sometimes overwhelming. It shows how failure is never a reality until we quit. It shows us how to "just start over." It has taught his students to have trust in their Grandmaster who faced the same challenges they are facing but who earned his title by "just starting over," by not quitting. It gives them the faith to follow someone who leads by example, because Choi continues to walk the walk.

Much good comes from these lessons. But the best is yet to come; the day when someone gets that dreaded call and the answering response will be, "Don't worry. There is a cure. You soon will be back to full health." That will be the day when those fears that numb the mind will be conquered by joy in knowing that the news is only a bump in the road, and not a "life sentence."

"Together, anything is possible!" - a good motto. Together, if everyone worked just a little bit to support cancer research, the cumulative effort could leave the world devoid of this horrible disease and bring peace of mind to every family. To this end, Grandmaster Choi presents each year the most enticing demonstrations he can muster from his fellow masters and grandmasters. He strives each year to give his audiences more than their money's worth. His tournaments provide inspiration for students, a way to test themselves,

and an encouragement to keep on learning. And each year the American Cancer Society receives a larger and larger check to help fund more research. The community is blessed. And that is a basic justification for the existence of Tae Kwon Do as a way of life; a

Grm. Choi at two of the benefits he has sponsored to raise money to help find a cure for cancer, the disease that took his father's life.





not only to help each other, but in the process also teaches them what they don't know and how to pass on what they do know. They pick up on the reasons why things are done the way they are done and the value of everything learned. Imparting information through teaching cements the knowledge gained more than does just being a passive receiver of knowledge. From this the students also learn patience, respect for others and gain people skills, which in turn, build their own self-respect and self-confidence. These are important skills Grandmaster Choi helps his students learn. These skills of helping and giving back to others are part of the way of life for serious Tae Kwon Do students in Grandmaster Choi's school. All that he teaches and the events he sponsors point the way down this path of compassion.

life journey to help others. This is what Choi teaches and encourages.

Learning to be physically fit and being able to defend yourself, as well as helping and defending those less able, are all important aspects of Tae Kwon Do taught by Choi. He coaches and aids those who seek competition and wish to move on from local championships to national and international competitions. But the most important aspect of his teaching puts the emphasis on instilling values such as discipline, respect, self-confidence, integrity and much more. These values are learned indirectly through class lessons, continually throughout the whole black belt journey, as well as directly. In class, he will ask his young students such questions as, "Do you want to be a great person?" After they all naturally respond, "Yes!" he will ask them what it means to be great. "Does 'great' mean being wealthy?" "No," he tells them. "A better way of being 'great' is to help others."

Through student teaching and encouraging students to help classmates at lower belt levels, Grandmaster Choi puts action to the principles that teach students



The Choi family: Grm. and Mrs. Choi with daughter, Christine, and sons, James (left) and John.

With his many years of experience, his continuous study, and multiple years teaching others, Grandmaster Choi has much to offer his pupils. Studying under Grandmaster Choi offers a student so much more than a physical martial art. It offers a way of life. Grandmaster Choi's biggest goal is to motivate others to help and to never quit. He states, "If any one person learns from this and 'does,' then our efforts have been successful; if this story helps any one person get through the problems in life with which they are challenged, then this story has fulfilled its purpose and is successful. May God bless and guide, one and all." ●

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dorothy Irwin, a long time student of Grandmaster Choi, resides in Texas.

Photos by Neil Steinberg, photowork.net

In his life-long study of Tae Kwon Do, Grandmaster Eunggil Choi has won many championships, including the Korean National Championship, two Korean Green Beret Special Forces Championships, and many others. Here is a brief look at some of his accomplishments.

- 1989: Earned Third-Gup as an International Referee
- 1993: Started annual "Kick Cancer Out of the World" Benefit to earn money for the American Cancer Society for cancer research. After losing his father to this disease, he set a goal to ultimately donate one million dollars for cancer research
- 1995-1996: Vice-President of the Greater Washington Korean Masters Organization
- 1996: International Corporate Advisor instrumental in promoting and starting Kang Wan Do originating from Kang Rueng City, Korea
- 1996 – 2000: Vice-President of the Virginia State Tae Kwon Do Association
- 1996 – 1997: Member of Leadership Loudoun
- 1996: Leesburg, Virginia, celebrates its first Annual Tae Kwon Do Day on April 22
- 1998: Loudoun Times Mirror newspaper recognized Eunggil Choi as Person of the Week
- 1999 – 2005: Served as Peaceful Unification Advisor for the South Korean Government to improve its relationship with North Korea
- 2000 – 2002: President of the Virginia State TKD Association
- 2000: Helped to promote and initiate the Virginia and Korean Sistership JeJuDo TKD Organization
- 2001: Promoted and initiated the Sistership of Leesburg City Kang Wan Do with Sam Chuck City, Korea
- 2002: Began Annual TKD Demonstration to benefit the Blue Ridge Hospice in his "Kick Cancer Out of the World" Benefit programs
- 2002: Received Master's Degree in Physical Education
- 2003: Received Eighth-Degree in Tae Kwon Do
- 2004: Korean broadcast recognized Grandmaster Choi on National TV, Channel SBS (the major Korean TV Broadcast) for "Kick Cancer Out of the World" benefit
- 2006: Again voted to serve two years as President of the Virginia State TKD Association
- 2006: Recognized as the Best Master of the Year by Blue Ridge University
- 2006: Received the Korean Presidential Award for his outstanding performance as a Peaceful Unification Advisor in 2000



Testing for his eighth-dan at the Kukkiwon in Seoul, Korea