

# **Taekwon-Do at home and beyond:** *My journey of family, discipline and resilience*

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2025

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*The practice of Taekwon-Do I.T.F  
has been central to my identity as  
a martial artist, father, and teacher.*

*This thesis looks at my journey in  
Taekwon-Do and how it has helped  
me recover physically, grow as a leader,  
and shape my family life.*

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

Taekwon-Do has not just been a martial art in my life, it has been my lifeline, my teacher, my community, and my healer - from my earliest days in sport, through accidents, injuries, and personal trials.

*Taekwon-Do, under the guidance of Grandmaster Augustus Mitchell IX, has given me purpose, resilience, and a chance to give back by teaching others.*

This thesis shares my journey through martial arts, my experiences as both student and instructor, and the way Taekwon-Do has shaped my life and my daughters' futures. It has provided me with a pathway for resilience after trauma and a vehicle for passing on values of discipline, respect, and perseverance to the next generation.



# Background in Martial Arts

## 2.1 Early Training and Development

Before stepping into a Taekwon-Do dojang, my life was already immersed in sport. I trained in Judo five days a week, competing every Sunday without fail. Alongside Judo, I was entrusted with teaching Japanese terminology to students including Black Belts, reflecting both my competence and the respect I had earned within the British Judo Association (B.J.A.) and British Judo Council (B.J.C.). I was selected for the English Judo Squad and had the honour of being Clifford Davies' Uke at his black belt grading. In Judo, Uke is the partner receiving techniques, while Tori is the one performing them. Clifford demonstrated kata, technical knowledge and fundamental skills with precision, and at which I had to learn alongside him and he succeeded, becoming the youngest black belt on his 16th birthday.

Alongside Judo, I boxed and practiced A-Tai-Do, always striving to push my body and mind to new levels. Coming from a family of athletes, my relatives included speedway champions and boxing champions. I was naturally drawn toward competition and discipline.

*While devoted to Judo, I often passed the hall of Grand Master Augustus Mitchell IX teaching Taekwon-Do, I promised him, 'One day, Sir, I will come', and years later, I did.*

My foundation in martial arts is broad and diverse, shaped by multiple disciplines, instructors, and competitive experiences. This multidisciplinary background not only deepened my understanding of combat sports but also reinforced the principles of discipline, perseverance, and respect which underpin my practice of Taekwon-Do I.T.F today.

## 2.2 Entering Taekwon-Do

I initially joined Taekwon-Do with the U.K.T.A (United Kingdom Taekwon-Do Association) under the instruction of Sir Augustus Mitchell, who at that time was a 6th Degree Black Belt. Eighteen years later, I am proud to still call him my Instructor, now Grandmaster Mitchell IX.

I also expanded my Taekwon-Do learning under other senior instructors, including Grandmaster Peter Harkass (9th Degree, U.K.T.C. - United Kingdom Taekwon-Do Council) and Master Augustus Mitchell (then 8th Degree). I assisted with classes for both the young 'Little Tiger Cubs' (4/5 yrs old) and mainstream students, learning the art of teaching Taekwon-Do to children and adults.

My journey was not smooth. After a family accident on my way back from training, I suffered a severe neck injury. Recovery took time, but I returned to training with determination.

*Even when faced with broken bones, I pressed on; I completed my 3rd Degree grading with a snapped hand bone, breaking the brick despite doctors recommending surgery and metal plates.*

I refused, knowing that metal would limit my ability to break in Taekwon-Do. My resilience was forged in Judo, where broken thumbs, fingers, and toes were common. For me, continuing was never a question.

# Taekwon-Do as Rehabilitation and Resilience

My journey in Taekwon-Do cannot be understood outside the context of trauma, injury, and physical adversity. Over the course of my life, I have faced events that doctors and specialists told me would permanently end my ability to train, compete, or even walk normally again. Each time, Taekwon-Do became the structure that allowed me to rebuild, restore, and exceed expectation.

### 3.1 The Fire

The first major turning point came when my family home caught fire. In those moments of devastation, losing possessions, stability, and a sense of safety - Taekwon-Do provided a constant. Training in the dojang gave me discipline, routine, and a focus on achievement when everything else was in disarray. Instead of dwelling on what was lost, I threw myself into perfecting my patterns, improving my sparring, and showing up for my club.

### 3.2 Road Traffic Accident

A serious car accident left me with multiple injuries that many assumed would end my martial arts career. Doctors spoke in terms of permanent limitations, restricted movement, and the dangers of overexertion. But the philosophy of indomitable spirit (one of Taekwon-Do's core tenets) - became my guiding principle. I adapted my training, using physiotherapy alongside basic techniques, stances, and stretching until my mobility returned. My recovery was not just physical; it was a reaffirmation that Taekwon-Do was not something I did, but something I lived.

### **3.3 Spine Injuries and ‘Impossible’ Prognoses**

Perhaps the greatest challenge came after multiple spinal injuries, where consultants told me bluntly: “*You will never walk again.*” For many, such words would be the end of hope. For me, they became fuel. I set myself the goal of not just walking, but walking back into the dojang, gi tied, ready to train. Step by painstaking step, I rebuilt strength, sometimes lying on the floor simply moving my toes, sometimes gripping the wall just to stand. Eventually, I returned to training and even competition. Taekwon-Do did not just help me heal physically; it gave me a reason to fight, a community to encourage me, and a philosophy that made surrender impossible.

### **3.4 Resilience as Identity**

These events shaped my identity within Taekwon-Do as not only a practitioner but a living example of resilience. Students who knew my history did not see an instructor who had never failed, they saw someone who had been broken, rebuilt, and stood stronger because of it.

*This authenticity deepened my role as both teacher and mentor, embodying the Taekwon-Do tenet of perseverance in a way no textbook could convey.*

# Teaching and Leadership in the Dojang

As my training progressed under Grandmaster Augustus Mitchell IX, I grew into positions of leadership and responsibility. Teaching became as important to my journey as competing or training. It was through being an instructor that I began to understand Taekwon-Do not just as a personal pursuit, but as a communal legacy.

## 4.1 Supporting the Dojang

Early in my instructor journey, I was trusted with responsibilities that extended far beyond leading warm-ups. I learned the full cycle of running a class: from health and safety to safeguarding children, to assisting with gradings and tournament preparation. Grandmaster Mitchell IX and other senior instructors placed faith in me not only to deliver techniques, but to carry forward the ethos of Taekwon-Do for the next generation.

## 4.2 Teaching Philosophy

My teaching has always been rooted in the belief that martial arts should empower, not intimidate. Whether working with Little Tigers (children) or adult beginners, I aimed to create an environment where discipline was balanced with encouragement. Respect was non-negotiable, but so too was laughter and joy.

*A child leaving the dojang with a smile and a sense of accomplishment meant as much to me as an adult achieving a Black Belt.*

### 4.3 Building Leaders

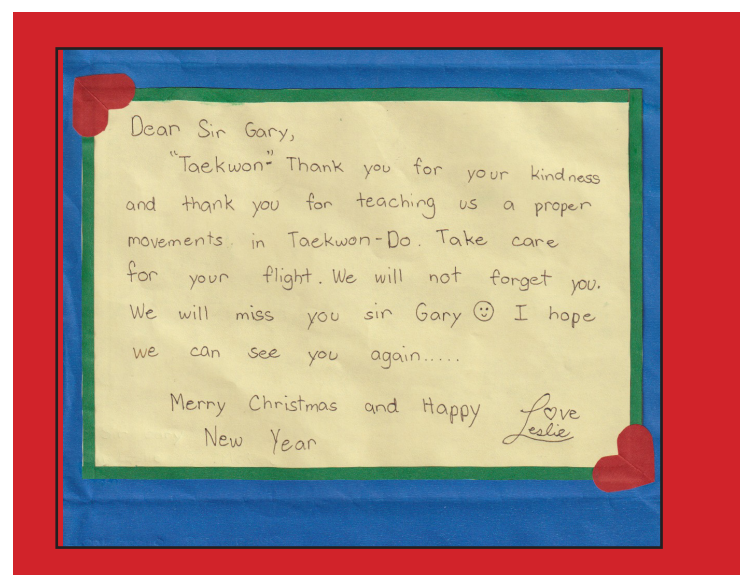
One of the guiding principles of my teaching was to inspire future leaders. I wanted every student to see themselves not only as martial artists but as potential instructors, role models, and ambassadors of Taekwon-Do. I often encouraged senior belts to lead warm-ups, assist juniors, and take ownership of their learning. In doing so, I tried to replicate the opportunities I was given, stepping forward, sometimes before I felt ready, and growing into leadership through responsibility.

### 4.4 Expanding Beyond the Dojang

My leadership roles grew internationally, including supporting seminars, tournaments, and workshops abroad. Teaching in the Philippines, assisting in *Wild Cats Taekwon-Do London*, and helping to establish *AGNK Taekwon-Do I.T.F* showed me that the “family” of Taekwon-Do is not bound by geography. Wherever the tenets are lived out, there is a shared language of discipline, courtesy, and unity.

This teaching work reinforced my dual identity as both lifelong student and mentor, embedding me deeply in my own family and my wider Taekwon-Do family.

I was honoured to be appointed as Vice President of U.K.T.I (United Kingdom Taekwon-Do Initiative) from 2018 to 2024.



## Chapter 5

# Crossing Oceans, Sharing Knowledge

In 2018, through Taekwon-Do social media, I was contacted by an instructor from the Philippines, Sir Nelson Bunag. He had been following my posts about promoting I.T.F Taekwon-Do and reached out to say how much he enjoyed them. We quickly became friends, sharing our goals of becoming instructors and helping students grow.

At the time, Sir Nelson was struggling to progress with his training due to issues with the organisation he was in. He longed to join the original I.T.F under Prof. Ri Yong Son and teach his students the true I.T.F way, as many were learning a mixture of I.T.F and W.T.F.

By chance, I was planning a trip to the Philippines to visit my girlfriend and discovered that Sir Nelson's school was only half a day's travel away. We arranged to meet, and in 2018 I visited his school, *Dragon Knights Martial Arts*.

From that first meeting, we trained together daily, sharing knowledge, refining patterns, and spending long hours with his students.



The children loved to train and seemed never to tire of it, if it were up to them, they would have trained every hour of the day. Their parents were always supportive, cooking meals for us during breaks, and after classes we would often head to the sea for a swim together. Many families struggled financially, and some worried their children would not be able to continue training. Seeing how passionate the kids were, I decided that I would always teach them for free. For me, it was never about money. It was enough to see their progress, confidence, and joy in learning I.T.F Taekwon-Do.

Over time, I committed myself to supporting Sir Nelson's dream. In Pinamalayan Oriental Mindoro, resources were scarce, so I began supplying materials from the UK: I.T.F tablecloths and flags, stationery, breaker boards, grading cards, student handbooks, belts, licences, and certificates. I even collected second-hand doboks from parents in the UK to send over. Everything I had been taught by my Grandmaster, Augustus Mitchell IX, I shared with Sir Nelson and his Black Belt sons, who were helping him build his school.

From 2018 to 2025, I returned once or twice each year, dedicating my visits to teaching as many students as possible while also spending time with my family in the Philippines. Everywhere I went, I taught for free.

Along the way, I began sponsoring families so that children could continue training while I was back in the UK, ensuring that under Sir Nelson's guidance, they would still be learning the authentic I.T.F way.



In 2019, I met with my instructor, Grand Master Mitchell IX, and on 20th July that year, Sir Nelson and his school, *NJB Dragon Knights Martial Arts*, became officially affiliated with U.K.T.I

From then on, I worked closely with him to keep his teaching aligned with our standards, sharing seminar updates, codes of practice, and technical guidance.

The language barrier was a challenge at first, Nelson spoke little English, so my girlfriend interpreted, and sometimes I hired a secretary. Over time, I learned Tagalog, which now allows me to communicate with him directly. In time, Nelson earned his 3rd Degree under Grand Master Mitchell IX and was added to the official I.T.F database. I continue to visit regularly, and on my next trip I will be joined by U.K.T.I Instructor Sandip Limbu, who also has family in the region. Together, we will train with Sir Nelson and his students.

Over the years, I have become well known in the areas I visit. Whether teaching in schools, villages, or by the sea, I have never turned anyone away, and everything has always been free. The national police often stop by for a chat and photos, while governors and mayors across the provinces have welcomed me warmly. The students are deeply respectful, eager to train from morning until late at night, often returning at dawn with their parents to continue.

The people of the Philippines have an extraordinary love for Taekwon-Do, and for me, the greatest reward is seeing their growth, not only in skill, but in confidence, discipline, and pride as true practitioners of I.T.F Taekwon-Do.



# From One Generation to Another

If resilience defined my early Taekwon-Do journey, and teaching shaped my middle years, then family became the hallmark of my later journey. Training alongside my daughters transformed Taekwon-Do from a personal path into a shared legacy.

## 6.1 My Daughters' First Steps in Taekwon-Do

Both of my daughters began training at age three. At first, it was playful; tiny doboks, oversized belts, and a mixture of kicks and giggles. But very quickly, they absorbed the discipline and pride that comes with training.

*I will never forget watching them stand for their first gradings: nervous but determined, tiny hands clenched into fists, voices strong as they shouted “Yes Sir!”*

## 6.2 Black Belts and Beyond

Over the years, their commitment deepened. Both earned their 1st Degree Black Belts, not as a gift from me, but through sweat, hard work and dedication under other instructors. Seeing them tie their new belts and receiving the official status pin was one of the proudest moments of my life, not just as their father, but as their fellow martial artist.



### 6.3 The Family Dojang

One of my greatest joys has been sharing Taekwon-Do with my two daughters. They have trained since the age of three, starting in the 'Little Tigers' class, and are now 1st Degree Black Belts. They assist me in class, travel with me to seminars, gradings, and championships, and dream of becoming instructors themselves. Together, we built a dojang in our garden where we train regularly.

*Taekwon-Do is not just my life - it is our family's life, lived 24/7.*

Training together changed the atmosphere of our family home. Discussions about patterns, sparring tactics, and tournaments became part of everyday life. The dojang was not just a hall we visited twice a week, it was an extension of our household. My daughters were not just my children; they were my training partners, critics, and inspirations.

### 6.4 Legacy Through Family and Community

Today, my daughters assist in classes, mentor younger students, and continue to grow as martial artists in their own right. Together, we represent two families: our blood family, and our Taekwon-Do family.

In both, the same values apply - respect, perseverance, and the commitment to never give up. By passing it on, Taekwon-Do will live on through my daughters, who I taught and guided, even after my journey ends.



## Chapter 7

# Conclusion

My life in Taekwon-Do I.T.F demonstrates that martial arts are more than sport: they are systems of meaning, healing, and legacy. Guided by Grandmaster Mitchell IX, I have grown from student to instructor, from competitor to mentor, and from survivor to leader.

*My ongoing commitment, alongside my daughters, reflects the enduring truth of General Choi's vision - that Taekwon-Do is a lifelong journey of self-improvement, discipline, and service to others.*

This background in martial arts, across multiple systems and under diverse instructors, provided me with a uniquely holistic understanding of combat sports and martial traditions. It shaped my resilience, technical depth, and ability to teach across disciplines.



# Record of Achievement

My competitive record reflects not only personal achievement but also a lifelong commitment to testing myself, adapting, and carrying forward the martial spirit into Taekwon-Do I.T.F

## **Judo (B.J.C):**

- Three-time undefeated National Champion.
- Four-time International Champion.
- Four-time Team Champion.
- Open National Champion.
- Selected for English Squad training in Kidlington under Senseis G. Brierty and Ted Cummins.
- Rated 7th best in England after defeating “Tiger” from Press Steel Judo Club.
- Held the record for fastest ippon at High Wycombe Judo Club (later broken by my daughter Aaliyah, who achieved an ippon in three seconds).

## **Judo (B.J.A):**

- Competed and instructed terminology; notable recognition for technical knowledge.

## **Boxing:**

- Defeated ABA Henley Champion Doug Russell (twice).
- Defeated ABA Champion “Stig.”
- Extensive sparring with professional and Army boxers.

### **Taekwon-Do I.T.F**

- Silver Medal – Nationals (Sparring).
- Silver Medal – Nationals (Patterns).
- Gold Medals x2, Silver Medal x1 in I.T.F vs Kickboxing tournaments.
- Three Gold Medals in I.T.F tournaments.

### **Other Achievements:**

- Awarded by Sir John Hunt in Oxford for climbing the 14 highest peaks in Snowdon within three days without ropes.
- Completed the Otmoor Half Marathon with the army in 2 hours 11 minutes.
- Multiple silver and bronze medals across martial disciplines over the years.

*“Determination and faith can  
overcome any obstacle”*

*General Choi Hong-Hi  
(9 November 1918 – 15 June 2002)*

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