

Tae Kwon Do Camp, Myuna Bay, 14th-16nd May 2010

By Carlo Bradoc a man gifted with expresionalism

Saturday, May 1st. Prologue

Beginning of May: two weeks time to the 2010 Autumn TKD camp at Myuna Bay. The excitement starts growing bigger and bigger as the countdown to the camp is getting closer and closer. Am I exaggerating? Trust me, I am not! For those who have been at least once at the IMT Tae Kwon Do camp what I'm saying makes perfect sense. It is hard to put down in words: the only way to get an idea of what I'm talking about is to experience it. The camp is not just training, it is companionship and friendship, it is hard work and great fun, sacrifice and reward. After you have tasted it once you can't wait for more!

Friday, May 14th. The "welcome" training session

(Time: 20.00). The waiting is over. While I am opening the sport bag, the first thought that pops up in my mind is: "I'm finally here, again". The excitement which has grown in the previous two weeks starts to take shape; I gear up, tighten my belt and a sensation of shivers goes up and down my spine while I am walking to the dojang (martial arts hall). I am the first there and as I bow-in my minds gets empty, all my thoughts get silent, I'm feeling my heart lifted up and a peaceful sense of calm flows through my entire body.

After few minutes people start to come in quietly. I see faces I haven't seen for at least six months, some of them have come to Myuna Bay all the way from Queensland, but I am not surprised, I know what a special experience is the camp and I'm sure they do too.

The first training session finally starts, Instructor Pete is in charge. It is the first time for me to meet him: he is a well built guy and he is holding a whistle in his hand. I can't help it, as soon as I see him he immediately reminds me Arnold Schwarzenegger in the comedy movie "Kindergarten Cop (1990)" where Arnold is a cop who ends up in an elementary school and he has some hard times in handling all those little crazy kids. I would have discovered only later that Instructor Pete is actually a school teacher, so I wasn't that wrong in the end ahahaha.

With his whistle he led us through a series of drills and exercises to warm our bodies before going straight in a more formal Tae Kwon Do training. The session was really enjoyable and I have to give credit to Instructor Pete: his approach really tuned up our spirits leaving a pleasant desire for more action, ready to come the day after. At the end of the "welcome" training session Master Ron opened officially the 2010 Autumn TKD camp and from the enthusiasm in his voice you could have already told it was going to be an awesome and memorable one!

Saturday, May 15th. The "Day"

(Time: 06.30). It is Master Ron's yoga session time. Last camp it was a complete surprise for me, I save a clear memory of it because I was feeling sorry for my embarrassing "unstretchability" (let me pass the neologism) and I'm sure other people were too. This year was different... This time I came prepared... Oh well, I thought I did, because as soon as I saw Ron, the nightmares from the previous year's yoga session popped up in my mind and the fact that Ron was wearing a T-shirt saying: "welcome to the house of pain"... Well I must admit it wasn't helping much. But hey, in the end it wasn't that bad and we kind of enjoyed it (okey dokey maybe now I'm getting a bit too much enthusiastic and positive about it...); at least the session made the job by waking everyone up and by making "crawling-still-sleeping creatures" in "standing and walking human beings" (I am still trying to figure out if it was Ron's yoga session or the cravings for breakfast to make that transformation to happen... I might go for the second one, but please don't tell Master Ron).

(Time: 09.00). Kumdo (Korean sword) time. After a quick breakfast we moved all together

to the dojang. Master Jang was waiting for us; with the well trusted help of Master Ron, Instructors Anne, Simon, Carl and Michael he was ready to bring us into the world of the Korean sword, or Kumdo. Everybody got their own chook do (bamboo sword) and we all sit to see a demonstration put up by Master Jang and his “sidekicks” Ron, Anne, Simon and Michael. The demonstration was really cool, especially the cutting part: with real swords they made their blades through wooden straws tightened up together to simulate human muscles and bones. Everybody was staring at the performers in deep silence. The funniest thing was that introducing himself Master Jang said: “I am Master Jang and my English is at a white belt level”... Well Master Jang, I do not know other people, but after I saw you cutting with that scary sword those poor wooden chops I assure you... I will never argue or make jokes about it!

We got split up in groups and all excited we started practicing our sword skills... Ehm... Maybe talking about sword skills is a bit too optimistic, but hey didn't they say: “Rome wasn't built in a day”? And now that I think about it they also say: “The key point in everything you start is to *ground* good foundations” ... The more I think about it the more I reckon it has something to do with the high rate with which we were dropping our swords to the *ground* ahahahah!

During the morning session we also had the opportunity to literally bash Master Jang with some “real, hardcore” *rubber* swords... I was feeling like a happy kid... I know what you're thinking, but honestly... When is the last time you remember you had such fun as when we were little kids bashing each other with friends?

The sword training was really interesting and exciting and at the same time enjoyable so we can only say thank you to Master Jang, Master Ron, Instructors Anne, Simon, Carl and Michael for sharing their knowledge with us!

(Time: 14.00). It's archery/assessment time. After a well deserved lunch shared all together in the dinner lounge it was again time for training. The lower colour belts had the opportunity to do some archery which I think was great considering that at home the only thing you can aim at is probably the TV set with the remote controller! At the same time, the black belts and some of us, brave hearted volunteers, went through an assessment session made of patterns, self defense and sparring drills, which for some of the high grades were worth a “ticket” for the next upcoming grading. I honestly feel lucky I got the opportunity to train with those black belts, it might be different for some of you, but for me, I always learn a lot from the high grades even just by watching them moving, pushing themselves and giving up or making through the pain. A very wise man (guess who?) on his office door has this quote: “Most things worth doing in life require hard work, infinite patience and learning from those that have gone ahead”; well I strongly believe that's true.

(Time: 16.00). It's Anne's Muay Tae Cardio Kickboxing “Dancing” time. Okay I have to be honest with you guys, you all know I'm a “fitness freak” and over the entire week-end of the camp Anne's session is the one I'm looking forward to the most. Well as usual Anne didn't fail me! When she tried to explain me, before the session actually started, what was going to happen I got a bit skeptical: “Punching and kicking in the air, with loud dance music on the background? That's not going to be challenging for me!”... How fooled I was... The training session was actually a good cardio workout: we were jumping around, throwing punching and kicking combinations at dance music rhythm. The best thing was that the atmosphere was really happy and catching, you could even smell the joy in the air; the cardio training was intense, but the music and the entertainment in doing it made everything simpler taking away the fatigue from our bodies. Everyone was smiling and, come on... When have you seen people smiling joyfully while suffering in pain for lack of breath?

Thanks Anne, last year I said (I'm citing myself): “Anne is the living proof that women can be hardcore as much (if not more) as men are”... That is still true, and I must add that this

time you proved you are also very smart: “I have to give you credit, sneaking a good cardio workout behind the rhythm of dance music is pretty clever!” So again, last year I said about your training session: “Pain is weakness leaving the body”, the updated version of it might now be: “Pain is weakness leaving the body... Moving your bum around at dance music rhythm”.

(Time: 17.00). It’s sparring time. After Anne’s class there was no time to joke around, just few minutes to gear up and back on the floor for more action: time to fight! We were all so pumped by the Anne’s dance-cardio training that sparring came naturally... Ehi wait a moment... That must have something to do with what the great Muhammad Ali used to say: “Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee”... Okey Anne good try, but I think it will be too hard, even for you, to make light-feet dancers out of us!

I honestly enjoyed very much the sparring session, it’s always a good way for low grades like me to learn. My first sparring partner was Master Ron... Well there is not much to say, I got beaten like a sack of s...and; I’m still carrying, after a week, a big blue bruise on my right hip from one of Ron’s kick, but I learnt a couple of good “tricks” and... How does the commercial say? “Bandage for a bruise 5 dollars with Mastercard... Learning a couple of fighting skills... Priceless...” Thanks Ron and thanks to all the other black belts who put so much effort in trying to help the lower belts: thanks for sharing your knowledge (and kicks ahahahah) with us!

(Time: 20.00). Patterns training time. “The Day” was almost over... But not yet... After a well deserved dinner we went again to the dojang to practice our Tae Kwon Do forms. After a Day like the one we had, you might think it was time to relax... It wasn’t. I was actually amazed by the number of people who turned up for the last beat of the day. Everyone diligently practiced their own forms and again the black belts were keen to give advices and suggestions for those students who were willing to learn. I will never get tired of saying it: “Thanks and thanks again, you give us so much of your knowledge and experience and I hope one day we will be able to pay back following your enlightened steps...” I personally found inspiring for example even just talking about martial arts with Instructor Pete. I saw him reading some martial art books and we had a good (but unfortunately not too long) conversation about them. That talk reminded me one more time that martial arts are not just fighting, they are a form of art and expression; they are a way of living, a way of improving our mind, body and soul striving for perfection every single moment which is given to us.

(Time: 21.30). Fire show. Finally time to relax. Some laid their tired bodies in the common dormitory and watched a martial art movie (Ip man, 2008), while some of us went down in the bush where we (let’s say almost safely) lighted up a fire place. We enjoyed there the good companionship in a cozy atmosphere and not only; Andrew and Ken, followed by others, put up a fire show by rolling around and handling chains, swords and sticks covered in flames... Very well done guys it was amazing to watch you; the show was really enjoyable and everybody would agree with me if I’d say you are very talented (someone more venial would probably even add you should make some money out of it!).

After that was finally time to sleep: we might have felt physically depleted, but believe me we were definitely spiritually enriched by the long day of training we were leaving behind.

Sunday, May 16th . The wrapping up

(Time: 06.30). Yoga time... Again. The day started as the previous one did, with the yoga awakening session held this time by the Instructor Simon. Okay in the last camp Simon’s yoga session was... Let’s put it in this way... Challenging. This time as I stepped on my yoga mat I knew six months had not been enough to be ready to handle it, but I stayed focused to get through because this is all what it is about and I have to be honest, I have to say that this time I really, really enjoyed it. Simon led us through some yoga poses adding some tai-chi

elements to the movements and I understand that it's hard to believe, but after one hour I was feeling all my body activated, I was feeling like a stream of energy going through my entire body... It was a great sensation. Thanks Simon!

(Time: 09.00). More Kumdo. After breakfast we went to the dojang where Michael taught us some more sword movements and consolidate our knowledge on the ones we got the day before. Michael was really patient and keen to teach us: I'm sure one day he will become an amazing instructor.

(Time: 10.30). Boards breaking and focus mits time. The last part of the camp always involves the boards breaking. In Italy we say from Latin "Dulcis in fundo" which means "The best in the end": yes because I do not know why, but breaking stuff is always fun. Have you ever thought how self-realizing is breaking stuff? Have you ever noticed for example that when a girl finds her boyfriend cheating on her she "has fun" by breaking stuff on him? I do not know there must be something special or even magical about the fact that it is always a matter of breaking stuff! We all had a go and the Masters and the black belts showed us some really amazing breakings. Carl did a four board breaking with a sidekick flying over a bunch of 7 kids; Ron did the same with a 360° flying back kick where this time the kids were a little bit more grown up being the big Andrew, Pete and Cameron. Simon jumped over Pete for a high turning kick breaking and Anne performed an "almost" five boards breaking combinations in a row. We had definitely a good time. The very last training was with strike shields and focus mits.

(Time: 12.30). A bit sore for the days of training on our backs we moved to the dining hall where we shared our lunch together. Ron officially closed the camp thanking everybody for the great enthusiasm and the positive attitude we all showed. Prizes for the best effort and for the indomitable spirit were given, but I am sure everybody felt like a winner because of the great experience.

This was my second IMT Tae Kwon Do camp. I was very excited about it before it started, but I must confess I was a bit afraid it couldn't be as special as my first one... Well I had to change my mind: it was absolutely fantastic! At the camp you find everything: training, friendship, companionship, fun and even pain and reward. I could try to explain my feelings with a rain of words, but it would not help you understand what the camp really is. You might think I am exaggerated or even a bit crazy, but if you had the chance to experience the camp you would definitely agree with me. On the way back home from the camp you might feel sore or physically in pain, but you feel your spirit and your soul regenerated; you feel your enthusiasm for martial arts and your passion for life renewed because in those three days you have improved yourself and those around you by sharing knowledge, feelings, emotions and even kicks. You know other people made you a better person and you contributed in making them better persons too. As I said last year a feeling is worth a thousand words, so I'd rather stop trying to explain how was the camp because I am sure that the next time I'll see you there and you'll tell me yourself!