

# Mrs. Dawn Khan

**E**ven though there are more and more women starting martial arts, female instructors are still a genuine minority and there is enough pressure simply being one of them without having your husband as the head of the Association and all three of your children being successful competitive students training under you, but this is the situation that Dawn Khan finds herself in. The Khan family is totally Tang Soo Do orientated and Master Khan admits that his wife is the solid foundation upon which their world is built and talking to her you can see why; she has brought all the best feminine strengths to what was a most macho art and gained respect through sheer perseverance. Thus, with that enviable female organisation, she not only runs a family, takes classes, sorts out the paperwork but also finds time for this interview and to prepare a fantastic spread for everyone involved in the photo-shoot!

*TKD-KMA: Early Tang Soo Do training has a history of being tough, so what are the benefits from a woman's perspective?*

**DAWN KHAN:** I would say fitness is the priority because most women want to keep in shape; also, most women need a social outlet, somewhere to let off steam, especially if you are a mother! This is a good way, you can socialise, there is

a family atmosphere and a lot of women like the 'family' feeling, others look for the traditional side, they want to do a martial art without getting hurt and Tang Soo Do offers all-around martial arts, including meditation. It doesn't just focus on the fighting, which a lot of women are scared of, we make it optional in our classes, and a lot of women opt out although they like the self-defence side.

*TKD-KMA: One of the problems for women is taking that initial step and actually going to a class for the first time.*

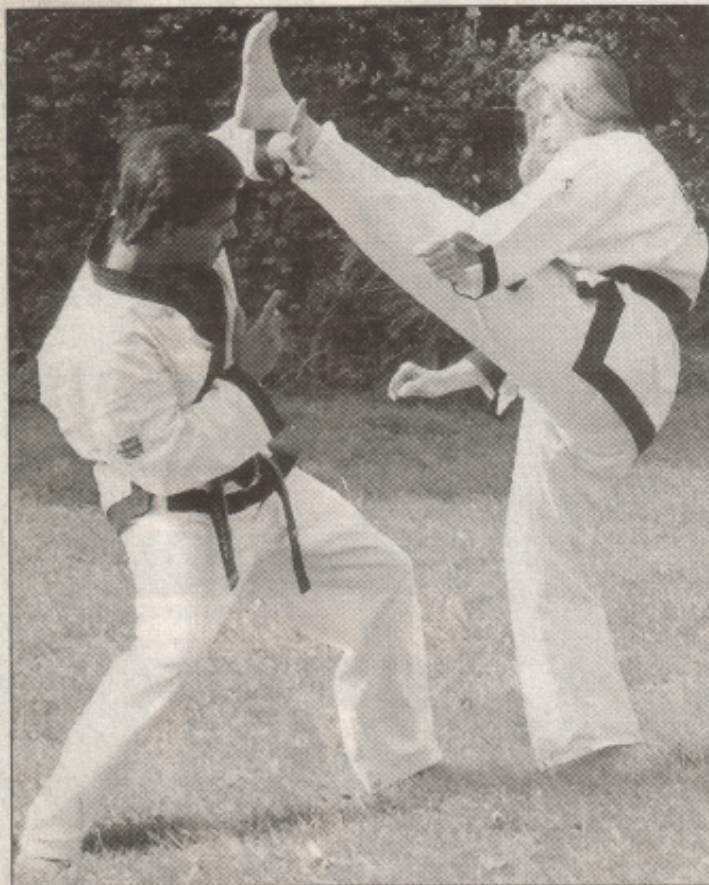
**DAWN KHAN:** Look for a class that has at least half a dozen women, a lot of women look to see if there's women their age, children, families, some women are put off by a 'hard-looking' instructor, it's important that the instructor is approachable but I would say that still, most women won't go (for the first time) on their own. I teach a class just for women and they love that, they'll come to a female (instructor) on their own as it can be embarrassing for women, they can feel less able than men in certain ways, but once they get in and see other women doing well, that encourages them to come along.

*TKD-KMA: Is Tang Soo Do modified to cater for women?*

**DAWN KHAN:** What we say to most of the women is take what's good for you, as I said, some of them won't spar but I think they actually enjoy all other aspects of Tang Soo Do.

*TKD-KMA: Do you see an attitude change with some women who say they're never going to spar and then become totally different?*

**DAWN KHAN:** Yes, their confidence builds and after



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**'Tang Soo Do has brought us closer together as a family.'**

about two or three months, when they are now possibly coming twice a week, they often ask can I just have a go sparring with the ladies and then they might try fighting with the men and gradually they just join in. I always say that most likely the person that's going to attack them (on the street) is going to be a man and if you can confront a man in class, do techniques fully in class with a man, they can see that they actually work.

I think the main reason they won't 'freeze', however, is because they will have become more aware. When I wasn't training I wasn't aware of what was around me but when you train you make different decisions, you become more conscious of what is around you and ten will probably avoid a situation happening. If they have contact in class it will become a natural reaction if anything did happen.



**TKD-KMA:** Was it difficult teaching when everyone knew you were the Senior Instructor's wife?

**DAWN KHAN:** I think not so much from our own students but from other people around you—they assume that because you're his wife you should be just as good as he is but as time grew and people saw my way of teaching they learned to respect me not for being his wife but for being an individual myself. Initially, it wasn't hard for me here but in the competing and testing level because people would look at me and say 'that's his wife', so the expectations were a lot higher.

**TKD-KMA:** Did certain people think that you probably got a 'free ride'?

**DAWN KHAN:** Exactly, even now, I don't compete any more but my daughter's do and you often hear that 'oh, she won because she's Master Khan's daughter'-that's just human nature until they actually learn to respect you and see that it's not because you're his wife or daughter but because of the dedication you have to your art.

**TKD-KMA:** Do you feel that women have to work harder for that respect?

**DAWN KHAN:** Not so much nowadays but when I first started, about eighteen years ago, it took a long time for you to gain respect especially from the men. I used to teach men

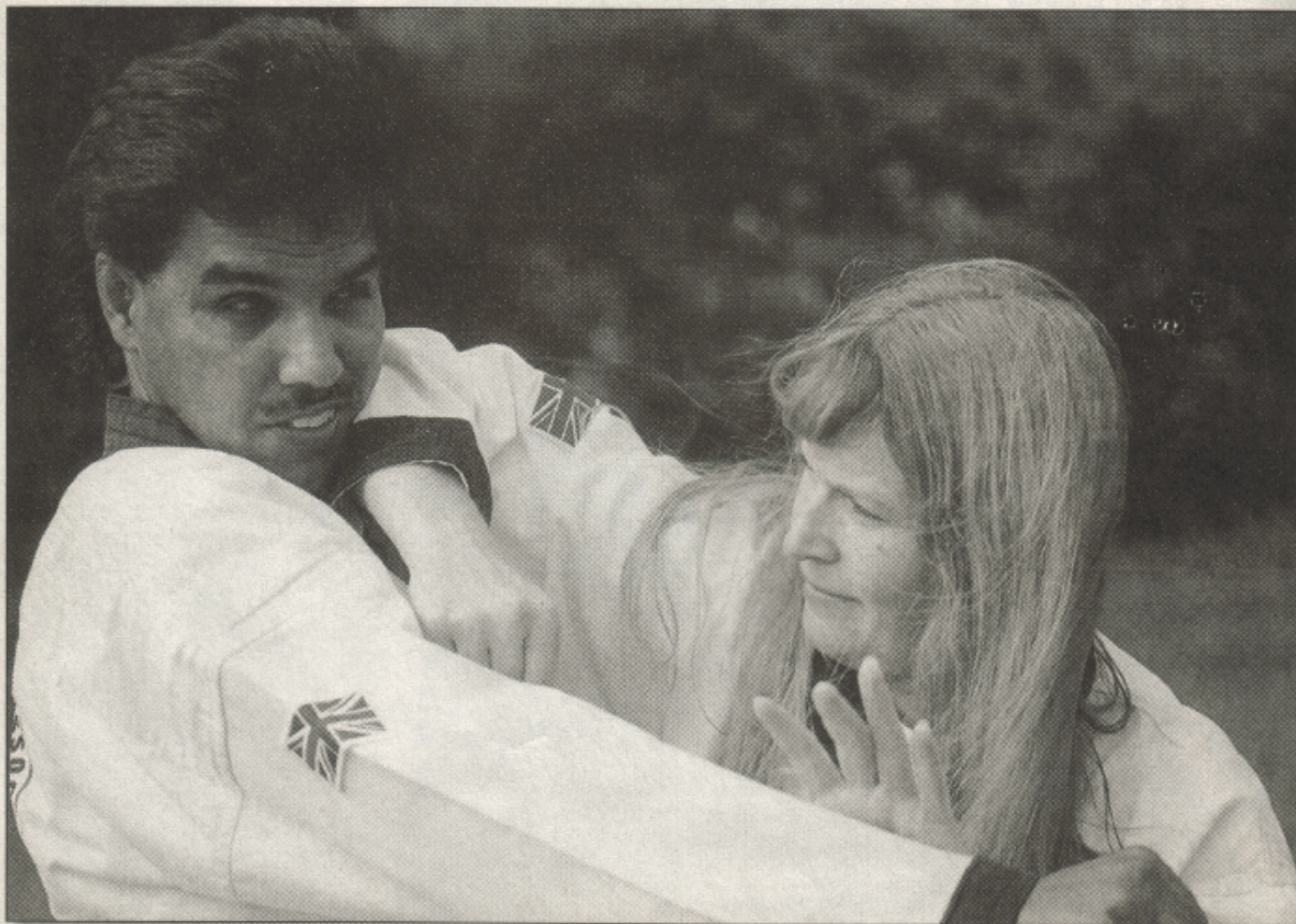
and you could feel that there was no respect there but now times have changed and people come in new and look at you and say 'she's a black belt, she can teach me something.' I think you can gain respect quickly from a woman, being a woman, because they look at you and see that you can do something they find very difficult themselves. As times have changed I've seen a change in attitude.

**TKD-KMA:** With more female practitioners come more female black belts. Do we need to convert them into instructors?

**DAWN KHAN:** I think it would be great and I encourage every woman that makes black belt under me or Master Khan to go and open a class and try and encourage as many young girls and women as possible to get involved because with our society, nowadays, they need this, they need to defend themselves and, there's also the obesity issue and bullying with children, so I think for women and young kids it's the best thing you could ever do, it's the best thing I've ever done.

**TKD-KMA:** Do you think, with their practical thinking and nature, that women can bring certain strengths to the table which men can't?

**DAWN KHAN:** Of course! A woman is very maternal anyhow, they can be very supportive, students sometimes want someone they can talk to and trust and it's not always about





martial arts training and through training they've built that trust with you and open up and you become someone they can rely on.

**TKD-KMA:** *Is it fair to say that women are moving away from the aerobics into martial arts because it is more challenging?*

**DAWN KHAN:** Oh yes, mentally, physically, it becomes more a way of life, something that they can dedicate themselves to, it's not just about going to class and come home, it actually extends from there, organising, fund-raising, promoting the club-with other forms of exercise it's simply do the class and go home. Also, because their children are often training it's something a family can have in common, it becomes a bonding thing, especially for single mothers, they think it's great, doing something with the kids, keeping fit together.

**TKD-KMA:** *Women seem to pick up techniques quicker than men, in my experience. Have you found this to be the case?*

**DAWN KHAN:** They do, women look deeper into things, they don't just want to go out there and fight, they want to

know how it works, they break it down-boys just want to get in there and do it. Because women don't tend to spar, they find other ways to see how these things work-many women will ask me loads of questions about one particular technique, they take it that little bit further.

**TKD-KMA:** *You're an instructor and a mother; is there a conflict when your daughter's compete?*

**DAWN KHAN:** That's a very difficult one. Obviously the maternal instincts take over but you're also an instructor so you're trying to stay composed. All eyes are on me when my children are competing; they want to see my reaction, especially when my daughter comes up against one of my own students. It's an emotional roller-coaster and being a mother comes first but my portrayal as an instructor is also very important.

**TKD-KMA:** *How much comes home because you all do TSD?*

**DAWN KHAN:** A little bit comes home, you talk, but it doesn't take over our life, we are a normal family. Obviously, it is our life but not twenty four seven, we try to lead a normal family life.





**TKD-KMA:** Was it a foregone conclusion that the girls would do TSD?

**DAWN KHAN:** The first child, I think, you always feel 'they've got to do it'. He (Master Khan) wanted a son, which God didn't grant him but the first one, Noreen, was always going to be, 'you've got to have a go!' The other two were different sort of characters, they had a choice and they made their choice. Aisha started, quit, then started again and stayed, Safia, the youngest, I trained when I was pregnant with her until a week before I had her, and so she knows no different and wanted to be a part of everything. They would have had a choice if they wanted to gymnastics, say, but I think being around Tang Soo Do every day, day in day out, they just wanted to be part of it all, really, they weren't forced.

**TKD-KMA:** Do they feel under pressure with both their parents being instructors?

**DAWN KHAN:** They do. I try to control my reactions, because you do tend to pinpoint them and people can focus on this and say they're getting all the attention. I try and treat them like all of the other students, I try not to focus on them too much and I do try to cut the mother/child relationship out in class but it is very difficult.

**TKD-KMA:** As a family, what has Tang Soo Do done for you?

**DAWN KHAN:** I think Tang Soo Do has made us a very close family and I don't think I would have survived our marriage if it had not been for Tang Soo Do because if I didn't join it would have been a struggle to keep the marriage together, I would have been a Tang Soo Do widow. Likewise for them, this is the best thing we ever did and I would recommend it to any family-it's hard work but its hard work together, you share the achievements, you share the failures and you can support each other. Tang Soo Do

has made us respect each other and brought us much, much closer together.

**TKD-KMA:** For your Master's belt you have to do a 20,000 word thesis; what was your subject?

**DAWN KHAN:** I was a learning support assistant at school for twelve years and during that time I picked up on lots of different learning disabilities, so for my thesis I researched all the common (learning) disabilities and how martial arts can help them overcome a lot of disabilities. I really enjoyed it. At first I was a bit dubious; could I do 20,000 words, but once I got my head down it was such a learning tool that now some instructors have asked if they can refer to it.

**TKD-KMA:** Is it true that you originally hated martial arts?

**DAWN KHAN:** After my second child and being heavily overweight I wanted to go to a keep fit class and get fit. My husband suggested Tang Soo Do but I hated it (laughs), everything about it. I said to him I'd give it a try but don't ever ask me to test, I'm just keeping fit but once I started I just couldn't get enough of it and there was no turning back from that day on. It turned out that I loved it. I want to be a Master belt so that I can be a role model for other women, so that they know they can achieve it if they persevere.

**TKD-KMA:** What is the process behind Master Belt in your association?

**DAWN KHAN:** From third dan to fourth dan and above you have to wait five years and then there's a three year process for your testing and I still think, even though I'll have been training for twenty years when I get my Master's belt, that there is still so much to learn. A lot comes with a Master's belt; people expect a lot of you, they expect you to know everything and sometimes, twenty years doesn't seem like a long time, even though that is a lot of years of hard work and dedication.





**TKD-KMA:** *A lot of ladies do eight week self defence courses; would you recommend them?*

**DAWN KHAN:** What I say to most women who call me and ask about self- defence courses is that I wouldn't recommend them, the reason being is that it's like learning to drive-if you do eight weeks and then never sit in a car again, you're not going to react properly. Doing it day in, day out, even twice a week, it becomes a natural reaction and I don't think that in eight weeks you can remember how to defend

yourself, you need a good three to four years, twice a week and making it a part of your life so that if someone grabs you something will happen naturally.

**TKD-KMA:** *Finally, what would you say to female black belts who want to teach but are frightened to take that first step?*

**DAWN KHAN:** Do it for the sake of other women out there who would love to try martial arts but are scared of starting with a male instructor in a male dominated environment, they need the right combination to take that plunge; to set up a class and give them an opportunity, they would be helping these women. Teaching a ladies class has been very beneficial for me, watching ladies who would never have taken their first grade becoming black belts-they come to me first and then three months down the line they have the confidence to join the mixed class. Believe in yourself, you can teach and when you actually see what you've given people, it is so rewarding. You have to put a lot of time into it, but you get so much back.

*For more information about the World Tang Soo Do Federation, please call: 01480 451621.*

