

Geoffrey Gr

'Forms are useless unless you can put them into practice!'

Like a number of instructors within Master Khan's Tang Soo Do organisation, Master Geoffrey Green is a mixture of the no-nonsense old fashioned work ethic that permeated the tough old days of Tang Soo Do training, and the forward thinking scientific approach that is driving the art forward. Thus he is a straight talking, and, in his own words, blunt taskmaster, yet at the same time he is an intelligent, articulate exponent of his art, dedicated to exploring, revealing, and sharing the true meaning of the traditional forms within a modern self defence context.

TKD-KMA: You're at a black belt grading tomorrow, and they're known to be tough.

GEOFFREY GREEN: 30 are going but we also had 15 fail. We have a pre-test prior to a grading and we don't let those go through who we know are going to fail. We try to impress upon them how hard the grading is and I don't think a lot of people realise, until their black belt, how hard it is. It's four hours, which isn't a long time but it's longer than our colour belt gradings and for some it's a shock- that they're working full out for four hours. We have five or six Masters sit on the examination board and we ask the candidates to go through the various things they have to do for the grading and if they aren't good enough then they wait six months and try again.

Right from start to finish, there's only one break, where they have a written test-they have to know the theory behind Tang Soo Do. That can give them a slight break-then they're straight back into it. Some people don't like having to wait the six months and being told they've failed and they finish but that only proves to us that they weren't ready for the dan grading.

TKD-KMA: There is always pressure, whatever your organisation or style, to pass dan grades for economic purposes.

GEOFFREY GREEN: With us there is a certain standard of technique we insist they should have. There are people out there who will give you a black belt just for joining them but we don't agree with that. If people join us saying I'm a 2nd dan this or that, can I join you? We usually say

no, because to us, they haven't proved themselves yet, so we again pre-test them. If they're good enough they'll get the rank, if not we'll be honest and say and then they have two choices-join us as the grade suggests or they can go away but they aren't given anything, they earn it. Each grade you go higher than the black belt, the more we expect of you.

TKD-KMA: Talking to Master Khan, he does expect a lot of you, in terms of time and dedication.

GEOFFREY GREEN: That's true. There are people out there who will see any martial art as a part-time thing; to me, and all the other Masters within Tang Soo Do, we see it as a full time thing. If you are courteous and respectful in class, why should that stop when you leave class? My door is always open for Tang Soo Do matters-I'm always there for my students.

TKD-KMA: How strong is Tang Soo Do in Wales and the West Country?

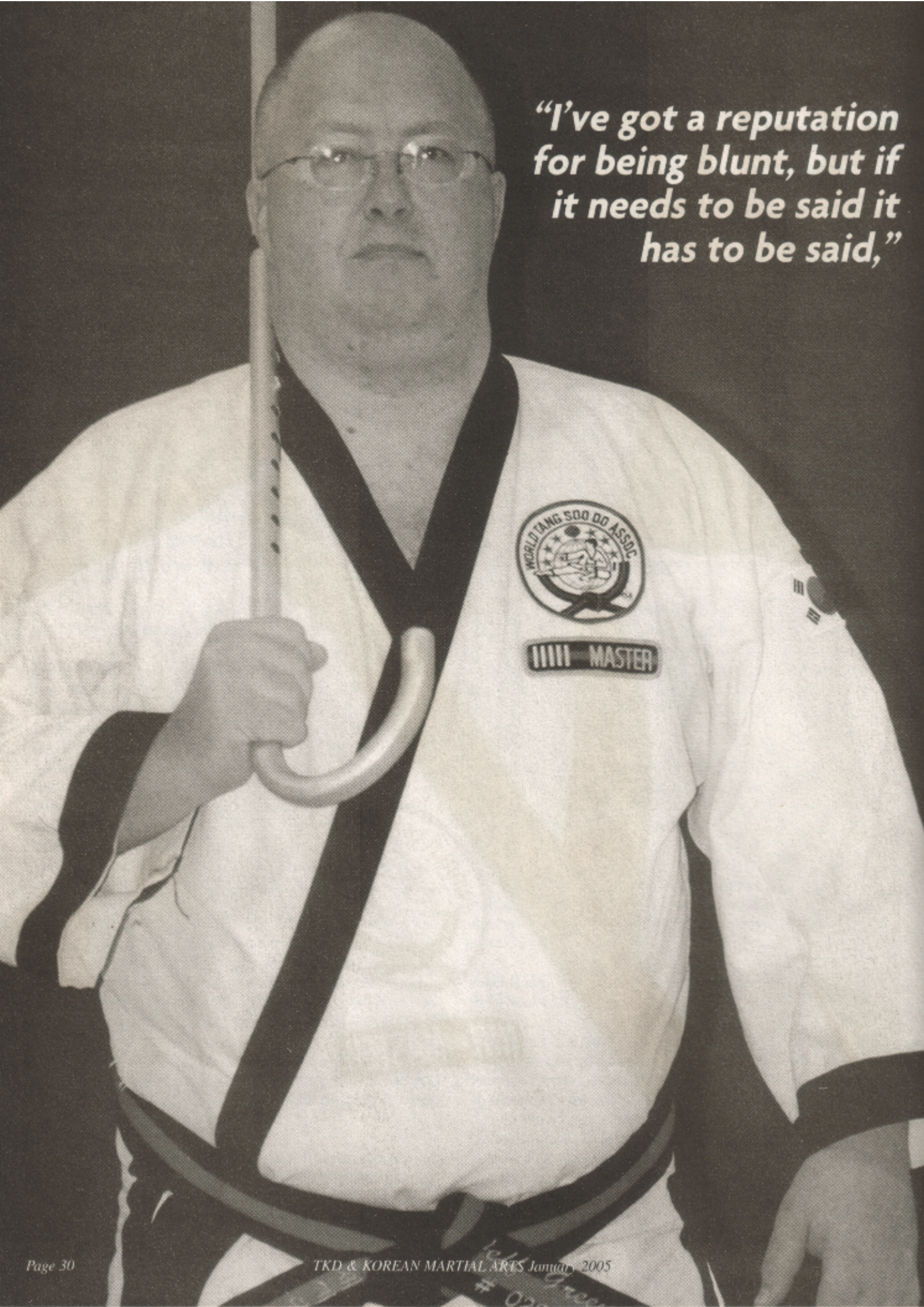
GEOFFREY GREEN: Master Raff Zamparelle is in charge (here) in Bristol and he's doing very well. In South Wales we have five instructors and they're slowly building up the classes but my intention has never been to be the big boss in a big organisation, I enjoy teaching Tang Soo Do and a class of ten or a hundred is no different to me, as long as they train hard and do what we ask of them-then I'm happy.

TKD-KMA: South Wales is a freestyle hotbed; what's it like teaching a traditional system there?

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GEOFFREY GREEN: I regard Tang Soo Do as traditional, so I have certain feelings towards competition; competition's good if its seen as a learning tool, do your best, win or lose, it doesn't matter as long as you learn from it. If you come back with a trophy, that's a plus, if you lost, understand why, improve yourself in class and get better. I don't like the attitude where you go to competition and you've got to be the best-a lot of clubs insist you enter their competitions-we are traditional and if you want to enter competition we have four a year and for us, that's enough.

There are a lot of people who practice Tang Soo Do and who never enter competition, we have families, juniors from six to my oldest student, who is about fifty five and they all train in one class. It suits every individual, old, young, male, female, whatever the reason they want to learn, we can give it to them.

TKD-KMA: *Let's look at those areas; Tang Soo Do and fitness.*

GEOFFREY GREEN: Ideal, as long as they train regularly and more than once a week and, of course, as long as they give it one hundred percent. If they come in half hearted it's never going to happen and I'm one of those people who tend to tell them that. I've got a reputation for being blunt but if it needs to be said it has to be said, it's as simple as that. I won't fool people, at the end of the day they're paying me to instruct them and teach them Tang Soo Do. I'm going to teach them to the best of my ability

and expect the best from them. If they don't put that in, they've got two options, leave or try harder.

TKD-KMA: *What about the self defence element?*

GEOFFREY GREEN: Going back to the black belt grading, my biggest problem is people going through the self defence aspects with a half hearted attitude. When I demonstrate things with individuals, I take them to the point where it really hurts, so that they appreciate the fact that it is really workable-I don't try and show something that's not going to work in the street but as good as the technique is, if they're going to do it with a half hearted attitude, it won't work.

I am very confident in Tang Soo Do as a self defence system. People have asked me over the years, 'what's the best style for me?' And I say, for me it's the best style but for you it might be totally wrong, you've got to find what works for you and Tang Soo Do works for me. I have never felt that what we teach isn't useful in the street and as an authentic form of self defence I'm behind it one hundred percent.

TKD-KMA: *Your association promotes the cane as a valid self defence weapon.*

GEOFFREY GREEN: We train every year in America, at a Master's clinic and cane defence has been pushed hard over the last few years and to me, because it's something you can carry in the street perfectly legally, it's a very





effective weapon and something we can teach to our older generation-if they have a cane they can become equal because of what they can learn through it. Saying that, we also teach staff, which again, is not something you can carry in the street but what we can do is teach the techniques and then adapt them to everyday things-you've heard it many times, a rolled up magazine is a staff, one of my guy's has started teaching with a hard backed book (Human Kinetics no doubt!), you can use the corner, the hard binding at the back, so if you know the techniques in class you can move it into the street using different things-compressed umbrellas etc.

TKD-KMA: Mrs Khan said that she never felt so 'aware' as when she started Tang Soo Do training.

GEOFFREY GREEN: Tang Soo Do isn't just what you do in class; Tang Soo Do is what you wear, what you say. People ask me how many times I've used Tang Soo Do in the street and my attitude is that I've never physically had to use the self defence techniques but it's the way I speak to people I regard as a self defence tool; the way you look at people, it doesn't have to be threatening it just has to be confident. I've been in situations where there has been an aggressive attitude in an environment and suddenly they'll see you and think I'll have a go at him but then you face them and look at them in a certain way and it tends to have an effect on them, they don't see you as an easy target and that's just from the confidence I've achieved through Tang Soo Do.

TKD-KMA: Are there those that train simply because they like the idea of a traditional martial discipline?

GEOFFREY GREEN: Over the years I've seen those who have enjoyed the free-sparring but totally disliked the forms and then you get those who come in and want to learn the traditional way, they expect to see discipline and courtesy, which we all have in the classes, that's one of the very first things I teach juniors and adults alike. People, if they've initially come for fitness, don't like the courtesy element but I'm courteous to them and I expect it back and eventually it's something they grow into.

I work for the local council and I had a discussion with a school headmaster in my local area and my attitude is

that they should be taught the traditional stuff within schools, purely because the biggest problem today is that there is a severe lack of discipline and respect from youngsters towards adults. I believe in the tenets and hope that people see I have humility, integrity and I expect other people to be that way as well-if you're honest with people it prevents friction. We teach the tenets all the time but some people don't practice what they preach but I feel we should live it as well as teach it.

TKD-KMA: You have a real interest in the depth of meaning in the forms, don't you?

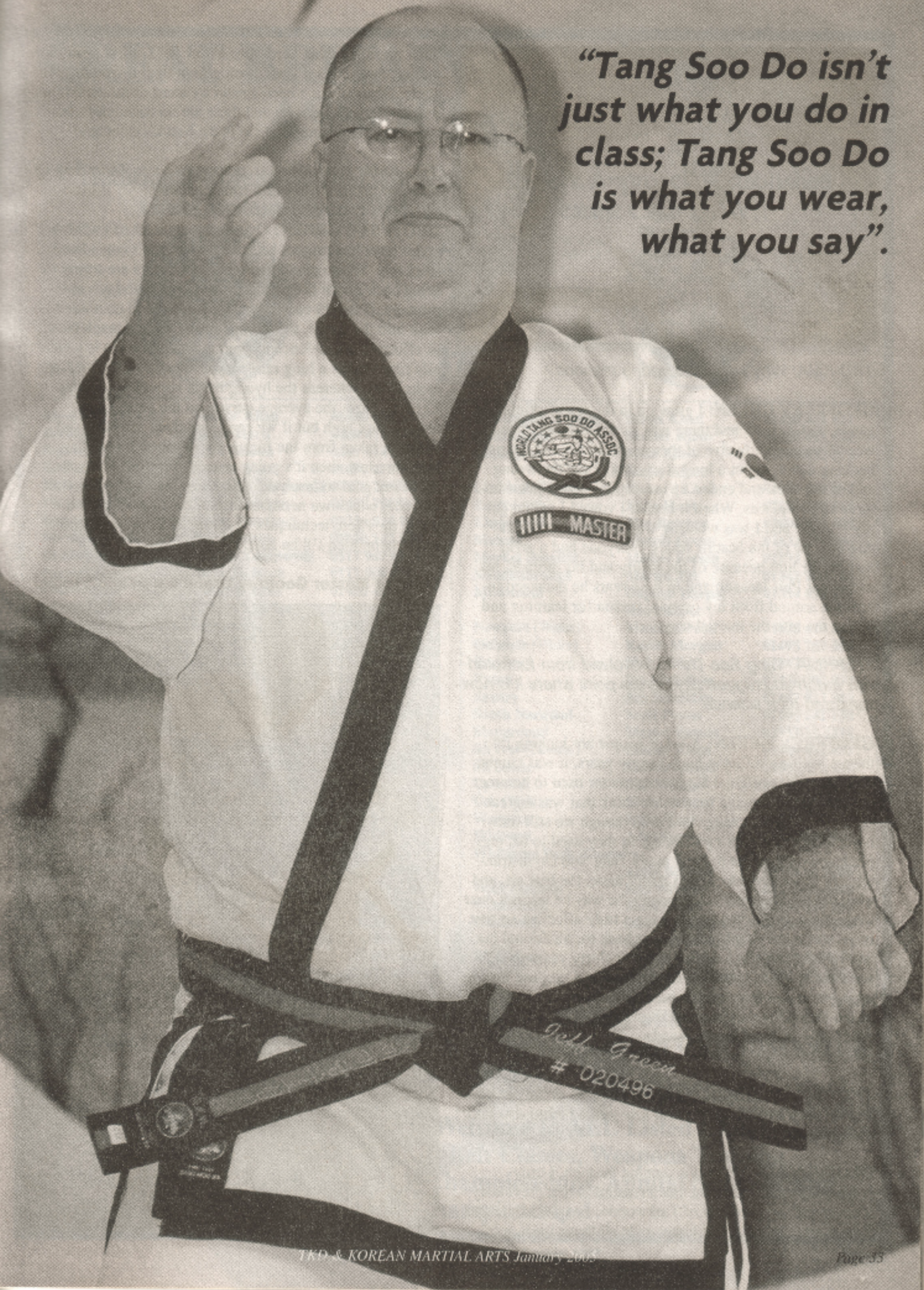
GEOFFREY GREEN: We were taught certain things as 'this is this'; I passed my Master's belt in 1995 and my thought at the time was, it doesn't work, I felt that there was more there than was being taught originally. Master Khan would show me certain things in training that I felt made sense, so I started looking around and found a few individuals who had the same ideas regarding forms-they are useless unless you can truly put them into practice, so if you're teaching something, make it work. To me, every part of the technique has to work when you apply it to the street application. A lot of techniques, if you take away the strict, rigid movement, start to become more what I see in the Shaolin systems, and it makes total sense.

TKD-KMA: You're Master grading wasn't the final goal for you then?

GEOFFREY GREEN: No, far from it. A lot of people see black belt as the end of the road but I try to impress on people that although I've been doing this 26 years, I'm still learning and for as long as I practice Tang Soo Do I will continue to learn because to me, if there's nothing to learn, then give up. I want to learn and I want to pass it on-I remember an instructor saying to me, 'when you start thinking about the money you stop thinking about the art'. In my initial years in Tang Soo Do I was probably paying more money out than I was getting in but I was seeing something at the end of the road and simply wanted to continue learning as much as I could. I've been lucky over the years, in that I've had some really good instructors because at first, I was practicing martial at for totally the wrong reason, I learnt Aikido, practiced it for 4 years...



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TKD-KMA: Why was it the wrong reasons?

GEOFFREY GREEN: I grew up in the era of skinheads, gangs, and so forth and there was a confrontation when I was 16 years old, twelve of them eight of us, and me not backing down, to cut a long story short I got the wrong end of the stick and ended up in hospital with a jaw fractured in two places. When it healed I vowed I would get my revenge and I was working with a guy who taught Aikido, one of the best in Wales, everyone had a great respect for him because of his ability and his attitude, his name was Phil Jackson and in four years he managed to turn me around from my original reason for learning and he got me into the martial way.

TKD-KMA: Tang Soo Do has evolved from its notorious rough and rugged days to the point where it is now regarded as a science.

GEOFFREY GREEN: A lot of people are looking into the art itself now. Going back twenty years, it was taught differently, our original Korean instructor used to hammer us into the ground and we used to think that was a great class but attitudes change and even though we still train hard, the classes aren't punishing, as they used to be, people just won't accept it. Now many Tang Soo Do instructors try and delve into what's really there, the true art, and even the Grandmaster has changed the way he teaches over the years and now we are teaching a truly effective art that more and more people are coming back to, traditional but workable styles and I think in twenty, thirty years you'll see a lot of styles that look almost identical because they're taking so much from each other. We're doing it now-a lot of the locking techniques and throws are taken from Aikido, Judo, Jiu-Jitsu-if it works, you use it and styles evolve. Styles that don't change stagnate and die.

TKD-KMA: Tang Soo Do seems to have grown in popularity very rapidly in the last few years; what are your thoughts on this?

GEOFFREY GREEN: It is coming through, I truly believe that, and one of the main reasons is that previously it never had the publicity of Taekwondo, as an example and Karate was the main traditional style all those years ago.

Tang Soo Do's been here since about 1972, yet it's only in the last few year's it's been recognised by individuals in the street. Generally, it's been spread by word of mouth but to me there is no best style and there are no bad styles, only bad instructors- Tang Soo Do is the best style for me.

TKD-KMA: How are you looking to drive Tang Soo Do forward, from a Master's perspective?

GEOFFREY GREEN: Over the years a lot of traditional styles have lost respect because they weren't considered workable. What myself and other instructors are trying to bring back into it is that this is workable in today's environment, if taught correctly, so my hope is to continue to look into the forms, the hyung, and to try and teach those as effective self defence technique. Tang Soo Do is generally regarded as a long range style because of the kicking techniques, whereas the hyung teach very close quarter fighting. Now, the average person on the street can't always kick high but if we can teach them effective self defence, taken from the forms, for instance, where the kicks are low, then it's going to work for everybody and that's my goal-to teach discipline and respect and the self defence, which we need because of the environment that we're in. These techniques work and if I can help people learn them, then I'll be happy.

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