



My parents were inseparable, truly loving and passionate towards each other. They had four children, myself, and two other daughters with one son on the way. So the decision to leave Korea and leave his family behind was terribly difficult for him. However, he was driven by his ambition to share his beautiful art with the World, but also a promise of a better life for his children and nothing would stand in his way. His life, his destiny was Hwa Rang Do and that came first, before his love, before his family. You can say that his true first love was, is and always will be Hwa Rang Do and this was also true to the Hwarang Knights of old where King and Kingdom came first. My father came to America and was separated from his family for almost three



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years. It was a very challenging time for both my father and us, the family he left behind. My mother was left alone, with three of our cousins. She raised seven children on her own, while working full time, and surely it was tiresome and difficult for her. I tried to help best I could. Although, I was only seven at the time, I was still the oldest male. I was the man of the house and I attempted to take charge, leading the rest of the six children and helping my mother as much as I could with all the chores while she worked daily.



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When my father decided to immigrate to America, he couldn't just pack and leave, it had to be well planned. During those days, it was terribly difficult to immigrate to America and it was just a dream for most people. However, my father is very resourceful and was able to secure a way for all of his family members to immigrate.

Hwa Rang Do would play a big part in the success of their immigration. He had to follow the traditional hierarchy of the family and coordinated the immigration of his family in order from his parents, then the oldest siblings to the youngest. He aided in bringing my grandparents, then my older uncles and aunts, which meant we were pretty much the last. He took onto himself the responsibilities normally of the oldest son in the family not because he had to, but because he was compelled to. Once again, he is a heroic figure who often helps taking on the responsibilities and burdens of others without being asked and because of it; he receives often resentments rather than gratitude.

At the time, many of the masters and head instructors were not in agreement with my father leaving to America, but it was my father's decision and they had to abide. Of course, they did not agree because they were driven by fear, having doubts whether they can manage without the Dojoo (Title of Owner of the Art), essentially because they lacked vision, foresight, and it would be for this reason why Hwa Rang Do in Korea would soon disappear. Knowing this, when he left, he left everything behind and only took a suitcase and approximately \$500 in his pocket. He even gave away the deed of the building he owned to the Korean Hwa Rang Do Association. He really gave everything away. My father also enjoyed raising tropical fish as a hobby and our whole house was filled with aquariums full of all kinds of tropical fish. He left it to one of our masters in Korea, who actually used them and made a profitable business from it. And, had my father retained the

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building and still maintained ownership, it would be worth tens of millions of dollars today. Yet, the masters who were left in charge of the Korean Association managed to lose everything and there are only a handful of Hwa Rang Do schools to be found in Korea today as many of the masters have diffused themselves and aligned with other profitable Hapkido organizations. It is not because they were bad men, incapable men, that they could not sustain and make thrive what already had taken root; it is because it takes special men who are fearless, relentless, and cannot be swayed by greed or power and is committed and convicted to their passion, to their dream. There are not many heroes as men can often be heroic in moments, but cannot be a hero for life.

During the three years we were separated, those were truly difficult times for my father. He was the Founder of Hwa Rang Do, the Chairman of the Korean Hwa Rang Do Association, the Supreme Grandmaster, the Dojoo, respected by all of the community, professional colleagues, and well connected in government, but in America nobody knew of him. It was way before the Internet; there was no way to Google, no YouTube, no social media, no way to know who he was, except for him to prove himself all over again.

Somehow, his family ended up in the inner city of Los Angeles County, called Huntington Park, which was predominantly Hispanic. He had to start from nothing, from zero, having no money, no title, not even speaking the language, without his wife, and with his struggling family, he had to start all over again. While in Korea even with all his time spent training and immersed in his work to establish the Korean Hwa Rang Do Association, he was very studious and managed to graduate from the highly acclaimed Dong Kook University in Korea with a Degree in Oriental Medicine. However, even that served no purpose in America. During the day he did whatever odd jobs he could find to save money so that he would be able to rent a place for a school. During the weekends, he would go to every tournament that he could find throughout Southern California, passing out flyers, and asking permission to demonstrate his art. Not knowing who he was, he was often rejected, but he persevered and continued on.

He managed to save up enough money to rent a small building less than about seven to eight hundred square feet. He lived in the back once again with a small drape to separate his living quarters from the training hall. Living off instant ramen, he continued to work during the day, walking to and fro. On his walk, he would place flyers on the windows of the cars to promote the school, not knowing that this was against the city law. One day a policeman stopped him and had him go back and pick up every flyer that he had placed. This would be one of many moments that would leave him feeling demoralized and defeated. It would have been easy for him to give up, especially after tasting the sweetness of success and reaching the heights of social recognition, only having to climb back up again from the very bottom. However, with the reminder of his conviction to his duty to care for his family and to keep the promise to his master, he prevailed through the hard times, keeping his vision in sight.

He continued to grow in popularity and the martial art leaders in Los Angeles started to take notice. His school steadily grew to the point that he could stop his day jobs and dedicate himself fully to teaching. He continued his efforts to bring his family, whom he missed desperately. After securing the visas for his youngest brother and my cousins, successfully bringing them over to America, there was only my mother and us, his children who were left. A few months after my father had departed to America, my youngest brother was born. And now, my mother was struggling to care for an infant and six other children. In witnessing how hard she worked to care for us, working all day, then coming home to



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prepare dinner, staying up late nights and unable to sleep looking after my brother; then up first thing in the morning to prepare us for school before she went off to work, leaving the infant with a nanny, I did what I could to help her. I recollect one story that sums up my efforts.

I was only eight or nine at the time with my siblings and cousins only a year apart all the way down to my youngest brother of one year old. I decided one day to help my mother with the daily chores by doing the laundry. There were no electric appliances, no washing machines, it all had to be done by hand in the outdoor courtyard using the water from a well with a manual pump. It was during the middle of winter, which in Korea is extremely cold and this is also probably what prompted me to help my mother, as it was hard to bare watching her suffer in the cold. I gathered my young troop, delegated their tasks, and somehow managed to complete the washing cycle. Of course there were no dryers either, so we had to hang dry all the clothes. Being very satisfied and proud that we had finished what we set out to do and that I was able to help my

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mother in some small way, we all huddled in the warmth of our one living room, attempting to defrost our frozen fingers. We all waited anxiously for my mother to return from work to surprise her with our accomplishment. We heard a loud yell from outside and we all dashed out to see what had happened. My mother had returned and found rows of frozen laundry, which had turned into icicles, hanging outside in the courtyard. We were expecting to be greeted with compliments and smiles, but received a horrifying shriek. I forgot one minute detail, that it was the dead of winter and the clothes had to be hung indoors. My mother patted me on the head and thanked me for my efforts as I helped her boil water and thaw the frozen clothing, I felt terrible as I caused her to do more work. It's funny to look back, but it surely was not at the time. I had learned a very important lesson that day, that best intentions mean nothing if they are not supported by proper action.

The day had arrived, the day that we would all be united once again as one family. We all boarded our first transpacific flight dressed in our finest clothes, as my mother didn't want to show anyone, especially to my father any signs of our hardship or struggle. I even got my suit custom tailored from one of my mother's friends. I was only nine at the time. She wanted to show that we were well without him so that he would not be sad or have regrets of leaving his homeland, for leaving everything he knew and loved. My father had the same thoughts in mind, as when we first saw him at the airport, he looked at his best, so handsome, strong, and full of joy. We all hugged and embraced, but every decision has a price, an unexpected consequence. Since my father was not present during the birth of my brother, he didn't recognize his own father and started to cry. My father's indescribable expression said it all.

This was 1974, forty-six years ago. It closed one chapter and opened the beginning of another. My father would go on to establish the World Hwa Rang Do Association and the World Headquarters in Tustin, California and I would support my father by continuing to spread Hwa Rang Do throughout Europe and the rest of the World, fulfilling his dream to bring Hwa Rang Do into global consciousness. The recognition of his cumulative work from the official registration of Hwa Rang Do with the Korean Government in 1960, which was its foundation to his stronghold throughout the World, was celebrated on our 50th Anniversary in 2010 in Los Angeles. For this auspicious occasion, I had produced a documentary chronicling his 50-year journey, "Hwa Rang Do® - The Untold Story of the Formation of the Modern Korean Martial Arts." After viewing the documentary for the first time, my father broke into tears and we embraced as father to son, disciple to master, as heir to Dojoo. There are only two times in my life that I have witnessed my father crying, the first was when my grandfather passed away in our own home. This one moment at our 50th Anniversary memorialized for me all of my father's trials and tribulations. Not a word was said, but in that one embrace we shared that which could only be understood by a father and son who've journeyed together in the same path of the Hwarang, connecting to all the ancients who've gone before.

My father was a god to me when I was a child and then when I became a man, I realized that he was not a god, but just a man yet an extraordinary man. When this moment came, it disturbed my entire universe, my sense of reality, and I felt lost and confused. What am I to do now that I have lost my god? There were moments of panic, fright, and uncertainty. I had to mourn the loss of a god, but I had to embrace the future, the acceptance of a man, my father. I asked myself if I could still respect him as a man. And, yes of course he was the best example of a man that I had ever known. This was one of the most important defining moments of my life. No longer could I rely on another more powerful being, but I had to grow up and be a man, be self-accountable.

What I have come to understand through my personal experiences as a student and a teacher of Hwa Rang Do for the entirety of my life is that all human beings possess the need to believe, to have faith in something no matter what it is. And, it is our human tendency to seek out charismatic, strong, influential people to build them up as gods, so that they can have something, someone to believe in. Then, by destroying the god that they created, they gain a false sense of power and self-esteem by repeating to themselves the mantra, "they are all just human, they are just like me after all."

Love, loyalty, and faith, essential to discipleship, being a good student, a good son/daughter, a moral person, cannot be measured by how much we can gain and profit from it. On the contrary, it is when we suffer, struggle, and face hardship our truth is tested. Ultimately, we abandon our love, our loyalties, and our faith because

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we are in fact self-centered and all that is important is actually the self and nothing else. When we realize that the sacrifices, struggles, and hardships outweigh the benefits, we find excuses, seeking for faults, inconsistencies, wrongdoings and use them as a basis of absolving any promises made and retract the oaths and vows of love, loyalty, and faith. It requires the humility, which comes from realizing that we are all imperfect and that we are all sinners in order to sincerely grasp the true value of love, loyalty, and faith. Until this occurs, we all measure our worth, our value by comparing ourselves to others, and in so doing we live in a lie, a delusion that somehow we are more perfect, better, more worthy and deserving than others, never having the clarity to see the falsity of statements like half truths, near perfect, almost finished, and

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god-like. Hence, most of us live desperate, unhappy, pretentious, insecure lives, which constantly need to be fed with positivity and self-reaffirmation in whatever way it can be received. However, the soul, buried within the subconscious, which makes up the majority of consciousness, knows the truth and the reality of an uncertain, pretentious life. It is an inescapable truth that until one surrenders the self to something far greater than the self, which cannot be destroyed, is perfect, eternal, benevolent, and absolute, that one cannot truly be selfless and will always remain in competition: to overcome the father, to defeat the master, to outwit the competition, to oppress the weak, to conquer the strong, and to destroy self-doubt.

My father is my hero and will always remain as such. He never questioned his duty, he never complained of his hardships, he made no excuses for his failure or mistakes, he never made promises he could not keep, he helped others who were in need, he was fair and just in his discipline of others, he assumed responsibility, he never blamed others falsely, he was loyal to his friends, he defended his friends at his own peril, the list is endless of why he was, is, and forever will be my hero. However, the one thing that most of all makes him a hero is that he is man, not a superman, not a god, not a fantasy of my imagination, but a real, fallible man who endures the same pains, sorrows, and temptations, but always remain on a steady course forward towards his vision of a better world for its people and a better life for his family, when many others change course or abandon their ship. He is unshaken and for these reasons, I can get up each morning knowing that my father, my hero will always be there and never abandon his post. I am frightened of the day that I will not see him there, not because he retired, but because God has taken him. When this day comes, I ask God that he will grant me the courage to persevere and carry my father's legacy with honor and dignity.

Thank God, that on my fiftieth year that He called me and finally brought me to my knees. In surrendering to my Lord, I have no fear of the future; I have no doubts of failure or loss and surely, no fear of death. I have only one fear and that is the fear of God. In surrendering myself I have come to understand the truth of love is in giving. I no longer worry whether I receive the praise, acceptance, and approval of my father and surely no other person. First, I work to serve and to please my God, my Lord only as he will be the most critical of my good works and most just of my sins. This has made me a better man, but more importantly a better son, and hopefully a better servant. I choose to serve Dojoonim Supreme Grandmaster Dr. Joo Bang Lee not because he is perfect, not because he is a god, or that he is infallible, but because he is a man, he is my teacher, and my father and because most of all I love him.

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