

2012 AAU Taekwondo Youth Leadership Award: Taekwondo's Effect on My Life

"Mom, Mom! Dylan invited me to his karate birthday party!" Who would have ever thought that would be what got me started in a life long journey? A small piece of paper handed out at the end of the day at school in first grade changed my life forever. Wise-men always say that the world's greatest pleasures stem unexpectedly, but little did I know that attending Dylan Shallhammar's seventh birthday party at East Coast Martial Arts was the start of my life.

Before I started Taekwondo, I had already been a part of six different sports teams; however, none seemed to give me the things the Taekwondo had to offer. While many sports are seen as a "hobby", martial arts is a "lifestyle". By adopting the taekwondo lifestyle, you are adopting a new way of living through the body, mind, and spirit, along with dedicating yourself to the art. This lifestyle caught my eye and starting at the age of seven, my life took a whole new turn.

Not only did I begin to learn about the dangers of the real world and how to handle them, but I also learned the techniques of memorization, discipline, dedication, strength, achievement, and most of all, perseverance, which led on to help me in other things besides martial arts, like school and issues pertaining to simply living. Many sports change your life through fitness, but martial arts changes your life through, not only fitness, but mentality. This mentality martial arts has given me not only gave me a better perspective on life, but it also helped me to understand the world I live in more because a major part of martial arts is looking into your own soul to understand the soul of others. Maturity and understanding of the world is given to true martial artists and I believe that I have received both.

For example, many teenagers are still trying to figure out who they are, who they want to be, and what they are living for. I truly believe that through martial arts, I have learned these things about myself much sooner than the rest because martial arts requires you to look deep into your own soul. Through martial arts, I have learned that I was born to help people and use my talents to help others experience the true joy that I have experienced because of martial arts. I live to make people happy because it makes me happy. I live to teach others what I have learned at such a young age because of martial arts. I live to make a positive difference in a world that may seem dark to others and I strongly believe that I have learned all of these things about myself because of martial arts.

I am not the best martial artist to ever walk the planet, but I have learned more through martial arts than many. Martial arts have given me strength, determination, perseverance, dedication, and much more than I ever expected. All of this because of a young boy's birthday party; it must have been fate. I chose to follow the path that I was placed on. This path has led me through many journeys and has changed my life forever in the most positive way possible. I believe that because of martial arts, I am more confident in following my dreams to become who I want to be and more. While I thought I had made an RSVP to a birthday party, I really had made an RSVP to fate and I will be forever grateful for the change martial arts has brought to my life.