



**The Final Step form Behind the Curtain**

**By Lesley Allen**

In 1995 at the age of forty little did I realise that taking part in a Martial Art would change my life and how much I would learn and discover about myself?

### **The History of me....**

For the first fourteen years of my life I lived in a small Cambridgeshire village with my family, Mum, Dad, three sisters and my brother. We lived on a small holding and were almost self sufficient what might be described as "The Good Life". Life for me then was uncomplicated and very happy.

All this changed when we moved to the city, when suddenly I had a whole new world to contend with, new house, new school and no friends. In the past school for me had always been enjoyable, but now it was the beginning of a nightmare. From the first day at my new school, my life was made miserable, trying to make new friends, to join in, to fit in or even just to be part of, I was not allowed to do any of these. Perhaps it was because I was the "new girl" or perhaps they felt that I was different. For this I was "sent to Coventry", picked on and bullied. Why me? I have never felt so alone. My only place away from all this was on the school stage hidden behind the curtains, for the rest of my school life this became my refuge. At the first opportunity I left school and started work. This memory has been locked away for 30 years, a part of my life I had chosen to ignore and pretend never happened.

### **Tang Soo Do and me....**

After two years of sitting on the sidelines, supporting my husband and son as members of the W.T.S.D.A. I felt it was time to accept the challenge and take part myself. A new club was being formed not far from where I live and for me it seemed the ideal place and time to start. At Manea T.S.D. Club we were all beginners, all learning together but each at our own pace. At first keeping fit and healthy were my main reasons for training, getting further through the belt system and grading was not uppermost in my mind. Meeting every Thursday evening as part of a club was enjoyable, and I really felt a part of Manea T.S.D. Club.

*... I now understand that at last I felt comfortable as part of a class, they were almost like part of my family; a Tang Soo Do family.*

Learning Hyungs was important to me, I wanted to be able to perform them to the best of my ability. To be able to do them well a lot of practice and dedication was needed, as each hyung was learnt I began to feel my ability and knowledge had improved. Self Defence was an area in which I could visualise each technique but I soon realised that to perform them well I needed to be stronger. Being five feet tall and of a small frame I wondered what I could do to achieve this, Where would I find this strength from?

*... I realise now that as I progressed, the spirit within me grew giving me the strength I was looking for.*

Free Sparring has always been a mystery to me I could never understand why two people wanted to fight each other, the confrontation seemed pointless. It is not part of my character to want to hurt someone, so to summon up the aggression to attack someone for no reason was very difficult, which found me always having to defend.

*... Perhaps on reflection I was not able to attack, having always backed away and hidden when threatened in the past. I now know, not to put up with a situation hoping it will go away; you have to face it and deal with it.*

As time went by, the club flourished and another lesson was introduced, but still I needed to train more often, attending a lesson at another club was the way of achieving this. This proved to be a new learning curve, I became aware that not all members approached Tang Soo Do as seriously as I did, and whilst I accept that everyone has different reasons for training, I believed that we all had one purpose. Training to me should be in the essence of Tang Soo Do as defined in the Five Codes and Seven Tenets, some others thought differently.

*... Once again I found myself in a situation where others were trying to influence me. This time I did not need somewhere to hide, I had the strength to resist the pressure. For once in my life I realised that I could be me.*

Becoming a Cho Dan Bo has been an important part of my training, being able to combine the knowledge, strength and spirit means I can go forward. I have accepted the opportunities to take warm up, and have been involved in teaching the class, all these have contributed greatly to my confidence. Being able to do this was something I could never envisage myself doing. Which to me is an achievement in it's self. As Manea T.S.D Club grew I have grown within it, now I am on the threshold of becoming a Black Belt I feel I can now be myself.

Facing my fears through Tang Soo Do has given me a great sense of fulfilment, something I would not have felt if I had not accepted my challenge and started training. Writing this essay has given me the key to unlock the memory and deal with the past.

Whilst actually writing this down in words has its benefits it has also been a very difficult and emotional task. I was not aware of how deep those feelings were. The effects of being bullied, has had a great onus on my life, I am now aware that Tang Soo Do has had an immense part to play in my "final step from behind the curtain".

Tang Soo!