

# **Empty Hand**

Dedicated to Sensei Spoon, Sensei Hart, and my family

My karate Junior Black Belt test was filled with many different emotions. I sat in the car, bats in my stomach. I was very nervous for my black belt test. I went into the Dojo and practiced my Kata and Hachi Kyu. Soon Sensei Spoon called us together. My heart was pounding so hard that I wouldn't be surprised if everyone in the room could hear it. We started the physical challenge. We had to do 50 push-ups in 2 minutes, and do more if there was time. It felt wonderful when I did 98. Next we did plank for 3 minutes, then 30 squat kicks, then 3 minutes of chair position. I thought it would be easy, but it was very hard. Even though it was, I loved the physical challenge.

I felt wonderful when I did the next part of the test, Hojo undo. I enjoyed hearing my Gi snap when I punched or kicked, or did any other strikes. I felt my hands and feet fall into place without me having to remember them. It was like I had practiced since the day I was born. I felt confident and my form felt clean. I was more than just going through the motions, I put speed on my blocks and power on my strikes. My hands started to feel as heavy as weights, but I held them up. I felt no urge to cheat. I wouldn't be doing any favor to myself or anybody else. I did every move the best I could, that was all I could expect of myself, and all anyone could expect of me.

Next, I did Hachi Kyu with Ferris. My heart was pounding, what if I got the sweep wrong? Finally it was our turn. I attacked first. We did combination numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and then finally, the hardest one, 8. After Ferris swept me he attacked. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. I had butterflies in my stomach before number 8. I took a deep breath and then I swept Ferris. He went down easily. I had gotten it right! We bowed to each other and sat down. I was overjoyed and I couldn't stop smiling! My nervousness had evaporated like mist. Next were the Katas.

I waited patiently to do my Katas. Finally it was my turn. I did Sanchin, Kanshiwa, and Kanshu. I put as much speed and power on them as I could, and also used good form and focus. I felt very calm. Inside I was bursting with energy. I didn't think I had ever done a better Kata. I watched the board writing down the scores.

The next part of the test was sparring. I knew that I wasn't going to be intimidated. We bowed to each other and then got into sparring stance. I knew that because Harrison, my sparring partner, was taller than me, I had to go for his stomach and chest, not his face. After Harrison, I sparred with Ferris. I was looking forward to doing spirit sparring. I gave it my all and sparred with Sensei Spoon. I struck over and over. I gave it everything I had. Even though I was tired, I had never felt more alive. No matter how many times I was swept, I always got back up. Seven times down, eight times up! I bowed to Sensei Spoon. I was sweaty, but I felt amazing.

The next part on the test was board breaking. We had to break three boards with the best front kick we could do. I took a deep breath and allowed my nervousness to be replaced by excitement. Slow, slow, slow, FIRE! I threw the best front kick I could, and I felt the board splinter against my foot. I felt proud, I had broken three boards!

Next was the pad work. We punched and kicked at the pads. Sweat trickled down my nose and my muscles burned, but my strikes remained strong. On the last strike, I felt I was opening up a door to see the future. I imagined a picture of myself getting my black belt. I knew that I would pass.

I waited for Sensei Spoon and Sensei Hart to come out of the office with the certificates and belts. They called us up, one by one. We had all passed! I was exhausted, but my eyes were shining and I had a huge smile. I walked to the car sore and sweaty, and I knew that was a wonderful thing.

Karate means "empty hand", empty of a weapon, but not empty of lots of perseverance, leadership, knowledge, teamwork, respect, self discipline, and Black Belt Attitude!

