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Long road to success was built through discipline, determination and passion

It has been a journey of life! More than 50 years ago, my dad came home one evening dressed in a funny white suit. His short explanation was that he had started doing karate at a Goju school close to our house. I was impressed with this totally foreign art despite being a rugby fanatic. Later that same year a demonstration was done at our primary school by Norman Robinson sensei and senior student and Eddy Kannemeyer. The strength and discipline impressed me thus began my long career in the ancient art of combat.

Training became a non-negotiable part of my life and many exploits made the journey very colourful. Sensei Norman is a brilliant instructor teaching JKA (Shotokan) with a strong influence of Judo. Training for the university team was fun, the highlight being the SAU (South Africa Universities Karate Championships) in July each year. I will never forget the unsympathetic hiding I received from Piet le Roux sensei from Kovyies. I was a first-year student and little did I know that this senior person was a formidable fighter with a world of knowledge and years of experience.

The University of Potchefstroom team was coached by Braam Peens sensei, a hard Goju-ryu instructor without a real passion for sports-karate. We were taught unequivocal rock-solid karate from the traditional school of Goju-Ryu. The University of Pretoria team was coached by Frans Joubert sensei, a Shukukai instructor following the impressive style of Kimura sensei. Being the only Shotokan student was a challenge but winning for your alma-mater was far more important.

Koos Burger sensei had a tremendous influence on my career in the fighting arts. A non-political figure with powerful karate and excellent technique, Sensei Koos's patience was often tested through my teenage years, especially when we were invited to teach in the smaller towns. Nigel Jackson sensei, the only South African to complete the instructor's course in Japan, was a great influence in my career and sparked my interest in and adoration of the Japanese culture. I was graded under him to third Dan level. My following grade was awarded by Shirai sensei in Italy after I failed the first attempt.

Grading for fifth, sixth and seventh Dan was under the auspices of Keigo Abe sensei over a period of 17 years and was truly motivating. Abe sensei is currently regarded as the second most senior graded individual in the world. It was during the past festive season that I received a letter from Japan. Mr Fumiko, personal assistant to Abe sensei included a short note from Abe sensei. "Soon-san, I want you to prepare for testing in July 2015 in Glasgow." My initial reaction was one of shock and my first response was to question Abe sensei's invitation. At this level students may never request a grading but need to be invited for such an honour. I do feel too young for such testing but this is not a point of discussion.