

Richard Smith  
1st Degree Black belt  
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## **Black Belt Statement**

How does a person write a statement about a lifelong experience that is still evolving? Years ago, as a white belt, I remember reading black belt journey statements on the ASKA website. Looking back, I feel I was better prepared to write the journey statement as a white or yellow belt than I am as a black belt. As a whitebelt I may not have struggled for two weeks on how to formulate the first sentence! As time has progressed, it became clear that the closer I got to the black belt test, the more I didn't know. This is unlike testing in everyday life. Traditionally in life, when you take a class, you expect to know the subject matter perfectly by the time you test. In martial arts, the black belt test only shows the student is capable of mastering the discipline they are practicing. By no means does completion of the first test indicate mastery.

In no way do I intend to downplay the significance of achieving my first degree black belt. This accomplishment has been a lifelong dream of mine. I always wanted to "be a black belt", as many people dream to be. I just never knew the impact and ripple effect martial arts would have on my life. When I am stressed out at work, I practice my breathing, wrist stretches, and close my eyes to run through forms in my head. In everyday conversation, my family repeats "Hakuna Matata", and "float with the boat" on a regular basis. I sign all professional and personal emails with "Fall down seven times, stand-up eight". These are all words of wisdom taught by Grandmaster Hien Pham that my family lives by now. I even cut my lawn at a certain height that is best for practicing katas. I can not , will not, imagine my life without martial arts.

I am proud to be a member of the ASKA family. A family that selflessly strives to spread knowledge and grow the martial arts community. I do believe that every person we meet in life teaches us something new, therefore the learning is never over. Thank you to the ASKA family, and our Grandmaster Hien Pham for the countless hours of dedication. Your friendships means the world to me!

Black belt is just a new beginning.

Thank you!!

Richard Smith

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"Fall down seven times, stand up eight."