

I started participating in sports at the age of 2. After years, it's hard to remember exactly where I started, but it began with ballet and taekwondo. I moved to Arizona at the age of 5 and wanted to try something new. I was never a particularly creative or musical kid, so I stuck to my roots as an athlete. From there, I joined cheer, track, and many other sports. At my peak, I was doing four sports at one time, having upwards of three practices a day. Then, my life took a little bit of a turn. I have always been clumsy, but being clumsy and doing so many sports gets you hurt, no matter how much working out or stretching I would do. I ended up severely injuring my back in gymnastics, and then a few months later, I almost ruptured my Achilles tendon. I spent around 3 years on and off in a boot up until I was 15.

All while I was supposed to be recovering, I stayed doing what I loved the most. I never lost a track race in my life, and I rarely ever placed below the top three in competition for acrobatics, cheer, and gymnastics. Then, my family had to move to Colorado for my dad's job. I obviously wanted to try sports again. I tried to get back into track and field and cheer, but my ankle would still flare up, so I was at a loss. Nothing else interested me, until one day my mom came to me and asked if I would try Taekwondo again. I was little when I first did it, but I was willing to do anything to get myself back in a good mindset. At the time, I was very angry with everything around me, so I thought joining martial arts would help with that.

I thought martial arts was all about fighting and getting your anger out. I would work out six days a week to gain muscle, and originally used ASKA to help with my anger. Then, I had all my health issues flare up. I was eventually diagnosed with two chronic illnesses, so working out was no longer an option for me, but my instructors were there for me. I was so upset and took it out on the people who cared most for me, but then I opened up about what I was diagnosed with, and everyone seemed to stay understanding. Even now, I'm still battling with my health journey and constantly balancing out practice with many doctors' appointments, but practice is where I'm able to feel the most myself.

Eventually, after only a few months, I realized that Taekwondo wasn't just about fighting and defending yourself, but it gave me a purpose to strive for a goal and be better than I have ever been in my life. ASKA allowed me to retrain my negative thoughts and gave me the best friendships I have ever had. I'm still learning to be patient, but I have learned that the journey doesn't stop when you are taught things; it continues to be a journey, no matter how much you learn and know, there is always more. Maybe it's not just about technique, but it can reflect outside of practice into the real world. I have had plenty of struggles with my health problems, but my instructors are there for me even when I have my hardest days and when I may not always be in the best mood. I've been taught more about myself, and ultimately have become the healthiest I have ever been, both mentally and physically. If it wasn't for my mom and dad supporting me and pointing me in a new direction, then I wouldn't even have my instructors to thank.

I have a lot to learn about patience, but I have become so much happier than I have ever been. Although my back still flares up at practice and I will always have my health conditions, I strive every day, even outside of practice, to take what I've learned and apply it. Through my hard work and determination, I eventually became a black belt, eight weeks after surgery, but my journey doesn't stop here. I want to become the best leader I possibly can and impact people the way my instructors have impacted me. I want to continue to learn things about life

and martial arts, and every day I continue to prove to myself why I am here. I am so thankful to ASKA.