



# THE GIFT OF KENPO

by Kiki Miller

It was my fault. I wrote the time for my son, Oskar's first-ever karate tournament on my calendar as 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Like many busy, multi-tasking moms, I was distracted and at 10 a.m. that Saturday, I noticed the glaring "9 a.m. Karate Tournament" on the desk calendar. I let out a screech. My husband, Craig and Oskar looked at me with wide eyes.

"The tournament started at 9!" I said, nearly in tears. Oskar panicked. His instructor, Mrs. Johnston, had told the students that she expected them all to be there. Illness or preplanned out-of-town events were the only acceptable excuses. These young students do not take what Mrs. Johnston says lightly and I could tell Oskar had no idea of how to explain this to her.

Kenpo Karate instills respect, responsibility and self discipline for all ages. No excuses. Oskar's emersion into this program has been one of the most positive growth experiences I've ever witnessed. No drugs, no tricky psycho babble, no behavioral modification progress report reward/punishment theories... just respect for yourself, your instructor and your God-given ability to muster the courage to do what's asked of you, regardless of external messages. Attention Stance means blink or breathe only. This seven-year-old son of mine, by physical nature, is challenged beyond his imagination to think it possible that he could do that for more than one minute, and he couldn't. But "a black belt is a white belt who never quit," reminds the Kenpo instructors. Just the color of the next belt, that you and you alone can earn, kept him motivated. And now I had dropped the ball on start time of the big tourney.

We grabbed his gear, ran for the car with the goal of at least showing up and apologizing. Oskar was emotional. He didn't say a word, except for consoling me recalling that Mrs. Johnston told him to be there and he should have told me this morning that it was at 9 a.m.

In the parking lot, Oskar straightened his outfit. "Ma'am said we have to be clean, focused and every part of our uniform right, no tugging, before we enter the building, Mom," he told me, successfully hiding his nervousness.

Mrs. Johnston spotted us in the lobby, looking directly at Oskar she said, "You were supposed to be here at 9, buddy, and the tournament portion for your age is over, I'm sorry."

I asked if we could stay and at least watch the older belts compete and she nodded. They were in the middle of changing judges between belt classes when Mrs. Johnston approached three men, Black Belts in full GIs, with impressive, ominous Dojo emblems, and spoke. She walked back, knelt down and whispered to Oskar.

Without a word, in front of bleachers full of spectators, instructors, trophies and judging tables, Oskar walked alone to the center mat. The judges approached. He bowed. They bowed. They asked a question, he replied boldly "I'm seven, Sir". He bowed again and walked to the center of the ring. My heart was in my throat, tears welling up. The room grew quiet as he began the moves he'd learned, and would have done with all of the white-belt class had we been there on time. His voice was clear and loud, his movements solid. When finished he stood at attention stance...15 seconds, 30 seconds...one of the judges approached him and spoke. Oskar looked him in the eye, stood still, replied "yes, Sir". The judge walked away and returned with a medal, placing it around Oskar's neck and bowing. Oskar bowed, then walked backwards to the edge of the ring, bowed again and ran off the mats and jumped into my arms.

Oskar finally spoke when we got outside, "I'm glad I can do it if I have to but I really want to be on time for the next tournament."

It's true all things happen for a reason. It was Oskar's responsibility to be there and mine to let him be responsible.

What an incredible gift the art of karate and the Johnstons at Northwest Kenpo give a family for a monthly class fee. The self-confidence, respect, lessons learned and memories will last a lifetime... for all of us.



**"A BLACK BELT IS A WHITE BELT WHO NEVER QUIT,"**

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