

Featured story:

## TAE KWON DO FARTING

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*There are many challenges one must face when learning the martial arts, but not all of them are what you might expect. Some of them are very personal ones and in the following case, some of them are shared.*

Whoops. There goes another one. Ever witness a symphony of flatulence? There was that classic campfire incident in *Blazing Saddles*, a glimpse at the inner workings and dynamics involved when men are together for any length of time without the ever-watchful and disapproving eye of a woman to keep them more civilized. Perhaps marketed towards the humour of young men but if the mood is right I'm sure many people of all ages across the gender spectrum could appreciate it and more than a giggle or two will be the result.

I, myself, participated in such a scenario. It was embarrassing at first but as (almost) all the people present were participating in this musical work of (f)art, well, let's just say we let our ourselves go and all of us were laughing out of both ends.

It all started one fine Tae Kwon Do class. Our instructor was ambitious with us, volunteering us for tasks beyond our normal capacity, as well he should. It just wouldn't seem like a martial arts class without some form of sergeant barking out commands, "Give me 25 now. On your knuckles." That sort of thing. It made you dread going there and those two hours stretched out for an eternity, especially with a big clock whose minute hand seemed to stick forever in one spot before reluctantly releasing itself to the next. I could write a book in the span of a quarter of an hour as interpreted by that unfriendly clock. Still, somehow the minutes managed to trek across the circular plain, taking their time, of course, and they would reach the long-awaited hour for us to eagerly head back to the change room and that wonderful ride home. It was hard drumming up the gumption to get to class, even harder getting through it, but when you were done, you were free and you felt like a million dollars (whatever that feels like).

So there we were. Relearning a move that we haven't really learnt yet. This particular one involved us squatting down in what is familiarly known as the horse stance. Your feet and knees were parallel, and somehow the space between your thighs seemed to round out to encompass that imaginary horse you mounted. Back straight, eyes and pelvis forward, fists with palms upward and drawn back to either side just above the hips. We were to raise one foot, the left one, by lifting the knee up high, pointing that same knee in the direction of the centre of an imaginary opponent and quickly straighten the leg out in a hard, snapping motion. The foot was to be maintained at a ninety degree angle, the ball of which being the point of contact. We were to keep it there, ready to snap it back below the knee when so ordered, but not a nanosecond too soon or too late or there would be more pushups to follow, on the finger tips, no less.

So there we were, looking like a capital T on its side and starting to shake. It's not easy to maintain that position, especially since when kicking out we weren't allowed to raise our head any higher than it was when we were in the original horse stance. In fact, we were still technically in that stance, but were captured, as it were, in a snap shot photo.

Our instructor thought that that should be enough time, ordering us to snap the foot first back to below the thigh, ready to strike out again if the situation warranted it, then return it back to the solid ground. Do it again. Same foot. Don't move your head or your right foot. Keep it solid. Strike out with the foot. Express yourself. Show the force. Kee-eye when you make contact. Thrust that pelvis forward when you do. Hold it. H-o-o-o-l-l-d it. Hold it. A little more. Now back, keep the knee high, pointing at its target. And, back to the floor. Again, faster this time. Let's have 10 hard kicks in a row. Harder. Faster. Hold it. Back under the thigh. Another kick. Now back, and to the ground. Right. Let's change. Now the other foot.

Sometimes we'd change the feet, sometimes we'd follow with a reverse punch. All the time we'd be maintaining our deep horse stance. Just when we thought we were indeed in hell, he would decide to turn up the heat a little further. He wasn't very happy with our posture. (Was he ever?) We needed more strength in our legs, especially those thigh muscles. Everyone bend those knees further. 'Sit' down deeper, but don't compensate with your back. Keep it straight. That's it. Lower now. Lower. Lower.

Then somebody let one loose. A few quick giggles entered the room but were immediately hushed when he glanced in their direction. That's still too high. What do you people do all day? C'mon. Let's get much lower. Down. Down. That's it.

Whoops. There was another one. Where did that one come from? Much nearer, that one. Hope it's not a stinker. Glad it wasn't me but if we keep this up much longer, it might be me next.

Okay, everyone. Let's go back to those kicks. Keep your position. Stay low. No-one stands up. Concentrate. Let's have some strong kicks. We'll do 20, then we'll break. One. Stronger. Harder. Two. Three. Four. Harder. Five.

Whoa! That was a loud one. It came from the other side of the room. Maybe it was two at the same time.

Six. Seven.

Phen Shamm Phhhh. Brrrrrrrr. ....

Now the sounds were coming up like popcorn in the beginning moments. More people letting a quick nervous laugh out.

Eleven. Twelve. Hey, I said stay down low. Where was I? Oh, yeah. Eight. Nine.

The popcorn was gaining momentum now. It surrounded us. By now we were all doing it.

Fifteen. Sixteen. Almost there. Eleven. Twelve.

What? That guy will never get to twenty. Where did he learn to count?

Eighteen. Nineteen. Seven. Eight. Nine. C'mon. Harder. Stronger. Don't stop.

Was he referring to our farting or our kicks? I know that he was helping us overcome our emotional blocks like frustration and the like. But damn, it WAS frustrating.

And funny. If it wasn't for the frustration I'm sure half of us would have lost all control and would be rolling on the floor, laughing our guts out. I doubt that there was one person in that room that hadn't contributed to that farting symphony at least a half dozen times.

Eventually he did get to twenty and our shaking legs trembling like crazy were finally allowed to collapse. We were all spent. We sat in position while he spoke for a short while. Then we started in on our warm downs, gently relaxing and stretching different muscle groups, lowering our breathing rate.

This was the part we all looked forward to. We were on the home stretch. A little while longer and soon we'll be uncapping our private parts (releasing them from the jock straps & protective padding), slipping into regular clothes and heading home. We will all sleep well tonight.

We gave our final bow, leaving that room smelling of freshly burnt popcorn.

*What can I say? A true story and not necessarily an unusual one, but this one was particularly impressive. I don't know which was more difficult, trying not to laugh, needing release from all that pressure coming from our demanding instructor, or trying not to let one loose, another kind of release from another kind of pressure.*