

Born Learning
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www.npl.lib.va.us/familyplace/parents/parents.html
and click on Born Learning.

The Born Learning website includes lots of ways adults can encourage a child's learning during everyday activities and have fun doing it!

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was less physically demanding. The mental challenge was another matter. The foundation of tang soo do and other styles of karate is made up of patterns of movement called forms. The first form, kibon I, consists of 20 movements, each of which combines a lunge with a punch or block.

The forms are not designed to be used in sparring or for self-defense. Odom likes to call them "tai chi with attitude." I like to think of them as the equivalent of scales or etudes for a musician – not full expressions of the art, but rather building blocks of technique. At the same time, they have their own intrinsic beauty – at least when done correctly. (Mine, early on, were reminiscent of the halting, clunky scales I played on the piano as a young child.)

Over the next few weeks, I polished my pol-form – but just when I thought I had it down, Odom would point out a flaw, and I would have to fine-tune it. Moving through the forms at this stage, with all sorts of do's and don'ts swirling through my head, reminded me of an old Zen story about an ant and a centipede. The ant, having watched the centipede go about his business for some time, could no longer contain his curiosity. "How is it that you can move all those legs at once without getting them tangled up?" the ant asked.

"Why I don't know," the centipede responded. "I never thought about it." He proceeded to reflect on the ant's question – and from that day on, he was never able to walk again.

Having grown self-conscious about my form, I seemed to be getting worse, not better. But in time, I was able to relax and internalize Odom's corrective measures.

White belts don't spar, but Odom would partner us up and have us take turns hitting thick torso-sized pads (he calls them Spongebobs because their shape resembles that of the cartoon character) or smaller hand pads. These exercises, I found, while a lot safer than sparring, still carried risks. Throw a front kick without curling your toes back, for instance, and you're likely to break, sprain or jam one of them. Punching a bag, by the same token, can result in a sprained wrist if you fail to employ the right technique.

Then there were my cardiovascular limitations. The first time I engaged in mock spar-

ring, I started out feeling fairly confident. My punches and kicks had been looking pretty good during standard reps, and I was pleased to note that my technique held up as I began hitting the bag. I relished the precision of the strikes, the power I was able to generate and the *sound* of impact. As I grew winded, however, all of this went by the wayside. My kicks got sloppier, my punches weaker. I couldn't fathom the idea of doing it while also *receiving* blows to the body and head.



Larry Carter demonstrates a jumping front kick.

Chris Cook, a tall, lean 30-year-old, has no such reservations (see page 33). A green belt at the time I joined (he's since moved up to blue), he couldn't wait to get into a ring – a *real* ring, with full contact fighting. Last fall, without any experience in a fight competition, he registered for a King of the Ring contest in Hampton – two brutal, five-minute rounds with limited protective gear (Cook wore a mouth-

piece, cup and fingerless gloves) and just a few restrictions: no groin strikes, eye gouges, or elbows and knees to the head when on the ground. "He did very well against a slightly larger, but less-skilled opponent," recalls Odom, who accompanied Cook to the tournament. "The guy appeared to be ready to bang on his feet, but was at a loss once on the ground. He was strong and able to keep Chris from immediately subduing him, but it was just a matter of time. Chris was in command throughout the fight."

Cook's primary advantage was his skill in jujitsu, a weaponless self-defense system developed in Japan that uses throws and holds to neutralize an opponent. Unlike Western wrestlers, who rely at least to some extent on raw strength, practitioners of jujitsu rely primarily