

Photos.



One.

Craig receiving instruction in Korea from Master Kim, 8th Dan, head of Taekwondo education in Korea and Mr Brian Smith, 5th Dan from Russell Macarthur Taekwondo.



Two.

Craig receiving his Dobok, uniform, to wear at the opening ceremony from Master Moon, 7th Dan.



Three

Lynne, Craig's Mum, on the left and Craig, on the right at the 5th World Junior Championships.

Craig's Story.

Firstly I would say that I write this story not as a doctor, or a professor but simply as a father.

Craig was born after an uneventful pregnancy on November 18, 1987. He seemed to be a 'normal child', although some of his development was a little behind the set bench marks.

We never had any inkling of any problems until Craig went to pre-school. All those children, all that noise, all those rules, Craig didn't cope.

Being a November child we thought it was a question of maturity and that letting him do pre-school again, at a different private school would sort all the dramas out. Wrong.

He stayed in this particular school for one year and one term, then we were told that the school couldn't meet Craig's needs and that he would have to go somewhere else. At this time we didn't even know what Craig's needs were.

Being parents that wanted to do everything they could we started doing the rounds. Doctor after doctor, psychology assessments, communication assessments, occupational assessment, motor assessment, different medications and then finally a diagnosis of ASD in 1994.

Craig is a high functioning ASD child. As parents do we made every effort to ensure that Craig would live as normal, don't you hate that word, a life as possible. He tried several activities, soccer, cricket, golf, dancing, and drama and had very limited success but we were determined to allow him to try different activities.

During this time we went through the dark, dark days. I used to think what would become of Craig? Was I responsible in any way for what was happening? Was there any hope for the future?

Craig went through the placement program with the then Autistic Children's Association in 1996. He was placed full five days a week in the centre in July 1996 and remained there until September 1998. During this time through the effort of the centre staff and Craig, his behaviour was modified to the extent that he could cope with mainstream education.

Craig made a successful transition and for 6 months all seemed well. Then there was a major change of staff at the school. The Principal and Deputy were moved at the same time and the whole culture of the school changed. Craig didn't want to go to school; he was the victim of verbal and physical abuse at the hands of other students. We had no alternative; Craig had to change schools, again.

The last primary school Craig attended was Kimberley Park State School. Craig's younger brother had attended this school since pre-school and we wondered how they

would go being at the same school. This experience was, at last for Craig, very positive. Because of the schools multi age class rooms Craig had the same teachers for 18 months. With the help of many people at KPSS, and the work of a private tutor, Craig made substantial progress.

In the early part of 2000, when Craig was in Grade 7, we made two decisions that were to be turning points for Craig. The first was a decision to allow Craig to take up Taekwondo, more about that later. The second was our decision of where to send Craig for high school. During his primary years Craig had attended six schools and we were determined to find the right school the first time for high school.

After seeking advice from many sources we applied to a small Catholic College at Mt Gravatt, Seton College. After an anxious wait Craig was accepted for 2001, Grade 8. One of the biggest advantages we saw about Seton College was that there are only about 150 students. We were sure that Craig wouldn't survive in a larger school. To our great joy we found that Seton College had much more to offer than the size of the school. Within weeks of starting there the Seton community had become like a second family. The first priority of every member of the staff of the College from the Principal down was to give every student the very best chance of success that was possible.

Craig had always struggled with reading, and I believe that one of the best things that happened to Craig was his Grade 8 English teacher. She showed Craig that reading could be fun. She took the time to find something that Craig was interested in then found him books to meet this interest. A child who had never read became an avid reader with her help and encouragement. Being comfortable with reading took some time but Craig says it was worth the effort.

Craig had had an interest in learning a martial art for a long time. We had always put him off because we did not know how a child who was quite aggressive at times would go being involved in, as we saw it, an aggressive sport. Craig's younger brother did six weeks of self-defence as an interest group at school and he wanted to continue to learn. Could we let one child do something that we refused our other child? After much consideration we decided to allow Craig to try. There was a Taekwondo class close to home and they offered the first month of training for free so we thought we could let both the boys try it out for a month with no cost. We did not know it at the time but the boys were about to start learning with one of the best Taekwondo clubs, Russell Macarthur Taekwondo.

We spoke at length with the master instructor about Craig and he assured us that Craig would be looked after and treated with the same respect as any other student. The first few training sessions were very hard for me. I watched like an eagle from the side thinking that any minute something would go wrong. I am pleased to say that my worst fears were never realised. I quickly learned that the corner stone of the club was every person, regardless of rank or skill level, was treated the same and allowed to progress at their own rate. We had found a sport that had a social aspect, of being involved with a

club, but in which the only competition was with yourself and trying to do it better each time.

Craig loved the sport. He had to practice harder than some to learn the techniques but Taekwondo gave him confidence and improved his balance and coordination greatly.

The combination of finding a sport that he could do successfully and being in a school that he enjoyed meant that Craig felt much better in himself. Craig learned about goals in Taekwondo and education and found that the better he felt about himself, the more he seemed to be successful.

Craig made some good friends at Seton, close friends that he still has today. It was here, and in Taekwondo that he learned that he could succeed. Then it was time to move on again. Seton College offers a Vocational Educational Program for a very small number of students in Years 11 and 12. Unfortunately, they do not offer an academic program. Craig wanted to do enough Board subjects to qualify for an OP score so that meant changing schools.

Because of his age the decision of which school for years 11 and 12 was a joint one. In the end it was down to two schools so we made arrangements for Craig to spend two days at each school and the final decision was made by Craig. The decision Craig made was the school where he felt the safest.

During Grade 11 Craig was given a wonderful opportunity through Taekwondo. Three junior students with special needs were selected to go to the Junior World Taekwondo Champions in Korea. These students were part of the Australian team and were to join other special needs students from Korea and Jordan performing a technical demonstration at the opening ceremony. Some would say it was a matter of being in the right place at the right time that Craig was selected, but he was the one who had put himself there through four years of determination and hard work.

The students had two weeks of intensive training with some of the best Masters in Korea. They performed in front of thousands with a live television audience of millions. Craig loved his time in Korea and has been invited to return to continue his training. He hopes to be able to do this in the future.

Craig is in the final semester of Year 12. At times he still struggles with the social side of school and the workload. He hates exams he tries to make up for just scrapping by in them by spending hours and hours on his assignments to get good grades. Is he an OP 1 student? No. Will he get the OP he needs to get into the uni course he wants? Maybe.

Does he have short term and long term goals that he is working towards? Yes.

Craig is a preliminary Black Belt in Taekwondo. His short-term goal is to earn his 1st Dan either later this year or early next year. His long-term goal is to become an instructor and have his own club within the Russell Macarthur network.

Craig is focused on finishing school and achieving the best OP result that he can. Eventually he hopes to work with children who have special needs.

I know that Craig would acknowledge the assistance he has received from many people along the way. With hard work and endurance from Craig and many others the dark days seem to be a long time ago and there finally does seem to be light at the end of the tunnel!

Update:

February, 2006 – Craig received a good enough OP score to gain a place at Griffith University. He is currently studying for his Bachelor of Psychological Science.

June, 2006 – Craig successfully completed his grading and was awarded his 1st Dan Black Belt in Taekwondo. Although this goal took a little longer to achieve than originally planned and taught Craig that sometimes goals have to be revised. The good thing is if you stick with a goal and don't give up you eventually get there – some goals just that a little longer.