

NORTH SHORE JOURNAL

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Christine Mallory, Editor

Survivors' Story: Multiple Women Come Forward with claims of Sexual Abuse by Mayor Chris Swanson

By: Katee Rose

Devastating is the word to describe the story that was told on the steps of Two Harbors city hall building the evening of Monday, June 13th, just before the city council meeting. Nancy Christenson and one of her daughters, Melissa Giles, were originally slated to speak inside the building at the public's podium to address the local government and the public about their concerns with the mayor. Nancy and Melissa were joined in support on the steps of city hall by friends and old neighbors Jen (Marquardt) Brostrom and Steph Lee.

Days before they were scheduled to speak, the women received a notice stating that their concerns about the mayor were not "public business". Back in March, the mayor was permitted to have a minister and his church fellows attend a city council meeting to attest to his virtue. His supporters were able to address

the chamber and public about their personal opinions in defense of his honor. Is this a double standard, when the rules apply differently depending on who you are? Women are far too familiar with this dynamic. It is commonly one of the many hard truths and obstacles they face, to be treated differently based on their gender, not given an opportunity, not given a voice.

When denied access to speak at the council meeting, Nancy and Melissa decided to stand on the steps of city hall prior to the city council meeting to speak their truth. Supporters stood with them in support and solidarity, holding signs that read: *I stand with Survivors, Enough is Enough, We will not be silenced, and Explain yourself Mayor Chris Swanson.* It was remarkable to see such strength in this group of women standing together, side by

side, holding each other, encouraging each other, and supporting each other, to get through this difficult speech.

Some folks may think when there is a crime committed, such as the one Chris Swanson has been stated to have committed - of sexually assaulting little girls, that just those little girls are the victims. But that is wrong. These crimes affect every single one in the family of these children and will have everlasting effects of trauma on not only the survivors, but anyone who has ever, and will ever love them.

This speech was not just about this particular survivor and her family, but the multiple other young girls that have made claims of sexual assault at the childcare center run by the mayor's mother on Marks Drive in Silver Bay. This is where the hashtag for the effort in

Survivors' Story continued on page 13

Two Harbors Tae Kwon Do Gains First Black Belt Candidates

By Haley Searls

On May 17th, Eli Symons and Alicea Erickson tested for their brown-with-black-stripe belt, making them the first black belt candidates from Two Harbors Tae Kwon Do (THTKD).

Elements tested in this belt test of Chung Bong Tae Kwon Do are forms, kicking series, escrima sticks demonstration, sparring and an essay turned in prior to testing about their taekwondo journey up to this point.

Candidates Eli and Alicea first performed their first four Chung Bong forms, one form following the other. This was followed by them demonstrating the fifth Chung Bong form - their top form for this test.

Next, Eli and Alicea simultaneously performed a kicking series to demonstrate their ability to perform various kicks against feigned opponents.

For the escrima stick demonstration, each candidate had to perform a form they created. These demonstrations were performed individually. Escrima sticks are weapons used in Filipino martial arts.

The test concluded with sparring fellow taekwondo students.

When asked about her tae kwon do experience, 12 year old Alicea responded, "My biggest challenge was probably preparing for the test and I feel like I have grown in confidence and self-control a lot aaaaand [sic] what I like about tae kwon do is probably learning to play around with the weapons and I like sparring too."

I then asked 15 year old Eli about the belt test and his tae kwon do journey.

Me: What was the hardest part of the belt test?

Eli: For me, the hardest part of the belt test was trying to get the forms done correctly. When you're under pressure from the test it is hard not to forget a step.

Me: What was your favorite part of the test?

Eli: My favorite part of the test was learning a new form, and getting to do an escrima stick demonstration.



Eli Symons and Alicea Erickson tested for their brown-with-black-stripe belt at Two Harbors Tae Kwan Do. (Photo by Leann Symons)

Me: Why do you enjoy taekwondo?

Eli: I enjoy taekwondo because it is a great way to learn perseverance. It is a slow and steady process that builds a bit more each week. Taekwondo gives me confidence that I can defend both myself and others if necessary.

Sensei (teacher) Laura Erickson commented, "Martial arts is so amazing for building self-confidence. It is an individual sport in a group setting. It helps students to know themselves, and it is something that is easy to 'take breaks' from to participate in other sports. It is truly a blessing to me to be able to share this sport with others. It took a long break for me to realize that being taught was a gift, and the size of that gift depends on what I do with it."

Two Harbors Tae Kwon Do (THTKD) was founded in 2019 by second-degree black belt Sensei Laura Erickson. Since martial arts is about personal growth and finding your own journey, Laura views herself as still a student. Laura continues in her journey by sharing her

passion with others through training them in the art of tae kwon do.

The forms, referred to as katas, taught at THTKD are Chung Bong, which were developed in Minnesota by Jay Hyon. Chung Bong was popularized by schools such as Karate North, Twin Ports Martial Arts, and Karate Plus. Unfortunately, many of those schools have downsized or dissolved altogether. Disappointed that there were no Chung Bong schools in the Two Harbors area, Sensei Laura shared what happened next:

"By chance, I stopped [by the] Neighbor to Neighbor Thrift Store and discovered the space above [the store] could become available for teaching. It felt like a dream come true, and everything fell into place to make it happen. Our forms and history [are] very strong in Minnesota. The Chung Bong forms were developed here. I really wanted to see that legacy continue, and teaching has become one of the best parts of tae kwon do. I enjoy encouraging people towards their goals, and helping build confidence."

I asked Sensei Laura how she got involved in tae kwon do. She replied that she had been interested in martial arts from a young age, and some of her friends did martial arts. However, her mother discouraged her from signing up for the sport.

As an adult, Sensei Laura signed up for a cardio kickboxing class, thinking she was too old to start taekwondo. Later she saw that a martial arts studio offered a free month of taekwondo classes. She decided to sign up for and loved the class. She loves many things about taekwondo - the stress relief, being active, the "team feeling while progressing individually", and that there is always another goal to work towards.

People interested in Two Harbors Tae Kwon Do may contact Sensei Laura at 218-841-4474.

Congratulations Eli and Alicea for your accomplishment in tae kwon do. May you continue to learn much as you embark on your journey for your black belt.