



F I R S T



TANG SOO DO  
OF FREMONT

## THE SPIRIT OF INDIA



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Published: Spring 2009  
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Publisher; Master David Bell

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## The Spirit of India

Early morning; probably two or three a.m., the screams of the wild dogs rumble as they run the streets of Bangalore, maybe in search of food or maybe just to mark their territory. Later in the morning, awoken by the sunrise and the sound of horns from the compact cars, three wheel 'autos' and the two wheelers establishing their way through the ongoing traffic for the day. Even a cow will make its way into the street to establish a right to be. Watching a society of two, maybe even three different caste of people functioning with a sense of harmony; a society with every creature seeming to belong, giving the 'Spirit of India' it's own distinct flavor {sauce}, unlike the West where everything and everyone is so easily replaced, the sense of belonging to anything long lost!



2008 was the year for Mrs. Vandana Rao to be recognized as Sam Dan (3<sup>rd</sup> degree) Black Belt status; studying in Fremont, California, USA nearly seven years and in her own established school in Bangalore, India closing three years now. I was humble and felt most honored to have the privilege to sanction and bestow this honor, from the community of traditional Martial Artists onto a student who had grown under my leadership. Having the opportunity to visit first hand the community of this newly

developed academy, one already so deeply rich in a cultural sense and then touched by the influence of ones own philosophy, was almost surreal.

As teachers, advocating change for stronger and better lives; we are often not the most popular people in our communities, at least initially, having to be the ones to peel away the layers of clutter that complicate life. Eventually we are recognized for our sense of clarity, consistency and persistence, and are granted the respect that is needed to continue lending our energy to those on the path to a better way. To witness Mrs. Rao becoming that person for a community, the same as I feel as a person in a community when she found me; the same as I saw Master Leak when I found him, a feeling that ranks in the highest order one can see for his or her life! To see her as my student I am four folds humble... We accept the ranking in the martial arts; not just, for how high we can kick or just, how hard we can punch, nor just, how deadly we become as fighters, but to make room for the juniors on the path to have an example of a person of such character, that they will allow themselves to experience a level of humility it takes to continue peeling away those layers to that better life.

Mrs. Rao has laid a strong foundation for her academy and has the indomitable spirited support of her beautiful family. From the first day we met, her husband, Krishna has been by her side supporting her on this path of training in these arts, I would like to thank him for his unselfish role in such a warm invitation to be a part of their world. It was in those first days I believe he recognized the importance of every character in the family to be vested for it to be a strong unit. She is also to be commended for ensuring that no one be intimidated by her growth. I have always seen the success of the family be displayed in how well balanced the children become. Their daughter, Aparna; who has trained in this philosophy since age 4 and a half and now a black belt candidate, is an exemplary example of such well adjusted character. The beauty of that support extends on from her mom and dad, grandmother and a loving sister, all who was apart of such a special welcome for me!

(see The Spirit of India page 9)

### **A Strong Philosophy...A Gentle Spirit.....**

by Mrs. Vandana Rao

At first we had all these plans.....Kabini Jungle Lodges - 2 nights, Royal Orchid Brindavan Gardens - 1 night, a trip into the wonders of Indian Ayurveda at a holistic spa – 1 night.....a few palaces, some wild life, some history, a little shopping, a lot of food....and we thought that would be a good way to round off the Indian Experience for Master Bell. His visit to India was in the making for a little over a year and besides the hours of Tang Soo Do, Yoga and Chi Kung training that was on the cards we had a lot of ideas about how we could get Master Bell to soak up the Indian flavor in 2 weeks. From previous experience though I knew better than to book, or even block or make plans for my Instructor who is easily the most independent, instinctive and intuitive person I have ever known.

Master Bell arrived in Bangalore in the wee hours of 16<sup>th</sup> December 2008 and by the time we got home from the airport it was already 2AM. My husband and I expected for Master Bell to flop right into the bed in the guestroom after having been in transit for almost 40 hours....but contrary to what most people would call jet-lag - Master Bell was full of energy and after a little tour of our home he chose to spend the next 2 hours in the school getting a good feel for what was going to be home over the next two weeks.



After what was merely 3 hours of sleep like a true Master he was up at the school for a slew of classes. Over the next 6 days almost non-stop Master Bell met the Yoga Class, the morning and evening Tang Soo Do classes, observed, taught, trained, even conducted a Chi Kung Workshop and seriously went to work in each one of them. It was a series of proud moments for me. On the one hand here was my instructor about whom I have talked consistently over the years with my students and it felt so good to be able to have him here in person to make all the stories come alive. Similarly I was truly happy and somewhat proud to be able to share with my instructor the work that my students had put into their Yoga stretches, their Tang Soo Do forms and drills and even their Chi Kung training. In many ways it was a landmark week for me and it defined Master Bell's visit to India.

Here I was – age 37 wife, mother and 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree Black Belt. I have had a lifelong desire to learn martial arts and 11 years ago in Mumbai I took my first concrete step towards Karate – then moved to Fremont California and began Tang Soo Do training with Master Bell - was then bold enough to believe that maybe, just maybe I could even be a black belt someday – realized that dream in 2003 – became 2<sup>nd</sup> Dan in 2005 and then dared to start a little school in 2006. I have put my energy into my little school now for close to 3 years – have White Belts, Red Belts and every belt in between that I have trained from the beginning – even a little 10 year Blue Belt (my daughter Aparna) for safekeeping, the maintenance of whose techniques and standards are a big part of my responsibility, pride and joy. I have the unparalleled joy of getting to train and teach and share these amazing arts of Yoga, Martial Arts and Chi Kung with my daughter Aparna, husband Krishna and some wonderful members of my family.

With the constant and unwavering support of my husband and the endless positive energy and enthusiasm of our daughter I had been able to get started on a dream that was a long time in the making. And I was able to share fruits of this healthy life style not just with my immediate family but also my parents whose generosity can only be compared to Master Bell's own giving nature. Over the years Master Bell had made time for me, my training, Yoga, Chi Kung, free sparring and ideas of putting a school together.

To have trained with Master Bell for seven years, then to have come away from Fremont for almost three years now and then to have him stand right there in the middle of my little school was a strange and surreal feeling. It was in many ways like coming full circle. It took me back to Day One in 1999, when I entered the school in Fremont for the first time and carefully soaked up a whole new environment that was going to feel very much like home over the next seven years. And now December 2008 - here was Master Bell visiting India - half a world away from California...visiting a school that he had helped to dream up and develop and fine tune...and even though it was his first visit to the country and my school - it was as if he had always been here. Master Bell was looking into something that was actually his own in form and philosophy. And I was both happy and relieved to see that he felt the same way and felt so much at home.





It is hard for me to put into words just how unbelievable it felt to have all these great forces in my life come together for those two very special weeks in December. Here were all the most important people in my life – my family who have always supported me and wanted the very best for me come together and meet Master Bell – the source of all that I believe to be Honest, Simple, Strong and Spiritual.

I was destined to travel all the way to America – a country that most see as the Capitalist, Hedonistic, and Materialistic epicenter of the world - the other end of the world I was born into - to find my spiritual center. And here I am 10 plus years later coming almost full circle and having the privilege of inviting and hosting Master Bell, having him preside over my promotion ceremony and watch me in a newest avatar – as 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan Instructor!

How do I sum up Master Bell's visit to India?

I saw a person come from all the comforts of the western world and not complain – not one time - about the so called chaos of our world. Far from that, I saw him find an appreciation for how so many people could emerge from so many different languages and cultural backgrounds and move with ease and a sense of common belonging, all as one - as Indians amongst each other. We saw how differently the traffic works in Bangalore as compared to Fremont and instead of the usual despair I saw him observe that in spite of the lack of implementation of our traffic rules, people here had lesser road rage and fewer accidents as compared to our western counterparts.

Master Bell was going to have nothing to do with the Toyotas and Hondas that we could have organized to have him tour around city highlights....we took the infamous “auto” instead. Almost everywhere we went we hopped in and out of little Auto Rickshaws and rode around town in a truly Indian fashion.

We went not so much to sightseeing destinations but also went walking around the real streets of Bangalore where people actually lived. Instead of going to see shiny pieces of art and history we polish up to show foreigners....we went instead to the local horticultural society to buy up plants for the school and spent hours with the local clay pot vendor picking the perfect planter and worked on different project around the school. We went around town looking at the local Mochee (the street cobbler)...from the 'Pani-Puri' and 'Butta' (street food) vendors to selecting sandalwood and silks, a kurta (Indian shirt) here or a saree there to take back to Fremont. From his encounters with the world famous tigers and monkeys in Bannerghatta National Park to the notorious 'chakkas' (transvestites) on the street he was truly unflappable. I saw him demonstrate a level of patience with the endless queues for the Wildlife Safari to the clueless attendants at Cauvery Handicrafts not with a sense of tolerance but with a genuine sense of humor and acceptance. He spent every moment pondering and absorbing the underlying spirit of this ancient country that will - to most of the western world and to so many of us Indians even - appear beautiful in its history but embarrassing in its infrastructure, wonderful in its hospitality but absent in its concept of hygiene ...while the ironies and contrasts are countless I found that I didn't have to apologize for anything during his trip. Because far from finding fault he was in appreciation of India's every aspect, strength and enduring value.





I had an opportunity to look at my own life, my family, my school, community and even my own country through the eyes of true Master. As a 5<sup>th</sup> degree Master in Tang Soo Do, as Chi Kung and Yoga practitioner and teacher Master Bell today lives a truly yogic lifestyle...from his simple choices of food, clothes or entertainment...he refused to jump onto the tourist bandwagon carry a checklist and mark off - Taj Mahal , Goa, Kerala, as 'been there and done that'. His visit and his objectives were simpler and yet far more profound...as a teacher – he had some teaching to do. As my Instructor he had a promotion to take care of – as a school owner he had to look closely to fine tune what my own little school needed – as a guest in our home he was perfect in how he molded himself with the routines of our household and in meeting with my extended family he was sometimes quiet and sometimes interactive and always humble and giving – as a human being he was in sheer amazement at the opportunity to experience what we have to offer. I can only hope that with time I can learn and develop more of the skill, patience, humility and humor that I admire in Master Bell.

It would take more than a few pages to really capture what I felt and learnt and got from my time with my Instructor. I added to my list of 'Formulas' to make life simpler, I learnt some new stretches in Yoga, practiced Chi Kung for hours and watched with amazement at the new headway and growth in my own Instructor who has in his own training grown to some intuitive place that is easy to appreciate, sometimes hard to keep up with, but always something to reach for and aspire to grow towards. He is an excellent teacher and will always be...I enjoyed one very special training session where he spent time with my daughter teaching her free sparring, then there were mornings and evenings he spent with my sister and my husband doing some special yoga and chi kung training, and then there were some especially memorable late night candle light training sessions.

Master Bell left for California on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008 minutes before the New Year. After dropping him off at the airport it was it was time to usher in 2009...a new year and a new beginning. He had left Bangalore with many strong messages for me - personally and as an instructor. I began to process what I had learned from those countless hours of precious training and many, many hours of conversation. I am still counting the lessons, the blessing and haven't been able to complete any kind of list...it will probably will take more than a month or two, to fully comprehend and assimilate the impact of this visit and how it will shape the years to come

However, to conclude I do want to outline one important message he sent me away with all those years ago and once again reminded me of this time ...he said, "Don't start a school to keep up with the pace and growth of Bangalore but start a school to save Bangalore from when this pace and growth slows down".

(The Spirit of India from page 4)

The December 2008 trip to India also provided the opportunity and privilege to introduce two black belt native Indian students (certified instructors) that have trained with me at the Fremont, California academy, at different times. Mr. Thirumorthy Gunasekaran, Cho Dan (1<sup>st</sup> degree) Black Belt recently moved back to the city of Chennai, India, after his stay in America. The 20<sup>th</sup> day of December was nothing short of electrifying, with an afternoon of like minded conversation and a couple hours of a combination of advanced Chi Kung and Yoga training opened the door for a beautiful brother-sisterhood relationship in the Arts; further seasoning the 'Spirit of India' with this philosophy, again I am deeply humble.

## Memorable Days with Master David Bell

by Mr. Thirumoorthy Gunasekaran

Tang Soo Do is the well defined structure which brings peace, confidence, clarity, awareness, health, focus, balance, character, patience, humility etc in my day-to-day life. Mind always tries to create chaos in so many ways but the Tang Soo Do brings the order into my life. I'll always cherish those 2 years of my practice with Master David Bell in Fremont. As I'm working in IT industry, my nature of job is sitting in front of the computer most of the time. So the work was more challenging to my mind rather than body. That created imbalance between my mind and my body. With proper training at fixed schedule on the week, the mind becomes calm and I'm able to see that my life is as simple as it is. Gradually the outside things which affected my inner peace and clarity started to decrease. I begin to enjoy the inner freedom irrespective of the outside situation and outside people.

I came to India on Nov-29-2008 after my project was over in my company. My 2 year mission to US came to an end. Master David Bell was planning his visit to Bangalore on Dec-17-2008. Master is always graceful with full of energy and compassion. His body frame will represent his philosophy in total. After I returned back to India, I was busy with my sister's marriage for a week. Then I started to train on my own and I was pretty excited about Master David Bell's visit to India. So I was eagerly waiting for 2 weeks to meet him. I met him and Ms. Vandana Rao on Dec-20-2008 in Bangalore. I spent almost 6 hours with them on that day. We had Chi Kung practice and it sounded like I was in Fremont class. I was so peaceful and got fulfilled with lot of energy on that day. I can't forget that experience. Master was telling to practice every day to keep up the balance throughout the day. He mentioned that "Don't wait for the need to practice, just practice every day. Probably the need won't come at all". Then I started to train everyday and I started to notice that there is no need arising in me.





Chi Kung needs the mind to be completely inside the body. It requires high level of mental discipline. For the advanced level of Chi Kung, we need to be aware of meridian lines. Once the mind settles down, I'm able to sense the energy flow through the meridians in the body. Also, Chi Kung gives me higher level of relaxation. I'm able to appreciate small essential things like smooth functioning of heart, proper breathing, hungry in the stomach etc inside my body which normally I won't be able to note since the mind was busy.

During those 2 years in Fremont, Master was mentioning about Ms. Vandana Rao often. But when I met Ms. Vandana Rao in Bangalore, I really wondered about her character and the way she was handling things. She is just the living embodiment of what Master was describing to me earlier. I can sense the strong quality of a Master. Master David Bell used to say "Be Strong and Be Humble". That combination looks paradoxical to each other but it is a very beautiful combination. That will be the typical quality of a Master. Patience, Tolerance and Compassion will say all about the maturity of a person. I can sense these qualities from Ms. Rao. Ms. Rao has a beautiful setup of the Martial Arts School with all those charts like skeletal system, respiration system etc in the second floor of her home. She made that school so beautiful which I couldn't dream that in India. If you just step out of that school, you can see the busy Bangalore but inside the school it was very peaceful. She made her dream into reality which begins to help lot of people in Bangalore.

I learnt a lot from the black belt classes that happen on second Sunday of every month in Fremont. It will always take to higher level of practice. After attending Black Belt classes, there are lots of changes in my way of life. I started to see the clear picture of my life and the outside world. I learnt to live the way of Tang Soo Do which makes everything simple in my life. As I grow more and more, the relationship between me and the Master became more beautiful and deeper. He made me to be centered on myself. As

I begin to put my self first, I feel more secured and well balanced. All my relationships become smooth and clean. My family and friends begin to appreciate my character. I started sharing this philosophy with them. Each Black Belt student in the Fremont class displays a very Strong and Humble character. I saw the Honor and Dignity in each one of them. It was always nice to be in the eyes of the Master. But the specialty of Master David Bell is that he made me to own the things. So when I came back from US, I owned one complete set of Martial Art package which I can explore for the rest of my life. It gives me very strong foundation of character and practice from where I can start building my own empire. I can take each technique as deep as I need in my life.

### **“I Trained with the Master”**

#### **Vidya Balaji (Yoga Class)**

Master Bell's visit:

All our doubts about where Ms Rao got her poise, humility and patience from have been put to rest after Master David Bell spent his valuable time in two of our yoga classes. His simplicity and dedication were for all to see when he came in to class right after his long journey. He was a very approachable and friendly instructor at the same time commanding respect. The simplest of the stretches which look very easy were done with such unimaginable intensity. He would take a very simple warm up stretch and build up varying levels of intensity for it. In spite of his vast knowledge and experience, he answered each and every person's queries with details and patience.

#### **Nisha Kewalram (Yoga Class)**

The following is my experience of my yoga class with Master Bell:

It was great opportunity to be able to attend a class with such an experienced soulful teacher. His flexibility and tenacity in performing the asanas were really an inspiration. I was really touched by his humility and sense of humor. I'm grateful that he was able to share his knowledge with us and give us his precious time. I hope he is able to come back to India more often.

#### **Anjana Srinivasan (Sunday Morning Yoga Class)**

Session with Master Bell:

My session with Master Bell was probably one of the best 90 minutes of my life. I remember leaving the session feeling electrified, energized, exuberant and calm, all at the same time. Master Bell kept pushing further and further with each stretch. I believe I did more then I thought I was capable of doing, couldn't have done it alone. Thankfully, I managed to remember a couple of stretches and practice them when I get time. I hope I get an opportunity to have a session like that again!

#### **Annette Ehrnsperger (White Belt Tang Soo Do – Morning Class)**

When I met Master Bell for the first time in Bangalore, I had heard a lot about him and his training. Given previous martial arts experience with a range of different teachers and styles, I had a certain general picture in mind. So, what

surprised me most was his humility. He is a master, an advanced black belt, a teacher and a person of respect. But nevertheless he showed the utmost humility when he came to our class. He was very gentle, struggling for words, speaking in a low voice. Rather waiting for us to speak than making a big presentation himself. Maybe that comes from being self confident and having found a center within.

**Regina Tay (Orange Stripe - Tang Soo Do – Morning Class, Chi Kung)**

Master Bell's visit to Bangalore Tang Soo Do was a brief but impressionable one for me. He reminds me of the ancient Japanese Zen master, who expresses his thought with very little words, but always just enough. "What is it about your instructor Ms Rao that you admired the most?" Master Bell casually asked all of us. It is interesting to know that every one of us see something in Ms Rao that we strive for ourselves. For me, it is her calm and serenity that convinced me about Tang Soo Do initially despite knowing nothing about the martial art. Then he paused and continued to state as a matter of fact "Discipline is the answer to all these qualities. In fact, discipline shall make your life easier and simpler." "Huh?" I was puzzled by his comment and in additionally, I wasn't convinced. How can Master Bell be so certain to state that all it takes is discipline? Although I fought with his statement in my head, I kept it at the back of my mind.

In the next meeting, to his question about how many of us practice 'Qi Gong' regularly? Many of us gave him what we thought were genuine reasons as to how difficult it was to get into the practice and how we could not feel anything even when we try. To my surprise, Master Bell simply said, "Just do it, don't think!" Yet another simple solution to what we thought was a huge challenge. I thought to myself, "Alright, I will try that; it will make my life easier anyway."

Then something magical happen ever since I "Just do it, don't think," practicing becomes easier and less a task! The amazing thing is that I realize I begin to speak slower too. It is not that I consciously tell myself to count to 100 before I speak, like I used to although always avail. It simply just happens. Listening becomes easier with breathing. Then, I remember once again what Master Bell shared with us on our last session of 'Qi Gong with him. "Remember how it feels like for the rest of your day."

I am very grateful for the opportunity to learn Tang Soo Do with Ms Rao and very grateful that I have such a great mentor and instructor. I am also very grateful that she has introduced Master Bell to all of us. The short session with Master Bell has proved to be one of the turning points for me. I will always treasure the short but powerful session with Master Bell.

**NEERJA PANT (Green Belt - Tang Soo Do – evening class and Chi Kung)**  
My Learning's from Master David Bell's Tang Soo Do and Chi Kung class:

The biggest takeaway for me from Master David Bell's is that each class is significant and what I take away from it is up to me. From what master David bell said, my understanding is that the learning available in a class is like a river and it is up to us as students how much we take out of it.

One's ultimate technique is a result of absorption of the fundamentals that one learns right at the beginning therefore it becomes extremely critical to keep revisiting the basics.

Master Bell explained the relevance of having a focal point which in his case was the eye of an eagle in meditation as a technique. I find this technique very useful when my thoughts wander during meditation...

In Master David Bell's class the five basic learning's which I got are

- 1) To be proud of my achievements
- 2) To respect, value and be confident of my belt and my position
- 3) A student's thirst for knowledge must be never ending. In master Bell's words "be thirsty for more".
- 4) Never overdo anything ego. Don't take such a long stance that you fall (Keep everything in balance)
- 5) The quality that you admire in your instructor the most is the one that you will imbibe the fastest

For a student there is a clear need to focus ones mind on every aspect of the body, be it the movement of the hands and feet, breathing technique, getting into different stance etc.

The Chi Kung class left me with one significant piece of information that one should not practice Chi Kung to feel something always. Whatever one feels or does not feel at any given point of time is the best because as master David Bell said "that's your energy so be happy and keep practicing". Last but not the least was the advise that he gave about a positive frame of mind keeping negative thoughts away would help in practicing Chi Kung.

While these messages have registered in my mind their implementation would be a continuous process for me.

### **Ms. Menaka Ranganath (Green Stripe - Tang Soo Do- morning class, Yoga and Chi Kung)**

"Master David Bell"

"His Eyes" -- Indefinite depth, Calm and Peaceful like an ocean, Radiant and bright like a rising sun that gives life, striking rays of energy.....

"His Posture" -- Is like an ancient historical monument, he carries history with him, his aura speaks of consolidate information and yet he is so humble.....

"His Voice"- Sounds like symphony, an absolute harmony of body, mind and soul.....

My vision about martial arts has totally changed since I met him, he has brought clarity in my mind by uttering few words in the class, he said, today, we are not in the world of literally, physical fight, we are in the world where we are challenged constantly, mentally, physically and emotionally.

"Discipline" is the mantra, key to unlock everything, key to the world of peace, key to the world of good health, key to love thyself, key to compassion.....

He is a solid standing compact example of what he preaches....

I feel lucky.....

**Aparna Krishna (Blue Belt Tang Soo Do. Age 10)**

### **Master Bell's Trip to India**

When Master Bell came to India it was really great because I improved and learnt many things. I improved not only my technique, but also my discipline. One part which I really enjoyed was learning new Chi Kung patterns which were really relaxing and I could also feel the tingling at the tips of my fingers as Master Bell described. I also enjoyed having an amazing sparring lesson with him, where I learnt a new way of fighting, rather than what I usually do. I paid good attention and appreciated all the slight details he gave me during my forms, Chi Kung and Yoga. I also had a great time during one night session of Chi Kung and Yoga, when we trained in the school with only candles as our source of light. I remember all these things not only for the memory, but for knowing everything Master Bell told me, during each of them. I take all these tips everyday and apply them to everything I do. I also now make a much more conscious effort to have more balance between the mind, body and spirit.

This was just a little bit of how much I took in and learnt during Master Bell's visit to India.

Tang Soo!





(concluding The Spirit of India)

*I hope my visit to the community and the city of Bangalore gave Mrs. Rao comfort and the renewed confidence in the path she has chosen; as teacher, to continue sharing this philosophy on her road to 'True Master'. Once again I have added to a lifetime of unbelievably special memories, and I will always remain a student of life!*

*Master David Bell*