

Silk Road Taekwondo Quest - Part IV (Bukhara, Uzbekistan)

Umida & Furkat's Tae Kwon Do - Love in Action

With correspondent Gregory Brundage

February 4, 2016

Due to tight timelines, I'd only spent one day in Samarkand and arrived at Bukhara in the mid-afternoon. The first thing I did after getting off the train was call "Umida," as she'd been recommended by Nelli, Uzbekistan ITF President Master Han's assistant in Tashkent. Umida speaks a little English, but she passed me over to Furkat, her husband of four years. He in turn offered to pick me up at my hotel about an hour later. Furkat showed up right on time. He asked me what I wanted to do. My first thought, of course, was Tae Kwon Do! This ancient city of Bukhara Uzbekistan has been here for a few thousand years at least and would wait until tomorrow. I didn't want a tour guide. I wanted Tae Kwon Do brothers and sisters all part of this world-wide Tae Kwon Do family I'm still getting to know, despite having started Tae Kwon Do in the US in 1969 and despite having explored South America in the 70s, South Asia in the early 2000s, South Korea for seven years, Beijing for seven years and various places in Central Asia.

So he drove us to one of his and his wife's clubs located in a large public school. When we arrived and went inside, I was a bit surprised at the size of the class, as there were at least 50 students training hard. Most were children, but there were also a few adults participating and several coaches helping keep everyone's technique clean and smart. The gym was obviously quite old, maybe 30 years at least, and the floor was that soft old wood that is just great for sports.



Umida--Tae Kwon Do superstar--ITF World and Asian Champion, many times over



At first I sat down with Farkat, who told me a bit about his wife, Umida's, competition career. In 2004 she won the ITF World Championships in Spain. Then in 2006 she won the ITF World Championships again in Malaysia, and in 2009 she won a silver medal in the World Championships in Kyrgyzstan. She was Asian champion five times. Later on in an interview I found out she started Tae Kwon Do training in that very same gym when she was ten years old. I asked her what got her going, and she said she saw it and immediately knew this was for her. Her first teacher was Igor Badaliyan, 5th dan, who is now back in Russia, and his teacher was Nikolay Galishnikov, 5th dan. Umida teaches six days a week, around six hours per day.

Also at that first interview I found out that less than half or so of the students actually pay for classes, as they make a lot of exceptions to provide instruction to students that have the desire to learn. I also learned that the ITF pays about half their salary and tuition fees cover the

rest. Tuition fees are pretty low, I think, so I've got the feeling they're not getting rich by any means, but they love what they do. They teach the kids with passion, discipline and love, so it seems like they have a pretty good life. They also have a baby

at home, who, luckily, is cared for by Grandma when they're teaching. Furkat is also an experienced martial artist with a diverse background and an instructor at some other schools, in addition to being a full-time student.

As usual, I volunteered to lead the class in stretching for 15 minutes or so, plus a warmup with few kicks. Then I went to the back of the class to participate Umida's class. One shouldn't visit any martial arts class carrying a full cup.

Watching her teach for even a few minutes, it was obvious Umida has extraordinary Tae Kwon Do technique and a classic, straightforward Tae Kwon Do teaching style. After about 20 minutes of large group work we broke into pairs and I practiced some kick combinations with my partner holding a clapper pad. About 30 minutes later the students started light sparring and I asked one of the adult black belts if he'd be willing to do some slow-motion sparring with me. He wasn't really familiar with that, but he agreed. I also asked him to break it up so I could just do attacks for a couple of minutes, then he just do attacks for a couple of minutes. This simplified the sparring process for me as I get the chance to see what kinds of defenses and attacks he's likely to use, without the "heat" of battle.

We traded off and on attack and defense for about half an hour, and all I can say is: Wow! That guy was great. Lucky for me, I'd asked for slow motion because I'm pretty sure he could have wiped the floor with me if he'd wanted. Instead, he demonstrated good-natured control and it was really, really fun. I also asked him to show me his winning tournament combinations,



and man, that guy's got great kicks, especially his tornado kicks that seemed to break the speed of light. And he was just one of Umida's many extremely talented students.

Afterwards I went to dinner with Umida and Furkat. They took

me to a great restaurant called Caravan, where we had Shashlik (one of Uzbekistan's top three national dishes), nan (great flat bread known all around Asia), and several different ultra-delicious salads. We traded stories about this and that.

I'm always interested in Tae Kwon Do love stories, and theirs was a bit unusual. Furkat told me this story: "We met in a hip hop dance club in 2011. Her brother was always going, and this time she came with him. I saw her . . . It was a Christmas party and all the dancers in the class played a game. There were four girls and four guys. One guy chooses one girl. If she likes, she can kiss the guy or she can hit him in the face."

Furkat stopped his story for a moment with a smile on his face. So I stammered: "Yes, and what?"

"Oh, she kicked me in the face so hard! After that I asked her, 'Why didn't you choose me



for a kiss?’ She answered, ‘All the other girls wanted to kiss you, so I thought a kick was better!’” We all laughed uproariously. No fiction can beat real life for color, imagination, and high impact. That will go at the top of my list for truly romantic Tae Kwon Do love stories.

Furkat went on: “She is great for me because we both really love sports. In the morning she wakes up and lights a candle. Then she puts it out using kicks, again and again and again. Then she wakes me up and says, ‘Come on, let’s train!’”

I also found out the Tae Kwon Do schools of Umida and Fukat are only one of four main ITF branches in Bukhara. Furkat also told me some background information about different cities and languages in Uzbekistan. For example, I found out he and Umida usually speak Tajik language with each other. In Samarkand and Bukhara about 80% of the people speak Tajik while everybody speaks Uzbek language. In Bukhara about 80% of the people also speak Russian, he said. He told me about three cities in Uzbekistan named Fergana, Andijan and Namangan that are close to each other and are part of an autonomous region. He said they mostly speak Turkish and Uzbek. Tajik, I found out, is a huge language around the region, which has historically had something of a moving mosaic of national borders. For example, I found out back in the days of the USSR, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan were all part of one country called ‘Turkistan’ and Tashkent was the capita.l

Not long after this Furkat was ever so kind again to give me a ride back to my hotel, and on the way we made plans for a tour of this fabulous ancient city tomorrow.

February 5, 2016

I woke early as usual and had the complimentary breakfast at the small hotel where I’m staying right on the edge of the old city. Then I started typing notes before my 11:30 appointment with Furkat and Umida.

My hotel’s location was just right, so we headed off on foot... Simply put no words or even photos can hope to do justice to this

wondrous Silk Road city preserved amazingly well through the two-plus millennia. Even Genghis Khan left parts intact, so impressed was he by the awesome majesty and beauty.

I’ll only mention a couple of sights. Our first, ironically, was a modern iron statue of Nasridin Afandi riding a donkey, or perhaps an ass.

(I’m not sure which.) He, Furkat told me, was an Uzbek mix of Charlie Chaplin and Robin Hood—great stories there. Again, there were/

are so many mind-boggling huge and beautiful places I can’t possibly describe them. But one

place in particular reminded me of a novel I had read by James Michener called

The Source. This was a story about an archeological dig and the people from the different historical eras as the dig

dug deeper and deeper, backwards through preceding civilizations all in one spot. Well, the Magoki-Attari Mosque in Bukhara would be one

great place for such stories to be told because in the artwork on, and archeological digs underneath, this ancient mosque have been found strong evidence of Zoroastrian religion, fire worshipping, Buddhism and Islam. Ah, if walls could talk! With archeology, history and even a little imagination, the ancient stories can indeed come alive again. Walking through ancient city is time traveling through a series of ages of great enlightenment and remarkable progress in education, arts, sciences, and in the cases of ancient bath houses, health and some degree of healthy pleasure as massage is often part of the Turkic hot bath experience.

At around 4:00 Furkat and Umida had to leave for class, whereas I had to type notes and upload over 400 pictures to a mailbox.



February 6, 2016

Woke early as usual with plans to visit the Citadel of the Art, the museum therein, and Zimdan, the medieval Amir's gruesome prison behind the Citadel, and make one more visit to Umida's Tae Kwon Do school for a last class.

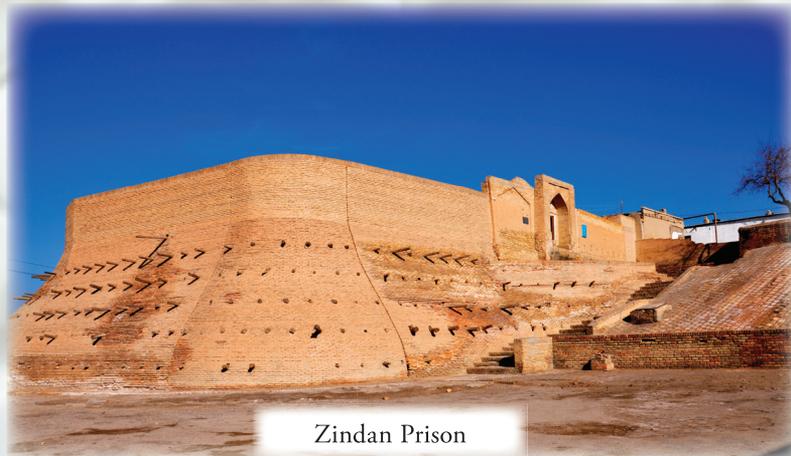
Arriving at the ancient castle of the Ark, I felt dwarfed by its magnanimity. The sheer size, scope, gravity and extreme history—the marvelous forces leading to the original construction of a splendid palace and the need to fortify it, the grandeur of its interior life over some 2,000 years and its near total destruction in 1920 from the Red army's bombardment were mind boggling.

After buying a ticket, I was introduced to the free English-speaking guide named "Dilafruz" (or something like that). She first led me up through the Chief Minister's quarters, explaining how in traditional culture there were inner and outer sections of a house and the reasons for this, how there were winter and summer quarters situated on north and south ends of the courtyard to take advantage of and refuge from the sunshine, the different materials used in the construction of those different quarters, and so on. I also found out the Citadel of the Ark has its own full-time master historian who is an expert in every pebble, every brushstroke of every painting, the relationships of major figures that would have occupied the Citadel, the rituals that took place therein, and so on.

Suitably impressed, she took me through the exhibits that are organized along the timelines of the different major historical eras of Uzbek history. There were convenient maps explaining the cultural/tribal/national border areas, and she explained how changes occurred resulting in major historical shifts from the Bronze Age to the 20th Century.

Near the end of the tour Furkat and Umida appeared, and we then went around behind

the Citadel of the Ark to "Zindan," the ancient prison of the Emirs. OMG! Sufficient to say, nobody would ever want to be a prisoner there. True, the debtor's cell didn't look too hideous, but the BUG ROOM definitely was. And, of



Zindan Prison

course there were all kinds of photos, as well as manacles, gruesome whips and so on.

After that we drove back to the same Tae Kwon Do school as a couple of nights earlier and I photographed all parts of the class. As the evening was drawing to a close, Furkat and Umida squared off for a big fight. It was excellent! Couples of the world should all take Tae Kwon Do because there is no better bonding. Though they both displayed supreme control, both clearly wanted to win. True, Furkat has excellent technique, is bigger and stronger, but Umida has more international competition experience and more than a few tricks up her sleeves! Anyway, I got some great photos, and after dinner I hated to say goodbye. They gave me a couple of gifts too, and I went back to my hotel for an early sleep so as to get up early to get to the Farab border crossing with Turkmenistan before the rush. Honestly, though, everyone here in Bukhara was so nice, the city so amazing and beautiful, I didn't want to leave. This would be a good home, I thought – I will miss this place and these people. Ah! That's the real life of a martial arts wanderer. But tomorrow is another day! **TKD**

Gregory Brundage started TKD under 6th dan Mr. Lee at the YMCA in Milwaukee in 1969. Since then he's trained in Europe, South America, and several Asian nations, including South Korea for seven years. He also trains in several other martial arts. He is currently a high school teacher in Beijing, still practices TKD, and competes in triathlons.