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Wharton helps Mihdi's fight for life

Bermuda's own, world-renowned, Hall of Fame Martial Artist Master Al Wharton has thrown his support behind little Mihdi Brock's fight for life. Master Wharton's Martial Arts Festival which runs from November 16 to 19 will raise funds for the little Bermudian fighter at the event and help sponsor Mihdi's training abroad. Master Wharton, a Martial Artist for over 40 years, recognizes a fighter when he sees one. The Academy's motto, "Energy and Persistence will Conquer all things" certainly applies to Mihdi. The 9-year-old has been in a fight for his life since he was in his mother's womb. Ten years later he continues his fight under daily care by internationally respected physician and Martial Arts Master Dr. Baolin Wu.

Mihdi has a treatment protocol that is all encompassing. The whole person is being addressed with herbs three times a day every day, and acupuncture, physical adjustments, and Qi Gong treatments five times a week. In addition to this, Mihdi's father, also a Martial Artist and student of Master Wharton for over twenty years, has studied integrated medicine in California for three years in an effort to support his son's fight for life. He assists by holding Mihdi in traction every ten minutes, and helping him on the parallel bars as well as crawling twice a day. The care and support don't end there as Mihdi, like all children his age, needs balanced nutrition. So Marvin prepares meals three times a day, and even takes hot meals to Mihdi for lunch. In Chinese medicine a cold or what we in the West see as a virus, in the absence of bacterial infection, can be combated with hot food in addition to herbs and keeping warm. Mihdi has recently developed asthma and uses an Albuterol inhaler prescribed by his Western pediatrician. His father is currently assisting him with this puffer during the night and during the day when needed. When Mihdi gets the timing down, he will be able to use it on his own. Marvin expects that won't be long as he is eagerly learning to coordinate his breathing with applying the spray.

For most of us in the West, Mihdi's treatment is considered an alternative form of medicine, but for many in the world, in particular China and other Asian countries such as Japan and Korea, it is the primary medical modality that has been used for thousands of years and recently complemented with Western allopathic medicine. Marvin was able to see the advantage of these medical modalities working side by side to help his son and knew he needed to learn more and began studying at the China International Medical University in Los Angeles. As Mihdi's physical therapy demands increased and the other requirements for his support and care became more challenging, Marvin had to make another life changing decision; with less than two years to go before finishing it was either continue with his medical school studies or set those aside to focus on Mihdi. For Marvin, that wasn't a difficult choice. He made a similar decision in 1996 when he decided to stay in British Columbia, Canada and help his wife Claire by taking care of his three daughters and the domestic duties in order that she might have complete bed rest in an effort to go full term with her pregnancy with Mihdi.

Marvin had built a successful insurance practice here in Bermuda where for over thirty years he insured many of the Island's residents and businesses. When it was determined his wife required complete bed rest with soft music and no distractions with family or the household, Marvin gave his attention to his family. It has continued for soon after Mihdi was born he was failing to thrive, and was diagnosed with hydrocephalus; then, at six months of age he had to undergo heart surgery. The complications thereafter with the progressive curvature of his spine have resulted in continued care and treatment. Ironically, insurance for the cost of all of this was not available from the business that Marvin had built over the years, but instead came from the government of British Columbia, Canada and a private coverage they obtained while in Claire's home state of New Hampshire. This all helped along the journey with the tremendous cost associated with saving this child's life. However, it was the people and businesses of Bermuda that have been the backbone in this effort; without this spine of support, Mihdi would not be alive today.

Marvin says that his years of martial arts training and exposure to Asian culture were the keys to the current heavy reliance on Chinese and Taoist Medicine in treating Mihdi. He continues by saying that "both Claire and I were born and raised in Western society, Bermuda and America, so our whole concept and thinking of and about medicine was Western. After consulting with the best doctors at British Columbia Children's Hospital, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, Cleveland Clinic, John Hopkins and Boston Children's, we decided Mihdi at two and a half years of age should not endure repeated surgeries for excess fluid on his brain and the Kyphoscoliosis that was progressing at two degrees a month." The prognosis of the top surgeon at Boston Children's was eye opening and precipitated Marvin telling him, "It's my turn now. I'll find a way. I studied Chinese medicine for a while in Canada, and during my years of training in the martial arts I have seen some amazing feats. It's time to take a look at what Asian medicine can do to help this little boy."

Marvin says that while studying with Master Al he saw first hand the amazing examples of the power of Qi (Chi). He saw practitioners of Uechi Ryu Karate, which he studied under Master Wharton, break baseball bats and two by fours with their bare arms and legs. Later he was exposed to the feats of the Chinese acrobats. So, he decided that there was little alternative, and to pursue Asian medicine for Mihdi's fast deteriorating condition. The details the journey that has following will be told in books currently being penned by both of Mihdi's parents.

Mihdi is clearly a fighter and he is inspiring Master Wharton to lend his school's support to this international effort and the fight of this little Martial Artist. Mihdi is training in Tae Kwon Do, a Korean system with emphasis on lower body stretching and high kicks. This is a prescription of Dr. Wu to address the curvature in Mihdi's lower spine. There are many other benefits of this martial arts study for Mihdi. Many of these are shared by Master Wharton at the Bermuda Arts and Fitness Academy and on it's website www.bermudaafa.com. He says students are expected to conduct themselves with dignity and humility, and to develop a style of life characterized by respect, courtesy, cleanliness, responsibility, integrity, self-discipline, loyalty, unconditional self-esteem, determination, perseverance, and self-mastery. These are some of the additional benefits of Mihdi's martial training in Tae Kwon Do.

Master Ahn, Mihdi's Tae Kwon Do instructor, says self-improvement through discipline benefits the whole of life. Mihdi began his study of Tae Kwon Do with the Taoist approach of a little at a time, one day a week. Now he is up to three days a week. This combined with swim class once or twice a week all work to support his spine and lungs. Doctors in New England warned Marvin and Claire of their fears that Mihdi would probably die of lung complications, such as pneumonia, resulting from the progressive thorax spinal curving before he was ten years old. Mihdi will celebrate his tenth birthday on Bermuda Day 2007. The new development of asthma brings up the early fears of those doctors for Marvin; however, at this point, Mihdi looks far from a kid in his last days. He continues to fight a strong fight. With this new help from Master Wharton and the Bermuda Arts and Fitness Academy, and hopefully from the rest of Bermuda joining them through the upcoming Martial Arts Festival, Mihdi will have the support to continue the fight of his life.

Besides Marvin's experience in the martial arts, fighting is not new to other members of Mihdi's family. Mihdi's sister Teresa Perozzi is Bermuda's own current NABC World Champion. In addition, his grand father Farrel Quinlan was the AAU champion at Notre Dame in the 40's, and his Uncle Maxwell Brock was known throughout the Island as a skilled boxer. Several of Mihdi's cousins are accomplished martial artists including Dr. Malcolm Brock and Freedom Burrows.

The fundraising next week will also bolster Brock in his persistent efforts to raise funds to do everything he can to give his little boy a chance to thrive and contribute to Bermuda and the rest of the world with all he is learning in the process of his fight to live. Brock says he is also emboldened in this endeavour by the practice of Qi Gong himself. He began his Qi Gong study with Master Al in the 90's, and was a student of Sifu Share K. Lew of San Diego in the early days of looking for a way to keep Mihdi alive. Now Brock is a student of Mihdi's Doctor Wu. A basic part of his study is Zhuan Zuan (Standing Like a Tree). Brock says this training helps him in many ways; one of which is to have the calmness and the fortitude to be there for his son constantly.

Brock says that the mandate of The Mihdi Joon Fund is to share the benefits of these years of research and study with Bermuda and the world. He hopes Mihdi will continue in this effort.