

The Vital Force

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Justin Gave Thanks

More 20th Century Psalms (from the subhead of “the personal”) BY JUSTIN STONE

I only once met Roshi Suzuki, the Zen Master who helped found Tassajara, but was deeply impressed. It is a difficult drive up to Tassajara in the winter and I had an old car. After speaking with me for a while in Japanese, in the mistaken impression I was a well-known scholar he was expecting from Kyoto, Roshi invited me to share a Japanese *ofuro* (hot bath in a wooden tub) with him. Looking hesitantly at the fading sun as the day drew to a close, I replied that I had better start back while there was still some sunlight to see by. “The moon gives light, too,” was his soft answer.

~ ~ ~

One of my T'ai Chi Chih teachers brought some students to see me on the Monterey Peninsula. We talked of this and that, and then one of the students asked me about reincarnation (a misleading word).

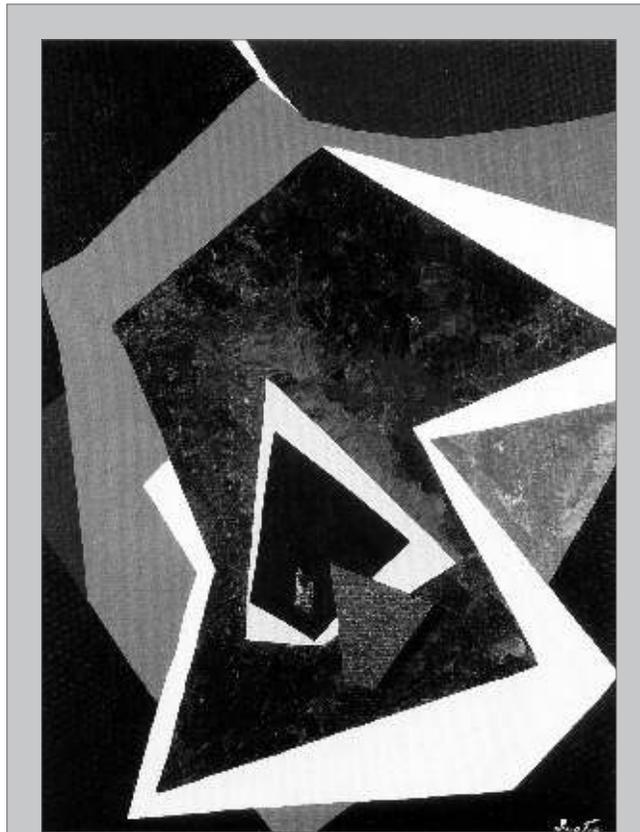
“What do you mean by reincarnation?” I asked. “What is it that reincarnates? That tree in the garden is shedding leaves, which is natural in autumn. But those leaves will return next spring. Is that what you mean?”

“The leaves that come in the springtime will not be the same leaves,” the student protested.

“Why identify with the leaves?” I asked. “Why not identify with the tree?”

~ ~ ~

Lynette Wooliver, a profound Christian Scientist, is one of the most spiritually advanced people I have known. She once remarked to me that she saw her daughters as two nice girls who occasionally



“Beyond Symmetry,” one of Justin’s favorite paintings, is available for purchase (see gkpub.com/justins-paintings) to support the work of Good Karma Publishing and The Vital Force. It also appears in his lush monograph, “Tentatively Forever,” available from Good Karma Publishing.

visited the house. When the home she and her husband were building in Santa Fe tragically burned to the ground just before completion, she told me that they had watched the fire with interest for a while, then went home to enjoy a night’s sleep. As her mother was dying, she remarked to Lynette on the beauty of the flowers in a vase by her bedside, and Lynette answered: “I picked them myself in the garden.”

One time, in Laurel Canyon, Los Angeles, Lynette and some friends were eating lunch with me at a sidewalk cafe owned by an Austrian man. For dessert he brought us each a rich Sacher-torte from Vienna, so good one always wants a second. As I was bringing my fork to my mouth with the first succulent piece, salivating in anticipation of this tasty morsel, Lynette suddenly asked: “Can we do without this?”

I immediately put my fork down and pushed the plate away, and she did the same. Seeing this, she remarked: “Then we might as well eat it” – which we proceeded to do with gusto. I

believe the lesson was completely lost on her friends, but it is true that we can only enjoy that which we can do without.

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It’s here: the newly re-launched website. Improvements include:

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- More dedicated conference links, pages and post-conference content
- Easier-to-find (and share) blog posts
- Separate tab for “Find a Teacher”
- Liberal use of Justin Stone’s quotations from most of his books
- Up-to-date software
- Easier and faster content updating

WITH GRATITUDE. KIM GRANT,
ALBUQUERQUE, NM



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Submission Guidelines

Please send articles as Word documents, electronically, to tcc@kimgrant.com. If possible, please tailor your submission to a particular section; the newsletter will hang together better that way. A 1/4 page in this newsletter runs about 200 words; a 1/2 page is 400 words. We are always in need of photos and artwork. Please send high resolution jpgs, which the Editor will crop and edit. If you have 10-12 pieces of related artwork – calligraphy, drawings, photographs, or something that will reproduce well in B/W – please submit them for consideration in an entire issue. *The Vital Force* reserves the right to edit submission for length and clarity.

Web Site Updates

The on-line database (for www.taichichih.org) will be updated within a week of the following deadlines:
January 15, March 1, April 15, June 1, July 15, September 1, October 15, & December 1.

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Deadline: Oct 1
Publication Date: Mid-Nov

In honor of Justin's birthday on 20 November, please share a story about meeting him – or a particular lesson you've integrated from a piece of his writing.

Deadline: Jan 1
Publication Date: Mid-Feb
To Be Decided.

Deadline: April 1
Publication Date: Mid-Aug
To Be Decided.

Deadline: July 1
Publication Date: Mid-Aug
To Be Decided.

We Are All Healers

By JENETH RUNDLE, OXNARD, CALIFORNIA

My brother Patrick was terminally ill with multiple myeloma. He needed an outside donor for a stem cell transplant. I was a genetic match. If he could just get well enough for the transplant of my stem cells into his marrow, and survive the procedure, he would be cured.

One day during my personal T'ai Chi Chih practice it came to me: the *Chi* circulating in my body, with a certain vibration in my stem cells, not only was nourishing and healing me with the Vital Force every second of the day, but could also heal somebody else – my brother. I realized in the most profound way, that I could share the *Chi*, and that I was, in that sense, a healer. I suddenly understood that each of us (whether we recognize it or not) share in this gift of healing.

I became an accredited TCC teacher in November of 2013 and began teaching classes in January of 2014. The day after I had this realization I was teaching a class. It was the fifth week of teaching my first group of students. In the middle of class two women entered the studio. The first woman used arm braces like the ones I had seen kids use with polio. The second woman appeared physically strong, and although she was nicely dressed and groomed, she had the look of someone who had seen very hard times.

I asked how I could help. The woman with the braces wanted to buy a yoga gift certificate for her husband and asked to sit quietly during the rest of the lesson. She found being in our presence during the movements and surrounded by the energy made her feel wonderful and relaxed. She sat on the carpet and meditated for the duration of the class. Afterward she shared how wonderful it was to be in the presence of such beautiful and healing energy and thanked us. As she remained seated on the floor I noticed how thoughtfully she assisted one of the students, who just happened to be using a walker, get into her shoes.

Once everyone departed we took care of the gift certificate and I asked her about her legs. As a long time yoga teacher I tend to see physical disabilities and injuries as things to be dealt with – and so I can be a little bold in my inquiry. She didn't seem to mind, explaining that she became disabled in the military, and that usually she is in a wheelchair. Her sister (her companion today) had become her primary caregiver, and was willing and able to provide the extra support she needed for balance, so now, she could spend more time out of the chair and in her arm braces. She said, "I love my sister, she is my angel."



She said, "It really doesn't matter what happened. This is my body now. I accept this completely. I do everything I want to in life except two things; rock climbing and sky diving, and I can live with that. I hike, I ride a motorcycle, I do everything I want to do. I love my life. I'm happy."

Her sharing about how she felt about her body, her acceptance of her circumstances, and this being her life, were things I really needed to hear. **She was not saying she was happy in spite of her circumstances.**

She was saying, "This is my body. This is my life, and I love my life!" I felt a healing take place in me as I felt the inclusiveness of these ideas: **We have one body, we have one life, no rejection, no exclusion.** We can have the whole of life in whatever body we have right now. Someone very close to me needed to discover this for himself and I needed to know it was possible. Now I had a true story with a message that could help, one that could heal.

She thanked me for letting her experience the class. We spoke about the practice and the *Chi*, especially about its healing qualities. I invited her to return and attend class any time. I said, "We are all healers." To which she replied "I've never thought of myself that way. Now you are a teacher of yoga and this beautiful *Chi* practice. I can say that about you, you are a healer. And my sister, she too is a healer. I don't know where I would be without the inspiration she has provided, turning her life around and coming to help me. She's my angel." Her sister then said, "But you inspire me. You have helped me to see the beauty in life and discover my own strength in this life. How can you not see that you too are a healer?" and I said, "What you shared with me how you feel about your body, your life and your joy, is exactly what I needed to hear today. So I, too, say, you are a healer."

And I thought: her gift of healing will continue as I work at delivering the message of her example to all of my students who need to hear it, and to the one special person I had on my mind that day.

Sadly, my brother died before receiving my stem cells. And so, I didn't get to share the *Chi* in the way we had all hoped. But I did get to come to the realization that it is absolutely true: in each of our bodies, in each of our lives, living in and with the *Chi*, we are all healers. And that healed me.

*we can have the
whole of life in
whatever body we
have right now*

Mental Effects Of TCC: Priceless Treasure

BY LINDA BRAGA, CASTRO VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

Many who teach T'ai Chi Chih focus on the powerful effects of *Chi* circulation and the physical benefits: stress reduction, improved balance and sleep, regulation of weight and blood pressure, etc. We may not fully realize how it also benefits our mental state over time, influencing our thoughts and reactions throughout life. The following experience illustrates the benefits of a tranquil mind. This is a true story about a health challenge I faced last year and what role 25 years of TCC meditation had on the experience.

I came down with a virus in October 2011, but continued to teach TCC classes. My doctor confirmed that I had a virus and said, "There is nothing to do but go home, rest, drink water, and wait three weeks." At the end of week two, I sought out an acupuncture doctor for a second opinion. She read my pulses and was surprised to find a problem in the lung meridian.

The following week, while teaching, I felt very ill, experiencing an increasing pain in my right upper chest. I had to lie down on the floor immediately ... and get help. Then things began to speed up: chest x-rays, blood tests, and antibiotics. **During this period, my mind was calm, very calm. I was not worried or afraid.** My first thought was that this illness was an opportunity to draw closer to God.

My doctor was now convinced that I was ill. This necessitated canceling all my TCC classes for November and December. I wrote to my students telling them why classes were cancelled and encouraging them not to focus on the details, but to stay centered on wellness for themselves and for me. **My mind was amazingly serene, undisturbed by others' anxiety and worry.** It held only positive thoughts and responses.

With antibiotics, I started feeling somewhat better, but the results of the chest x-ray were not good. A mass in my lung was identified. A CT scan was ordered. The results were not good. A PET scan was ordered. The results were not good. My doctor regretfully told me that the scans all pointed to lung cancer. **At this point, I felt a surge of tranquility flood my whole body.** My mind remained calm, open and steady. I felt clear and grounded, detached from the diagnostic details. I was more interested in comforting my doctor than worrying about myself.

I was told to see the oncologist immediately. After the exam, I



Softness and circularity abound in nature. When we take time to pay attention we find them even in the lowly dandelion in the meadow.
— Stephen Ryter

was informed that I probably had lung cancer, but the details did not add up. He encouraged me to go on the two-week planned vacation to Kauai with my husband, and then do another scan on my return. **My mind remained open and positive to what was unfolding.** I felt very calm, encouraging others to not get caught up in fear. It felt like a fluid situation that could go in any direction. I believed a miracle could be one outcome.

After my return from Hawaii, another scan was done. The results came back on December 19th. I had lived with the idea that I might see Jesus a lot sooner than I had planned. Miraculously, the mass in the lung had shrunk by more than half. Unheard of, according to my oncologist. "We just don't see this result very often." **A miracle, I thought. I felt humbled and amazed.**

I continued to do 15 health-affirming procedures including TCC, prayer and meditation. I continued a two-month voluntary diet that eliminated all sugars, wheat, dairy, caffeine, sodas, etc.; I ate only fruits, vegetables and meat. I began doing an Ayurvedic oil-pulling practice daily, along with several other therapies. By late January, I decided to resume teaching TCC and gradually get back to other responsibilities. **My mind was determined and open. I felt very calm, even content and happy in the events of each day.** My goal was to aid the shrinking of the mass.

What carried me through this health challenge? What kept me mentally calm every day? What gave me the inner knowing that all was well when the facts said otherwise? What gave me the inner joy to encourage others and calm them when they heard about my illness?

I am clear that years of TCC meditation were the key.

The practice of focused awareness is cumulative over time, gradually building up a serene frame of mind. Even when bad news comes, the mind remains tranquil. The practice of **calm mind abiding in a relaxed body** arises not only during practice, but throughout the day. Regular meditation transforms a person's mental state, and over time helps dissolve patterns of anxiety.

What Justin Stone told us many times is true:

T'ai Chi Chih meditation is a powerful practice that can influence your life greatly. It can help you respond to negative events in life with serenity and non-attachment.

During my final visit to the oncologist in April, he confirmed that the mass was nearly gone. His parting words to me were, "I consider this case closed and I never want to see you again. I just want to say that if I ever get diagnosed with cancer, I am going to call you and ask you to tell me about everything you did." As I left the office, I placed a TCC brochure on his desk.

Seijaku & Fast Track

(Seijaku Is Not for Everyone, said Justin Stone)

By Brock Brocklehurst, Albuquerque, New Mexico

An Explanation:

Different emphasis
Different breathing
Sometimes frustrating,
Sometimes too fast for me
Sometimes fun.

If done correctly
Strengthens the participant
Improves one's T'ai Chi Chih
Is a hoot while learning Fast Track
Never forget the fun.

Fast Track:

i
love it
fast track goes
boog gala booga boo*
why is that
i don't
know

*How I felt getting lost doing
Fast Track Pulling Taffy

And Always Remember:

i
love it
fast track does
release me from
the movement
and i
breathe



Above: I have been a painter for 35 years and currently work in mixed media. This series, Finding Home, represents our earth and spiritual homes. (Also see pg. 10.)

– Deanna Shapiro

Who Am I?

By Carmen L. Brocklehurst,
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Justin often spoke of Ramana Maharshi with love and respect. One of the important parts of his teaching was to ask us to ask, “Who am I?” It seems simple and many people answer it simply. I am Fred, or I am Professor Fred, or they connect the question to other worldly answers. There are many levels to this question and answer. In years of reading *The Vital Force*, I’ve noticed that many teachers are interested in more than academic replies. Some have come to very high levels of knowing. If one truly wants an answer it will take the depth of our T'ai Chi Chih practice to get there.

Often, Justin inspired us to know the answer with his comments about TCC. He gave us the ultimate way to know more about our practice when he said, “One day you will be doing TCC and know that no one is doing anything. T'ai Chi is doing TCC.” Until that time we work on many aspects of TCC: softness, continuity, release, freedom, gentleness and swimming through very heavy air. The list is long.

Many teachers and students have experienced the ultimate only to find out that our practice doesn't stop there. It begins there. We are taught to trust in our elders, but not in the *Chi*. We are taught to forgive others, instead of knowing that in the *Chi* there is only possibility, not right and wrong. If a three-year old throws his bowl on the floor, is it wrong? If an adult was taught to honor her group and disparage others, is that wrong? If an adult steals bread because his family is starving, is that wrong? If a child concludes that stealing is acceptable after seeing this, is she is wrong because of this conclusion?

When do we start to teach the greater part of thinking, feeling and doing? TCC teaches us to do this – not with rules, but from a greater knowing of who we are, which is learned in the silence of our practice. It may take a lifetime, or many lifetimes; but it is a worthy endeavor. As we grow in our practice we come to know how to love and share the *Chi*.

Cucumber

By Doug Harned, Albuquerque, New Mexico

A friend suggested I write something for *The Vital Force*. My initial reaction was “nothing jumps to mind.” But, is it really true that I’ve nothing to contribute, nothing to say? When it comes to T'ai Chi Chih, specifically, I don't. No great experience, no insight. But I can relate a quick anecdote that I do find great meaning in. It goes like this: I was bored and wrote a quick ode to the mango on Facebook. In the post I also thanked God for the mango: all its juicy, delicious glory. The surprising reply was, “Why not, God is a mango.” What a wonderful response. Funny, but with real insight. I've thought of that phrase often, and inwardly smile every time I do. If this article gets printed, I hope it leaves you with a smile. I'll close with my

Breathing & TCC

BY SANDY McALISTER, HAYWARD, CALIFORNIA

As I finish the last repetition of a movement, the weight is flowing into the back leg and there is a *slight* rise in my stance. With that expansion of my body I notice my breath is expanding, I'm breathing in. As my front foot moves back and settles next to my back foot, my weight sinks down into graceful conclusion and my breath responds, breathing out. The downward body motion in conjunction with the exhalation draws the attention and focus downward increasing awareness of grounding, and settling my attention and weight into the soles of my feet. There is no conscious effort to match my breath with my movement. It seems to be a natural connection that is happening.

Justin taught that in T'ai Chi Chih we do not need to coordinate our breath with our movements. He writes in *Spiritual Odyssey*, "**There are no special breathing techniques for T'ai Chi Chih.** I am not interested in what goes on in martial arts."

In Chapter 2 of *Heightened Awareness*, he writes, "Nothing is as vital to life as breath yet we take it for granted and breathe unconsciously. This is probably for the best, for when breath is regulated or made the object of concentration, it tends to become rough and uneven. **A self-conscious breath is never natural.**" He continues in the chapter to write about the benefits of working with the breath, but not coupled with TCC.

While many other disciplines and movement practices use the breath in a specific way, Justin has always been emphatic that a specific way of breathing should not be taught when teaching TCC. **Practitioners should allow the breath to regulate itself.** New students may hold their breath as they concentrate while learning and applying new information as they move. A good teacher often reminds students to check in with their body and look for tension in the belly or abdomen and notice if they are holding their breath. When teaching I occasionally breathe in and out loud enough for the students to hear. It is a subtle reminder for them to notice their own breath.

A student of mine once asked if the class could do a practice regulating the breath with the movements. We talked about the different ways this might be done. As they did the practice they were encouraged to experiment with the various ways to connect the breath and the movements. At the end of practice we talked about our experiences. Most students felt it was distracting and an extra. Many felt their natural breathing pattern was slower than the practice and they had to breathe a bit quicker, even with a slow-paced practice. This was my experience. When doing TCC I find my breathing slows down. My breaths out and in are not of the same timing. If I were to regulate my breath to my practice it would make it artificial.

In TCC we do the movements without intentionally moving and directing the *Chi* flow. The softness and evenness of the movements, the movement patterns with their circularity and polarity, the shifting of weight – *yinming* and *yanging* – these are the principles when applied to the practice, which facilitate the moving and balancing of the energy. With the attention focused low, the grounding further assists the balancing and integration.

There are some movement practices, activities and sports where it is important to couple the breath with the movement in order to reap the full benefit. It is not necessary in TCC. The only time I find my breath moving in tandem with my body, other than the Joyous Breath movement, is when I come into stillness at the end of a movement. Breathing out as I am sinking into stillness helps gather my full attention and intention, feeling as if my body were draining into my feet with my breath and continuing into the earth. At the same time there is this dichotomy that my upper body is light, upright, open and spacious, yet with substance. While there are these two feelings, the lower part of my body sinking into the earth, rooted and the upper part of my body light, almost ethereal yet with substance, I feel no separation. It feels the same. **How can this be? I have no answer, nor need one. It just is.**

As it says in the *T'ai Chi Chih Photo Text*, "The *yin* and *yang* element separate when in motion, and they come together again in quiescence. So, when we begin the motions of TCC, we are dividing the two forces; then we balance them as we practice. Finally, when we are still again, they reunite."

Breathing out as I come into that stillness heightens my awareness of letting go if I have been holding, softening if I have been constricted, refocusing attention if it has wandered, being here now in the present, not going on automatic. I do not do this intentionally; it seems to have become part of my practice naturally. I do not teach this to my students nor do I suggest it be part of anyone's practice. It is my experience.

Forcing the breath to fit a pattern, whether in movement or stillness, is unnecessary tension, effort and distraction. Justin felt it was important for each of us to allow our body's natural rhythm of breathing to integrate itself without effort into our practice of TCC. As we move softly, breathe softly – without effort. As we *yin* and *yang* fully, breathe fully – without effort. In stillness shed the mind and body of movement and breathe without thought.

Grounding With Joyous Breath

BY DANIEL PIENCIAK, HOWELL, NEW JERSEY

This year's annual teacher conference was themed, Grounded in Growth. Many are familiar with the Chinese saying about a bamboo which does not grow much for several years and then suddenly sprouts up as much as 80 feet or more. The story infers that during those seemingly dormant years, much growth has been taking place below in the roots.

I had a similar awareness when a co-worker asked if I knew anything about my last name. She said "pien" was a Polish word, referring to the part of the tree where the trunk meets the roots. I gave this a lot of thought (it was over twenty years ago, before I studied T'ai Chi Chih), and it made me much more aware of my rootedness in the earth upon which I walk.

One of Justin Stone's most noted TCC teachings is to **keep our awareness in the soles of the feet**, referring to the *hsueh*, or spot on the bottom of the foot known to the Chinese as the "bubbling spring." This focus is one of the six principles of how to move.

In my years of teaching and doing TCC, one can experience this awareness in many different ways, i.e. feeling where the weight is on either foot or both feet, feeling sensations in the bottom of the foot, visualizing energy at the bottom of the foot, connecting to the earth through the soles of the feet, breathing through the soles of the feet, and so on.

One of the most valuable teachers of this focus has been the movement, Joyous Breath. (One might note that in earlier editions of the *TCC Photo Text*, this movement was introduced before any other. And in "Notes on Movements Just Learned" and "Teaching Tips," Justin writes that, "some like doing it at the beginning of the practice"...there is nothing wrong with that." I am one of those some.)

I often teach Joyous Breath early in my classes, even in the first class. We are instructed to push the air down into the ground. We do the movement with vigor. (Justin sometimes even used the word force.) I find it is very powerful for students to feel their feet accepting the body weight each time the knees bend and the body sinks downward. I have also found it helpful to point out how the lower abdomen (tan t'ien) contracts or pulls inward on the way down, and then releases or expands on the way up as we inhale.

Unity

BY DEANNA SHAPIRO

I am out here on the porch
doing T'ai Chi Chih,
facing Shellhouse Mountain,
a cathedral of shaggy rock and pines.

My body is easy
like the brown speckled snake
sunning against the house,
head cocked at an angle listening.

I do Rocking Motion, *Bird Flaps Its Wings*,
and *Around the Platter*,
energized like the hovering wings
of the hummingbird drinking nectar from the bee balm,
the Monarch butterfly fluttering among the phlox,
the grosbeaks flying straight from tree to feeder,
carried on the radiant morning highway.

An old Eastern saying goes that "the ones who keeps their concentration in the soles of the feet throughout the day will heal a thousand ills." **I encourage my students to do Joyous Breath at various times throughout their day, not only within their formal practice time of TCC.** The grounding experience and awareness of where the feet meet the earth can be invaluable to the practice and to one's health and wellbeing. My students have frequently reported benefits such as relief of vertigo/motion sickness, better balance, relief from undue anxiety, increased energy, better sleep and improved regularity. Thank you, Justin.

Fear

BY TERRY JENNINGS, HONOLULU, HAWAII

A student who is afraid of lightening practiced T'ai Chi Chih during a summer lightening storm. She did three movements, including *Pulling in the Energy*. Instead of being afraid she felt the energy of the thunder, lightening, and rain. She felt it as a gift, the power of earth and elements. And the fear disappeared.

Prison ... Of All The Places To Discover TCC

BY JULIE HERVET, PLACERVILLE, CALIFORNIA

It seems I was connected to T'ai Chi Chih and Folsom State Prison long before I'd heard of or given much thought to either. It was through listening to the voice of Spirit, or *Prajna*, as [TCC Teacher] April Leffler would say, that I found my way to the practice, as well as to the prison. Actually, they were a package deal.

It began back in 2007. While I was practicing T'ai Chi [Ch'uan] a **"random" thought popped into my head** that *this would be a relaxing thing to do if one were in prison*. I had never met anyone in prison, nor had I ever been to one, so I just brushed it aside as one of those weird things our brains do sometimes. But over the next couple years, this idea wouldn't go away. I guess I'm kind of slow, but it finally occurred to me that perhaps I was supposed to do something about it. And I eventually realized that they probably wouldn't want anyone teaching T'ai Chi in a prison (because it's a slow fighting form, a martial art.) So I decided I needed a Qigong teacher.

Looking back on it, it wasn't a very well thought-out plan ... like I was just going to learn Qigong and *they* were going to let me come into a prison and teach it. It turned out I didn't need a good plan, because I had *Prajna* on my side. So I googled Qigong instructors in my area, printed out a list of about 15 teachers and picked out a name. Without knowing anything about her, I called and asked about classes. She responded that she didn't think it would work out because she was so far away, but then paused and said, "I don't know if you'd be interested, but I teach a class inside Folsom State Prison one day a week." Wow.

All the hair stood up on my arms and neck. I couldn't believe it. Here was the first teacher I'd picked off a long list of names, and she was the exact person I was looking for. I didn't know it at the time, but this was my introduction to *Prajna*, to listening to the inner voice. I met Judy

Tretheway at the prison in 2009. I learned TCC in the prison class, then assisted with teaching, and became accredited to teach in early 2011. When Judy retired in 2011 after 13 years of teaching TCC in the prison, it became my class. (Judy later confessed that two weeks prior to my calling, she had put out a prayer for an assistant.)

In November of 2010, after one year at the prison, I went to Albuquerque for an Intensive. I didn't know the event was connected with Justin Stone's birthday. What a great introduction to the community. Pam conducted the Intensive, and I got to meet Antonia, Sandy, Dan (and his belt buckle), Carmen and people from all over. Justin came to speak, and I shared with him that the men at Folsom still talked about his visit there. I also met my dear friend Banks Upshaw. As we went around the circle introducing ourselves, I mentioned I'd learned TCC at Folsom State Prison, thinking that most people knew it was a men's prison. Banks returned to Portland and told his wife he'd met this amazing woman who'd really turned her life around. It wasn't until I saw him again at our teacher training that he figured it out. We had a great laugh over that one.

Teaching at Folsom has been, without a doubt, the most important spiritual experience of my life. It started out that way and has kept on rolling. The men are very focused on the movements, the teachings, and our time together because they are highly motivated to heal. They are incredibly appreciative of me coming in to teach. Initially, they were my teachers, then they became my students, and as with all students, they are my very best teachers. We have come full circle, and I am so grateful for all of it. TCC and teaching at Folsom have changed my life in unimaginable ways. Thank you, Justin.



My Life With TCC

By JAYNE KENNELLY, MINNETONKA, MINNESOTA

After my father died in 2009 my body crashed. His death was not unexpected but I think I stuffed all my grief and sadness into my body. Up until that time I had been managing my rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia and osteoporosis quite well with yoga, Pilates, weight lifting and walking.

But everything changed almost overnight. I could not make my own bed; I had to ask my son to come over and wash my underwear and do simple things. I was in pain and needed to change things, especially since a physical therapist told me my body was too flexible; I needed to quit yoga. I needed something to calm me down but I also needed to move.

I decided to try T'ai Chi Chih at the Minnetonka Senior Center. I had heard about it, tried some other forms that didn't seem to fit me. My first teacher was Joe Apt. At first I could not believe that Joe was the teacher, as he was quite elderly and needed to sit down often. But I came to respect him as a teacher. His wife Barbara helped out and another person did the counting.

It was difficult for me, and I was a difficult student for Joe. I was used to moving fast, with big movements. As a type A person, it was hard to slow down, be still and not move my body as much.

Being soft and accepting were not terms I was used to.

At that time, I could not raise my arms for Cosmic Conscious Pose, and my body hurt. I also had to wear shoes because my feet hurt. But I stuck with it and after Joe died, I had other teachers, Bridget and Monica Campbell, who was Joe's student. But it was still difficult to let go and just let my body move. I still moved with a stiff body, trying so hard to get every movement exactly right.

Finally I made it to the intermediate class even though I was really not ready. But Monica became my teacher and we had a few private lessons to help with *yinning* and *yanging*. When she started teaching at my workout facility, I was thrilled. This meant I could go twice weekly and really improve. I hadn't been practicing at home, even though I had a DVD. A few years prior, I had attended a workshop with Antonia and received wonderful feedback from a variety of teachers.

Now after three years with Monica as my teacher, I like it. About six months ago I realized I was soft, relaxed, less anxious. **It was exciting to finally get it.** The benefits have been numerous: I am more at peace; my balance has improved; I'm able (at times) to shut out the rest of the world and my busy life. Along with other things, TCC has helped me to get to this good place, with my body and my life. By the way, I can now do Cosmic Consciousness Pose easily, as well as go barefoot. And there is no pain.

Oasis Metaphor & The Hummingbird

By HOPE SPANGLER, PRESCOTT VALLEY, ARIZONA

I teach an in-depth, 15-week, for-credit T'ai Chi Chih course at our local community college on Friday mornings during the spring and fall semesters. We have time to do fun things like play with metaphors, which time would not typically permit in a shorter class. Another benefit is practicing TCC outdoors when weather permits. Since it doesn't often rain, we have at least half a dozen classes outside.

On campus, there is a lovely sculpture garden with a vertical waterfall surrounded by a circular walkway. We gathered around it for TCC one Friday in April. As we began moving, honeybees flew to drink from the base of the waterfall. They had found a nice little oasis away from the blistering sun and dry conditions. I thought of how our TCC practice is like an oasis from stress and the often-hectic pace of life.

While moving to the accompaniment of gentle splashing of water drops, a hummingbird (glistening a gorgeous metallic green with a little black bill) next arrived. Only a foot or two away, undisturbed by the gentle rhythm of TCC, it alighted on the fountain, much like woodpecker would on a tree. We were delighted to watch it drink and bathe.

Watching this scene unfold as we moved together made it a very memorable practice.



Weight Loss & TCC

By JACKSON RAINS, PLYMOUTH, MINNESOTA

I have struggled with being overweight since I was ten years old, gaining and losing pounds, but always being too heavy. Over the past year I have lost 35 pounds and have about 20 more to go to reach my goal weight.

I wish I could tell you that five daily TCC practices caused my weight loss, but I can't. Like so many aspects of TCC, the connection of my weight loss to TCC is indirect. I had some health issues last summer that were not related to being overweight, but when I got out of the hospital I was weak as a kitten. It was summer so I was only teaching one TCC class each week, but I could see that in the fall and winter when I have eight classes stacked into two days, I would have to be in much better shape or give up the classes. I started walking, lots of walking. At first it was not about weight, but as I walked more, the relationship between activity, calories and pounds became clearer and more within my control. I bought one of those activity trackers that counts steps and used it for several months and then started using the program MyFitnessPal on my smart phone to count calories in and out. So far so good.

So what is the connection to TCC? My previous dieting was motivated by my wanting to look better and avoid health problems associated with being fat. But now my love of TCC and teaching TCC has added an additional external reason to be fit and lose weight. And that has made all the difference. I cannot quantify it, but I am sure that the peace and balance of practicing TCC has something to do with it as well. Then there is the increased awareness of my body. How I am moving and where am I feeling stress.

As a part of my regimen, I input the calories burned during various activities. I have not found a definitive calorie count for TCC, but based on other forms of T'ai Chi and the gentle nature of TCC, I estimate that I burn 120 more calories while practicing TCC than sitting on the couch watching TV. If you have any information on this I would like to see it.

I have lost weight many times in my life and always gained it back pretty quickly. This time feels different. **The practice of TCC has sourced a long-term shift in my daily routine, and is not a fad or temporary activity.** Having TCC as part of my journey gives me confidence that the changes in my relationship with food will continue even after I reach my goal weight.

The Boomers Are Coming, The Boomers Are Coming

By JACKSON RAINS, PLYMOUTH, MINNESOTA

These days Paul Revere would probably have tweeted this alert rather than hanging lamps in the church steeple. Instead of information about the British, he would be telling us that in the past decade the number of people over 65 in our country increased by almost 20 percent. And this trend is going to continue. **What, you may ask, does this have to do with T'ai Chi Chih?**

These Baby Boomers are the youth of the 1960s and 1970s who were involved in the Summer of Love, Transcendental Meditation, Ram Das, the Age of Aquarius and dozens of other spiritual paths. Careers and family diverted them from those spiritual paths and now they are retiring in droves. With time on their hands, these Boomers are seeking in their retirement, to reconnect with this sense of purpose, with something beyond themselves.

TCC resonates with this search and positions us perfectly to expand our TCC classes. I teach TCC at a local YMCA and my class has increased from 20 students to more than 30 in the past 18 months. And it continues to grow. A year ago the building was remodeled and a wing was dedicated to "Older Active Adults," focusing on the 55+ demographic bringing in lots of people in our student demographic.

Anyone who wants to teach more TCC classes needs only to contact local YMCA's and other health clubs in their area. These organizations are very aware of the demographic trends and are actively seeking classes to meet the interests of this rapidly growing group. Community education programs are also looking for programming; I have well attended day and evening classes through these. And don't forget the senior living facilities such as assisted living and apartments marketing to older active adults. These are prime locations to expand our teaching.

Anyone who wants to increase their TCC teaching can ride this wave of Boomer retirees. We can serve this growing community and honor the memory of Justin who gave us this gift.



At left: See caption on page 5.

TCC As Life Raft

BY DENISE EMANUEL CLEMEN, OXNARD, CALIFORNIA

My proverbial boat ran itself onto the rocks in 2007. **It took only a minute** for my husband to tell me the marriage was over, that he was marrying someone decades younger, and that they wanted the house so they could raise their new family there. Cast into physical and emotional anguish, I did the best I could. I went to grad school. I fell in love again. I took anti-depressants, and every now and then, I didn't end the night swimming in a sea of gin.

Five years later, still locked in mortal combat with my ex-husband over finances, I agreed to become the full-time caregiver for my 88-year-old mother. After thirty years of marriage, moving farther and farther from the ocean, I left the geography of my divorce and moved from Los Angeles to Ventura County, landing close enough to the ocean to hear the waves. The man I loved was a train-ride away, and without knowing it, I was building the life raft that would save me when I lost him.

I joined a gym in my new city, happy to see interesting classes. I resurrected my yoga practice, and after daily conversations with my boyfriend about T'ai Chi Ch'uan (he was a long-time teacher), I decided to learn that too. **I was dismayed that first morning at the gym to discover I was in a T'ai Chi Chih class.** What was this modern practice originated by some white guy in the 1970s? Unsure how to exit gracefully, I stayed and by the end of class, I decided to return.

"T'ai Chi lite" my boyfriend, Dan, first called it – even as he encouraged me to do it. I stuck with it, practicing at home, reading *The Vital Force*, downloading the app, and practicing twice a week with my teacher, Lisa Otero. **By the time Dan was diagnosed with lung cancer in late 2013, I was training to become a teacher, and he was learning T'ai Chi Chih.**

After six months of juggling care for Dan and my mother, Dan entered hospice. On June 6, he took his last breath in a hospital bed in my living room as I lay next to him whispering in his ear. Some nights after my mother is tucked safely into her bed, I practice in my living room as boats sway in the marina. I look out at the dark water, swamped with gratitude for my TCC practice, somehow still afloat.

TCC & Community

BY MARCY BURNS, OXNARD, CALIFORNIA

"We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community." – DOROTHY DAY

Tai Chi Chih becomes many things to those of us who practice regularly. It gives us joy, peace, calm, focus, grace, fluidity. The list is long, and the words appearing on the list are unique to each person. For all of us, though, they include words of gratitude, and here I offer one more: community. It's heard less often but it's important wherever it finds roots and wings.

In simpler times, it was easy to find and be part of a community. On farms and in small towns, before there were telephones and cars and paved roads, one relied on family and neighbors and church congregations. Individuals in community supported, comforted and consoled one another in times of need and crisis. In contrast, most of us now live in urban environments where anonymity is commonplace. Knowing neighbors and being an active member of one or more communities is no longer a given. **Almost everyone has friends. Not everyone has community.**

Fortunate as I am to have both friends and communities, I still count myself blessed to have a longstanding TCC practice community. We are together two times each week (with Lisa Otero). **New people come into the group; all are welcome; some stay, some don't. But a core group has stayed year after year.** We continue to learn and to grow our TCC skills, gaining new insights and occasionally making breakthroughs. To suddenly understand some aspect of the practice that had been elusive seems almost magical. Of course, those breakthroughs, the wings of our practice, are not magic. They occur under a gentle but firm insistence that we practice mindfully. And we come together at least once a year with others in Ventura County, so we are part of a larger TCC community.

We are young and old, alike and different. What matters is that we care about our practice and each other. We are members of a TCC community.



Teaching Tips For Teachers

(Also Valuable For Students)

BY JUSTIN F. STONE

THE MOVEMENTS AND THEIR KEYS (OR, WHAT TO LOOK FOR)

Daughter on the Mountain Top is a great favorite. It should be explained that we start “low” because we are going “high.” Again, the movement is done mostly with the wrists, not very far from the chest (we do not extend way out so that it is the arms that are moving). After the two hands cross and start to come down, the fingers still point upward until the last minute, when we begin the next swing. Some students have the tendency, when the hands cross, to then point the fingers down and to make arrows of the hands. This is not correct. As the hands come down the wrists are still cocked and the fingers point upward as the elbows swing out slightly to the sides.

When doing this “Daughter” on the right side (right foot forward), the student may ask why the right hand *still* crosses in front of the left, as it did when the left foot was forward. The proper answer is, “Yes, the right hand crosses outside the left, which is closer to the body.” This does not answer the question. There is no end to such “why” questions, and the teacher would be wise not to try to explain. Again, remember that the benefits come from the *doing*, not the discussing.

From the booklet “Teaching Tips For Teachers”, excerpted and available for free download from Good Karma Publishing (www.gkpub.com) and in print form for a small fee from the New Mexico T'ai Chi Chih Center (taichichihassociation.org).

Daughter in the Valley begins “high” because we are going “low.” Some students mistakenly bring their hands up the side, waiting almost to the top of the arc to bring them together . This negates the important polarity of the two hands rising close together, the palms facing each other . This latter way is correct. Many students begin to move their weight back, toward the rear leg, before the two hands reach the top of the arc. Actually, the weight

continues shifting forward until the top of the arc is reached; then, as the hands swing out to the side, the weight begins to settle back. Teachers should watch to see that the weight does not begin to switch back until the hands swing out to the side, and the teachers might well check their own form to see if they are doing it properly.

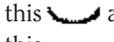


Carry the Ball to the Side is one of the more complicated movements, though not difficult. First of all, it is done primarily with the wrists, not the arms. Since this is the first movement that uses the T'ai Chi sideways step, the teacher should demonstrate this step before teaching the movement. The foot snakes out to the side, toes pointed out, and the knee bends slightly. The foot then comes down on the heel (not flat on the foot), with the foot quickly flattening out. Don't let the student get in the habit of just falling to the side. After each sideways step, as the hands come to the side in the “rest” position, be sure the knees are slightly bent. All through the series of movements it is necessary to make sure the student bends the knees and does not do “stiff-leg” T'ai Chi Chih.

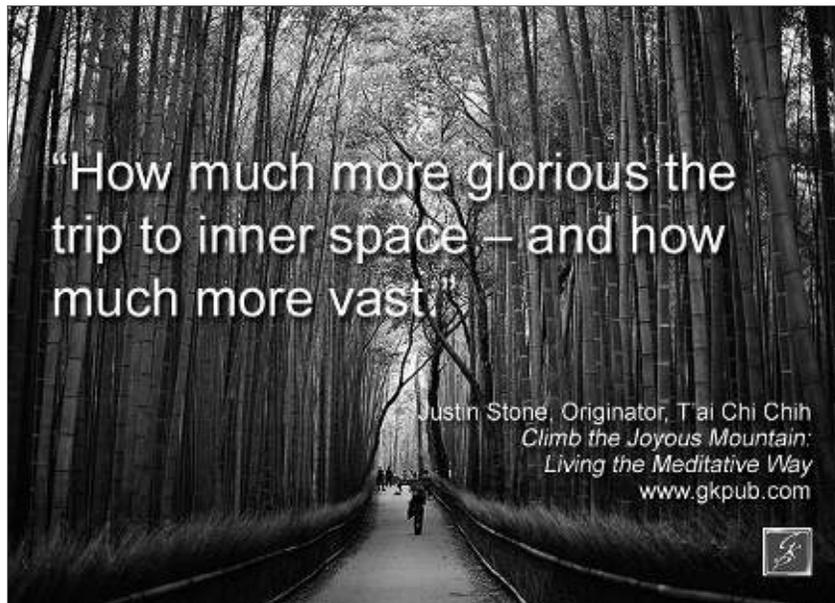
Only when the student has learned the entire movement should the matter of emphasis be taught. As we move to the left, the emphasis is on the right hand, but, as we bring the hands over the top and back to the right, there is no emphasis. It is important to understand this. After we have done the three steps to the left and begin to move back to the right, the emphasis is naturally on the left hand, as described above. Do not forget to teach this emphasis and change of emphasis; it is an important part of the movement.



In doing “**Push Pull**” we do not push straight ahead. The hands dip slightly—not way down, as some do—then come up again as we near the end of the forward push. Thus, from the side, the

movement looks like this  and not like this .

It is important to explain that, with the left foot forward, we emphasize the right hand as we push forward (but remember, there is no emphasis when we pull back). It is 60% right hand, 40% left hand. When the right foot is forward, naturally it is 60% left hand, 40% right hand. But remember, not as we pull back, when there is no emphasis.



Gateway To Eastern Philosophy & Religion

By JUSTIN F. STONE

VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL

I'm going to read a statement from my Zen teacher. It has to do with Saigo and Daigo, the vertical and horizontal. Now we're back on a different level. We're not on a simple level. But there are many of you who meditate, and I think this will get across the idea.

"Some people have a small taste of the vertical, the unrelieved absolute. They then begin to go to lectures, read metaphysical books and argue with those who don't share their opinion. They have naturally translated their small experience into terms that are familiar to them religiously, philosophically and psychologically. So they hear the voice of Jesus, or they see Krishna playing the flute, or get a glimpse of the Buddha with two attendants. **This disturbs their lives because they now realize there is something more than their daily experience.**

Others may have a complete vertical experience, and an overwhelming experience of oneness that takes them completely into the absolute, and makes it impossible for them to get back to their habitual daily lives. They now think transcendently, and find everything in this world tasteless and meaningless. It is very difficult to live on in this fashion, even though this experience may have been joyous and almost ecstatic. Many who have this experience of the absolute are sure they have achieved the final rung on the ladder, and make no attempt to understand or integrate their experience. They may become renunciates and shun all worldly life. It is not a happy or fulfilling way to live. If the student has a good teacher, the teacher will see the dangers and lead the student along the way to complete integration. **The student must go back to the market place, to be with humanity and, indeed, all life.**

You remember the story about Chao Chou: When someone comes to the teacher carrying nothing, what should he tell him? Tell him to throw it out. That's also what the teacher would say in light of a student's experience of oneness. The teacher would say, "Forget it, go past that." Without a teacher, students may persist in this condition, understanding much of eternity but little of today. They may long for release from this world into a state that they conceive, without realizing that *that* state is the state of their own minds. **Having escaped samsara, and had a real glimpse of nirvana, they have not reached**

the point where they perceive that samsara is nirvana. The absolute is the relative. There is no need of escape, only integration. They are living in the vertical, which is steep and slippery and untenable in this world. If I said this to a person from one of the new religions, he or she would look at me as though I were crazy.

Those who follow a true teacher or who spontaneously have an experience when they perceive their own enlightenment, are able to make the complete circle and come back to **ordinary life, which will now appear anything but ordinary.** What need for argument when each thing is perceived as being true. Such a person has little desire for metaphysical discussion, and no desire to foist his views on anyone else. He no longer sees his experience as Christian or Buddhist, and will get to the point where he forgets his own enlightenment. Not wishing to be a teacher, he is a true teacher by example. There is no chance of his being hung up on words or written characters. The scriptures no longer serve a purpose since everything in life has become a scripture. Truly, the moon shines clearly in a cloudless sky. Yet there is turmoil, joy and suffering and he does not avoid these. The vertical and horizontal have been completely integrated. For how many does this happen?

One thing very interesting concerns the moment when the meditator perceives his own enlightenment. There's a famous story in Zen Buddhism about the monk who, after many years of practice, entered to face his master. Something shifted, and the monk had a great Satori experience. He stood there overcome by it. The attendant said, "You've had your joy, now why don't you bow?" So he bowed. And as he bowed,

he perceived his own enlightenment. I'm not going to try to explain that to you. You'll have to figure it out yourself. He perceived his own enlightenment and integration was possible for him. Otherwise, he might have wandered around in that state of enlightenment without even knowing about enlightenment or his own enlightenment. Then he'd be hung up.

I had a talk with Roshi about perceiving one's own enlightenment. The monk had the enlightenment. Then, when the attendant said, "Why don't you bow?" he bowed and perceived his own enlightenment. **At that moment, there was no self, no individual self.** People such as Paul Reps, for instance, always spoke in the third person. After making a statement, Paul would say, "Did Reps say that?" It is a method used to go beyond clinging to the self.

From the book Gateway to Eastern Philosophy & Religion, excerpted and reprinted with permission from Good Karma Publishing, and available on www.gkpub.com.



The Joy That Bubbles Up

By MARIE DOTTS, LOVELAND, COLORADO

As this year's conference draws near I find myself reflecting on how my soul has grown and unfolded since the last one.

I am in a much different place. During April Leffler's presentation on *Prajna*, we formed small groups taking turns sharing our greatest desire. While we were feeling and expressing our greatest desire, other members of our small group voiced our inner critic/superego – the voice of what I call our True Nature. They whispered thoughts aligned with their respective roles. My greatest desire was to allow the joy that bubbles up from the soles of my feet. At that time I was struggling with believing that True Nature would support my joy. **Why would I**

NOT believe that True Nature wants us to live in joy? The answer lies in what Justin refers to as our habit energies.

Our habit energies are deeply embedded in our psyche and cells, the result of our conditioned past. This conditioning creates a core feeling of being disconnected and separate from the flow of the Life Force. This separation creates a world of duality and conflict. When we act from our habit energies we often become identified with the inner child or the superego (the internalized voice of our parents and early environment). My soul child has a core belief that she is unlovable. She feels unimportant and insignificant and definitely not worthy of joy. Being disconnected from her own source of love she must get this from others.

My habit energies orbit around the belief that I need to earn this love by being loving and giving to others. My superego's job is to continually reinforce this and ensure the maintenance of my habit energies. I have been working with the patterns of my habit energies for quite awhile and have untangled and digested much, but the *Chi* wants to flow through every nook and cranny of our bodies and souls. It wants us to be completely open to the fullness of who and what we are. To support us in this unfoldment the *Chi* brings the exact circumstances into our lives that will help us wake up to our habit energies. **By waking up to them we become free of them.** Below is the *Chi* at work for my unfoldment and freedom.

~ ~ ~

Nine months before last year's conference I was working full-time as a CNA for Hospice but the energy for the job was deeply waning. There was no joy arising in my body for the work. At the same time I was feeling a lot of energy and excitement for dedicating my time to teaching TCC. Just like in the *Prajna* exercise I could feel myself oscillate between the voices of the superego and True Nature. With my family depending on my income, my superego would tell me

that there was no way I could leave and follow my joy. There was a deeper layer, however, a much more ingrained habit energy. It was the feeling that True Nature was against me much like the energy of a bad stepmother in fairy tales. When I was aligned with this voice I only felt tension and contraction in my belly. No *Chi* flow and no joy.



The principles of TCC support us in getting free from these false identifications. **When we focus on the soles of our feet or our bellies we are connecting to the alive Presence that we are.** We can separate ourselves from the voice of judgment and align with Truth. When I did that I could just relax and observe the energy arising in my body. What I experienced was the natural ebb and flow of the *Chi*. The *Chi* was just expressing the natural flow of contraction (full-time job) and expansion (teaching TCC). I did not have to "do" anything. Just BE. The *Chi* is the real doer. A few weeks later at work,

they said they needed to lay off three people. I volunteered. It was perfect. Through unemployment insurance I would provide for my family and build my TCC classes simultaneously.

Back to last year's conference. My first level of unemployment was coming to a close. I had made many teaching contacts but had gotten few responses. The habit energies were being triggered again. Would the *Chi* really support me? **Am I really allowed to live a life from joy?** Again the principles of TCC were there to support me. TCC teaches me to stay connected to my true center, my *tan t'ien*. This helps me disidentify from the false and deficient center of the ego. It also holds and welcomes the feelings of the soul child without identifying with her. Feelings not safe to feel when I was younger. These blocked feelings block our Life Force and are the source of our habit energies. I welcomed all of her feelings of fear, sadness, pain and rejection but mostly her desire to be loved. In allowing these feelings the held energy was freed, the habit energy let go of.

When I returned from conference, calls came in and classes started. I have been actively teaching this whole past year and the ripple is growing. I am filled with gratitude for the joy that I feel sharing this loving and deeply healing practice and supporting my family. I am hosting my first TCC retreat in the Rocky Mountains soon. **My only job is staying present to the *Chi* by focusing on the soles of my feet and the *tan t'ien*.** This connects me to my own strength and the power needed to separate from the voice of the superego and align with the voice of True Nature. In this place I am able to be with whatever is arising without judgment. There is a feeling of softness and effortless flow.

The *Chi* has its own flow and wisdom. I can never be separate from it. I AM the flow. My life is a journey of deepening my trust in this flow and truly allowing the JOY that bubbles up from the soles of my feet.

Who Knew ... Life in the “TCC Lane”

By DEB BERTELSEN MAPLEWOOD, MINNESOTA

A voice speaks: “I know what I said, but I know not what you hear.” I listen carefully. The same phrase is repeated but I am confused about its meaning and origination. It is said: given time, when the student is ready, the teacher appears.

From *Spiritual Odyssey*, “Out of Bondage,” our teacher Justin Stone writes, “We believe we are perfectly free in our decisions and our movements, but ... we will find that we follow certain patterns, sometimes even asking ourselves why we made a particular mistake all over again...”

Who knew that in the middle of a friendly, light-hearted late-night gathering with close friends, I would suddenly be moved to uncontrollable tears? I was casually sharing situations at work that had me continually puzzled and frustrated. Conversation turned to exploration, support and validation. I was totally unprepared for what I was uncovering. Little did I know these particular Habit Energies (*Vashanas*) were bubbling up at a time that needed my attention. A second teacher has appeared and I received a personal “appetizer” of what was on tap with Marie Dotts’ conference presentation, “Working With Our Habit Energies.” She gave me the courage to discover and work on developing my Essence.

Justin also said, “There is within you *that which knows* and that is your teacher. That is the true teacher.” With poise, grace, humility and humor, we had a wonderful presentation on *Prajna*. April Leffler simply shared personal experiences and asked us to set aside anything that didn’t resonate as truth for ourselves. **Who knew** that I would actually follow my inner guide and let *Prajna* speak during the filming of the YouTube video? I didn’t think about it, write it out, or practice. I went in, filmed and left, having no idea what I had said. For those who know me well, that is not what I would have typically done. As the third teacher, April gave me the confidence to trust my inner wisdom.

After conference, I go back to my routines: working full time during the day; teaching and leading T’ai Chi Chih groups in the evenings. Work consumes much of my time: way too much work for one person and not enough hours in the day. The holidays are quickly approaching and I seek to find balance with work, classes and family. My life changes with the sudden, unexpected death of my father a week before our holiday gathering. I do not handle it well. In fact, I struggle with this for months. **Who knew** this would be the time for another teacher, Judy George? As a close friend and spiritual guide she encourages me to feel all of the emotions, to talk with my dad, to write him a letter. It is unfathomable to me. How can I possibly do this when I do not want to let him go? And then she reminds me of “Letting Go,” of staying grounded, and of unconditional love.

Who knew, that after the death of my father, the habit energies that had been present in my work situation would become clearer and *Prajna* would work overtime? Who knew that in April 2014, I would leave a job I had for 17 years in order to find a better balance and healthier environment, where I didn’t need to be responsible for everything? **Who knew that good friends, great teachers, Habit Energies and *Prajna* would team up and set me straight?**

Who knew that what happens at conference doesn’t stay at conference? Who knew what happens at conference permeates every cell of our beings and consciously or unconsciously guides our journeys? **Justin knew.**

TCC Strength & Habit Energies

By JUDY GEORGE, ROSEVILLE, MINNESOTA

When I was introduced to T’ai Chi Chih in 1989, I did not realize how valuable this was, or the growth that would take place, and how quietly it would support me right where I was physically, emotionally and spiritually.

It gave me permission to **choose to be present in softness**, something I’d never experienced. In the awareness and presence of softness, a quiet inner strength worked to allow me to slow down enough to feel. Feel what? The many painful memories stored and stuffed, choices made, behaviors, thought patterns and so on. We all have our stories. I called these “bad habits.” Looking back I see the arc of growth over the years.

At the Minnesota conference last year, Marie Dotts gave a presentation on “working through your habit energies.” I shared the information with my TCC class, and asked if we could do things differently.

I noticed over the years that my students would come into the room and stand in the same place week after week. I invited them to pick a different space, as I did. It felt different for all of us. I observed my students at different angles. The students acknowledged, that yes, we are creatures of habit. We also entered and left the room in silence, a mini retreat if you will.

The words “let go” are easy to say, yet hard to do. But when we surrender, that “quiet inner strength” sets in. That maintains a deeper connection to who and what we are; it’s been there waiting. Trust the process and see what awaits you.

I continue to do what I can to stay present daily, to stay attuned to my feelings, to create a space for growth and healing, to let who and what I am live in love and truth.

From Selfish To Selfless

BY LINDA JONES, BENNETTSVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

When first thinking I wanted to become a TCC teacher, it was purely a selfish decision. I had near term plans to move to an area where there was no TCC community. I knew, even though I had derived great benefits from the practice, that I would eventually become lazy about daily practice, pick up bad habits and most likely stop practicing entirely if there were not other practitioners around. Becoming a teacher would help me help myself.

After my practice progressed, my feelings began to change. The practice became so good and benefits so great that I felt I would burst if I didn't share it with others.

I now know that even if I never encounter another practitioner, I will never stop practicing. I might inadvertently pick up some bad habits, but it wouldn't be because I am not sincere. Now I do not want to teach for myself (even though I am sure it will give me great pleasure and benefits); I want to teach for the benefit of others.



Post-Accreditation Practice

BY LINDA JONES

I just had the most incredible practice ever. I am pouring sweat now though. **Will that heat ever go away?** It felt so magnificent that I just have to share the news.

I was practicing on a soft oriental rug. Every foot placement felt almost perfect, needing no adjustment. All the moves were incredibly slow and even. I felt rooted in my feet and my *tan tien*. The weight shifts were so smooth in the side-to-side movements. I totally forgot about moving my arms, but when I was aware of them, they were soft and just where they should be. The expansion and contraction came so naturally. For some strange reason, my arms went comfortably above the crown of my head when I usually have them forward. Unbelievably the wrists were parallel with my shoulders without strain on the last pose. That was a first without strain and discomfort.

The next time I practice, I will probably be as clumsy as an ox, constantly adjusting my feet and messing up the side-to-side weight shifts. But for now...

Impermanence, Being Present & Being Mindful

BY LINDA JONES

On my enclosed patio, I have a waterfall and fishpond, and I spend hours watching the fish, mesmerized by the waterfall and practicing T'ai Chi Chih. It has brought me great peace and pleasure.

A few days ago, the water level dropped a little so I turned on the faucet to add more water. The next morning I opened the patio door and was horrified and devastated to see about six inches of water covering the patio. My lack of being present and mindful and forgetting to turn the water off reminded me of how we have to accept impermanence. As I sadly gathered the fish that had perished because of my actions, I gently remind myself to let go of the guilt. The guilt passed, but the lesson to be more present and mindful remains.

Pyramid Poems

tears
of joy
student still
happy as one
teacher now
joy of
tears
- JACK WEAVER

joy
is found
inside you
not found elsewhere
look within
welcome
joy
- STEPHEN THOMPSON

joy
is us
all here now
rocks like snowflakes
different
and yet
one
- JULIE HERVET

joy
isn't
what you expect
until it comes
within you
and fills
joy
- ANON

joy
is all
there is when
we just let go
live in the
now and
be
- JOAN WEAVER

Experience With Student Teaching

BY DIXIE ADENIRAN, VENTURA, CALIFORNIA

I am preparing for teacher accreditation in October. This has been a joyful, grounding and affirming experience. Student teaching has been a very big part of this almost two-year process. My teacher, Lisa Otero, is creating a regional TCC community over a five-year timeline, and is right on track. Training future teachers is key to the growth and stability of our community. (See her article in *The Vital Force*, May 2013, page 17.)

PHASE I: Training began with a small class of beginning student teachers. We took turns presenting a short lesson on a movement of our choice. Then we received feedback from Lisa and each other. The first time was done without preparation. It felt awkward and unnatural after enjoying the depths of my personal practice. It felt strange and inhibiting to be scrutinized so closely. **Trying to talk while moving was difficult. It was a beginning.**

PHASE II: Lisa assigned homework: to prepare a TCC movement for presentation at our next meeting. We had to decide how to prepare. My sources were the *TCC Photo Text* and the little orange book, *Teaching Tips* by Justin. I stood in front of a mirror and tried different approaches. Breaking the movement down into parts and putting it back together worked best. We did these presentations several times, **finding ourselves surer and less tentative with each presentation.** Our voices got stronger. Our tendency was to hurry. With practice we learned to slow down.

PHASE III: Lisa teaches many classes, and she established a 15-minute time slot before or after her regular classes for the student teachers (one assigned to each class) to take charge (under her supervision) and teach a movement. She advertised these sessions as a means for students to learn in greater depth about a specific movement, and as an opportunity for students to support the community and the student teachers. Each student teacher started with Rocking Motion and worked up to Cosmic Consciousness Pose. Some movements (especially the Taffys) required several repetitions. After a while, we were asked to look carefully at students to find mistakes and offer appropriate corrections. I found this difficult in the beginning. I could not see difficulties. **Then my eye began to discern better** and I could see how I might offer guidance. Lisa asked us to keep a diary of our student teaching.

PHASE IV: Lisa asked me to do a running commentary in one of her classes as we were doing the practice, making suggestions for improvement and reminding students of various key themes (softness, continuity, circularity, polarity, etc.) This offered more practice in speaking while moving.

PHASE V: We are now beginning a new and more advanced part of this training. While Lisa is away for a month, we student teachers will take charge of most of her classes, under the supervision of another accredited teacher, Lisa's mother, Corine. We will each have several opportunities to lead the practice, give instruction, and orient newcomers. This will give us the opportunity to be observed by and receive feedback from another teacher.

This process has been slow and gradual enough to build skill and confidence without too much stress. But it has been challenging enough to make me feel some pride of accomplishment. I love being part of the community that is building locally, and of the larger TCC community. I bow in gratitude to Justin and the line of teachers that have brought this practice to me.

TCC Journal Part 2

BY RICHARD BETHKE, PSYCH MAJOR AT WIDENER UNIVERSITY, PENNSYLVANIA

Journals are due tomorrow. I suppose the obvious thing is to reflect on this course as a whole and T'ai Chi Chih in general. I'm certainly glad I fit it into my schedule. It's an experience I wouldn't have had otherwise. I don't know how much of what I learned is going to stick in my life, though. I would love to say I'm going to continue practicing, but that's probably not true. It's that way with lots of classes, I suppose, as there are things learned in high school I'll likely never use again.

I think the issue is that I am not really a spiritual person and TCC has a very strong spiritual component. It can be done without said part, but that feels sort of incomplete. I'm always going to be a facts guy. I don't care for most religions or alternative medicines or anything like that, but I do think I've gained something – if not an inherent love for TCC.

I am a bit more open to things now, willing to try things even if they're a bit odd. I've been doing things I've never done before, from trying new games to talking to new people to eating new foods. My life has been one heck of a roller coaster this semester. A lot has happened, some for better, some not so much, but over all I'm coming out of it all right. I believe TCC was something I needed this semester, something to show me the

opportunities waiting even though some others are gone. Honestly, that is probably the most useful thing any class has taught me all year.



How? How? How?

By STACEY MOORE, DOVER, PENNSYLVANIA

How do we know? How do we know what to do next, or what the next step is to be? How is it that some days go so smoothly and others seem to just fall apart? How are we affected by our waking state, by others we come into contact with, by the moon? How can we handle some situations with such grace, and with others we turn into a monster (self-perception felt by some of us internally)? How do we know what our path is and where we are being led? How is it possible to let go and trust that we are being directed exactly to where we are meant to be? How do the people and experiences of each moment of each day determine and impact our next move? We have much to deal with in day-to-day life. How do we manage to handle all of these pieces that present themselves to each and every one of us? Knowing and trusting, in what?

Learning a long time ago many great coping mechanisms and ways of understanding, ways of working through situations and challenges that have come into play in life, managing to move from one experience and moment to the next, dealing with one relationship and person to another... **Certainly it seems that the easiest way to cope with life is** through the use and consistency in practicing T'ai Chi Chih and *Seijaku*. These two important gifts available for use every day in life help me to learn and remember to Breathe, Trust, Let Go, Live Free and Love All.



Family, Friends & TCC

By JOYCE K. VEERKAMP, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

I was feeling a bit out of balance, not quite right, like something is going on, but you don't know quite what. So, reluctantly, I made an appointment with my primary care physician in late April. Within a week I had an ultrasound and CAT scan; I had a mass in my mid-section. Surgery was scheduled the next week and additional procedures might have been needed.

On May 8, family and friends came to the hospital to lend support. Surgery took less time than was scheduled, possibly due to the energy from the Tai Chi Chih practice done while I was in surgery. I woke to everyone telling me I was okay. The mass was contained; I just needed to heal for six to eight weeks. She suggested I keep moving a little more each day, but not to overdo it. Over the next couple weeks, I continued doing TCC and with encouragement from family and friends my energy returned.

As the weeks progressed I was amazed at how little pain I felt. At three weeks the surgeon suggested continuing whatever I was doing – because I was healing just fine. Six weeks from the initial appointment and four weeks from the 10-pound mass being removed, I am doing about anything and everything I want. Joy through Movement is truly healing in so many ways, and if you add family and friends ... what an unstoppable combination. Thank you all, and Justin.

The Gift Of TCC

By DR. PAULINE QUIMSON, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

If I were a master chef, T'ai Chi Chih would be the basic ingredient serving as a foundation for daily living. From personal experience and student observations, daily practice not only **clears out mental cobwebs** but also **releases emotional baggage** and clears blockages and toxins.

While in the Philippines recently, I worked with high level governmental organizations and NGOs (non-governmental organizations), foundations, organic farming communities and families. No matter what lecture or workshop I was giving on health and wellness, disease prevention, pain relief, stress management, relationships or self-healing, TCC was always welcomed by the participants. In fact, every group and private client expressed how much they immediately felt a difference after practicing even just a little bit of TCC. This ranged from people needing some relaxation to those healing from severe trauma and abuse.

One group was very special – a bunch of about 70 young girls recovering and healing from sexual exploitation and abuse. The original plan was for the sponsor group to treat them to lunch, followed by fun and games at the amusement park. When the park opening was delayed, the leaders asked me to teach something that would help their trauma healing. So I demonstrated and taught TCC. When I followed up with them during private conversations, the students shared how much better they felt afterwards: *Mas panatag na ang kalooban ko.* (I feel more at peace within myself.) *Nakatulog ako nang mahimbing (nang walang masamang panaginip).* (I was able to experience deep sleep without horrible nightmares.) *Pakiramdam ko, kaya ko nang magsimulang magpatawad.* (I feel like I can begin the process of forgiveness.) *Naramdaman ko na may nagmamahal sa akin.* (I feel that I am loved.)

I am now excited to continue to discover more experiences of balance, harmony, integration and holistic transformation from my personal practice and from students at the TCC Center in Albuquerque – as well as from fellow TCC teachers, teacher candidates and the whole community.

When the sculptor is asked, “How do you create such beautiful works of art?,” the sculptor replies, “I just remember the beauty that is already there, and then I chip away what does not belong.” I am filled with joy to know that TCC helps us release what is not ours so that we can reconnect with who and what we really are, so we can remember the wholeness that we have always been all along.

Accreditation, May 2014, Philadelphia, PA: It Takes A Village

BY APRIL LEFFLER, PROSPECT PARK, PENNSYLVANIA

The T'ai Chi Chih community is truly supportive in nature. Whether one is a teacher candidate, auditor, host or trainer, ultimately we are all still TCC students, part of a larger community. As the host, I had the privilege of witnessing the group's transformation. It was wonderful to see people going deeper into the practice and to tweak and delve deeper into my own practice. Auditors focused on their own form while assisting when needed. Below are some comments:

"I knew the accreditation would be demanding. My teachers had prepared me for that and had told me how supportive everyone would be. It wasn't just the support I received, it was the dedication, commitment and caring this community offered each other. Whatever path I take, this experience will always be with me. Daniel's sincere guidance brought real meaning to Justin's words, and to the practice and spirituality of TCC that cannot be found in a manual." – DEANNE BORRIE

"Auditing for the entire week was especially meaningful. Not only was my wife a candidate, but a long-time student and a student who'd asked me for coaching were there. As the week unfolded, it was

thrilling to see the candidates blooming. It was also a treat to hear Dan's refinements, which deepened my own practice. What a privilege and joy to share this week with the candidates, now fellow teachers. – JIM KAIB

"Such a spirit of joy in learning, made easy by seamless organizing that enabled us to float through the schedule until, suddenly, the near-week was over. A deep sense of purpose and patience was due, I think, not only to the expert guidance of our trainer and host (and greatly enhanced by the presence and wisdom of auditing teachers) but also to our commitment to "keep TCC pure." Surely there is no better foundation for effective teaching than careful practice, working with principles, being diligent about encouraging proper form, and seeking

the least resistant path for the Chi. And we had such fun doing it with continuous reverence and love. An amazing invitation to continue inviting others to the *Chi*."

– NANCY DANIEL

"Through the week, my practice was polished and blossomed, and I walked through a door feeling newly ready to be with and trust the vital force with humility and courage." – M. LYNNE JONES-DIETZE

"An unforgettable experience of community and emotions. Flowing upstream like a salmon. Thanking Daniel for "rocking my boat." Learning the deeper meaning of impermanence makes one realize this form is a lifetime commitment to keep pure and polished. Struggling to incorporate tweaks into movements at the beginning of the week, one realizes that happens over time and when ready, you will proceed. Finding myself struggling to massage tweaks into place through the week caused strife in my practice. Letting go was relearned. Think-

ing that being here said my movements were correct. Now one needs to make them more correct. It is amazing how the following week these tweaks seemed to flow into my practice along with the voices from all the wonderful teachers and trainer. Almost like being in class still.

In Daniel Pienckiak, one could feel desire to transfer his experience and knowledge to us to absorb. His stories brought more clarity to subjects that might have been a little fuzzy. Everything flowed without a hiccup, and host April Leffler may want to offer a class on hosting.

The most gratitude is saved for my original teacher, Jean Markey, for keeping me going and polishing off the rough spots as my absorption improves through all the practices. Being the bamboo bending in the storm without breaking, deciding to change a zero into a one, saying yes to the opportunity of a TCC class many years ago.... All this became clearer than ever when returning home and finding an article from Anita Vestal in the latest Vital Force as she said yes to TCC in York, Pennsylvania, to one of Jean's students. One person did change the world. We are just a part of the immense result. To anyone wondering how he or she can change the world, here is your turn: Say yes to TCC and let the teacher within you come out to play." – JACK WEAVER



Back Row: Lynne Jones-Dietze, Fran Kaib, Jack Weaver, Linda Jones, Angela Calogero, Carolyn O'Donnell. Front Row: Dan Pienckiak, Deanne Borrie, Nancy Daniel, April Leffler.

here
move on
the journey
has begun and
never ends
t'ai chi
chih

– DEANNE BORRIE

calm
stillness
awareness
the energy
within me
unfolds
now

– DEANNE BORRIE

Minnesota Retreat, May 2014

By MONICA CAMPBELL, MINNETONKA, MINNESOTA

This was my first T'ai Chi Chih Intensive since becoming a teacher *and* attending with some of my students preparing for accreditation *and* since I've been practicing Seijaku regularly. How spectacular can a few days be? Spectacular, and then some.

It was so awesome witnessing students having "ah ha" moments at that level – being present to see light bulbs go off and feeling their emotional responses and experiences. The tears that ran after they felt TCC doing TCC for the first time was spectacular.

TCC and *Seijaku* continue to surprise and catch me off guard with their depth. The circularity of how they work together amazes my being. Each practice turns the next one into a whole new experience. It is never ending. The circle continues and I love the exploration behind it all.

I feel I am walking this earth as a different being than who I was years ago. And it feels so good; there are no words. Each time I practice TCC I'm aware of what I have gained with *Seijaku* and so then my TCC practice becomes more spectacular.

Trainer Dan Pienciak is such a kind, warm, open soul and this beamed out to all participants. Students and teachers were embraced by his knowledge. He encouraged us to explore and feel the movements in our bodies while staying with the TCC principles. Spectacular.

I came away with a deeper understanding of Justin. I had never met Justin but Dan brought his stories into the weekend, giving me a new level of appreciation. Spectacular.

My being wants more *Seijaku* which brings forward anything and everything I need to work on in TCC, which in turn brings forward anything and everything I need to work on in life. I feel both practices more vividly. When I walk through the day my senses feel more, see more, hear more; the circularity continues. **It is like all the elements of life's doors have opened and are greeting**

me with a huge smile and open arms. My natural tendencies are to be "way out there" but I feel more balanced than ever. I am so wonderfully grounded to this earth and connected to the heavens that I feel embraced with pure joy. Spectacular.

Over the first 12 years of my daughter's disability I erected two walls – one on either side of my body – that held me up but didn't let anything in. I did not feel I could handle anymore. I had already practiced a dozen *Taiji* and *Qigong* forms and wasn't getting anywhere with breaking down those walls. When I was introduced to TCC five years ago and started practicing I felt walls move farther away from my body. With the addition of *Seijaku* the walls are way out in the distance, and they're not made of brick anymore; I can see thru them. Spectacular. Thank you Dan, the Rochester community, and Justin. A spectacular few days.

Arizona Retreat, May 2014

By RICHARD CUTLER, AUSTIN, TEXAS

The theme of Pam's retreat was "Deepening Your Practice," and participants came from as far away as Washington State to an especially beautiful location among oaks and pines. The weather was perfect, the food incredible, and the experience awesome. Pam brought three decades of practice and teaching, and we had discussions based on Justin's *Spiritual Odyssey*. We experienced breakthroughs under Pam's guidance and profited from sharing with each other. Dana Diller, tireless host of this retreat, summed it up: "We came together as strangers and left as family."

Attendees' comments that "I felt the healing energy and the kindness of working in teams" ... "I stepped forward in spirituality; I wasn't permitted to take steps back" ... "I was rejuvenated, renewed and reaffirmed in my practice and my teaching" ... "I didn't realize how much more I could ask for" ... Pam said it was exactly what she needed: "a lot of practice in a scenic place, wrapped in a warm comforter of accepting love." She also offered some re-entry advice: "After the cocoon of love and lack of criticism, take the beauty of our experience inside of us. Like homeopathy, a little bit goes a long way."



Santa Barbara Retreat, February 2014

BY NANCY GARDIKAS DERR, CAMARILLO, CALIFORNIA

I had never been to a retreat, and I was looking forward to time away from my usual schedule to relax and focus on Tai Chi Chih. I enjoy TCC but other things often come before practice. I was hoping to refocus myself and prioritize TCC.

Upon arrival, I took a long stroll around the grounds, which were quite dry despite this being the rainy season. As I walked narrow paths and alongside spreading magnolia trees, I noticed birdbaths made of stone, tile and porcelain. I have three at home and love to watch birds bathe and drink. On this afternoon, all birdbaths were empty and quiet.

I came to the retreat after a 10-year break from TCC, although it had always been a perfect moving meditation for me. (I have tinnitus so sitting meditation has always been difficult because I am never sitting in silence; there is always a loud ringing in my head.) The hand and leg movements of TCC and the focus on circularity are easy to get lost in. They help me focus on something besides my noisy head. I practiced for about a year then gradually stopped until 2012 when I took another class from a new teacher.

The retreat was all I hoped for and more. I felt a new sense of peace envelop me. With Antonia's guidance, I moved more gently and actually felt the movements directed from the *tan t'ien*. With Pam's guidance, I focused more on the soles of my feet between movements and felt grounded.

On the last morning, I awoke with a feeling of calm and joy. I made a cup of tea and walked the grounds like I had every morning, **yet I felt so different**. A storm had moved in, so it had rained a little the first night and even more the second. On the last day, the sky "opened up" and during our last practice, the rain came in sheets, accompanied by lightening and thunder. As I walked the paths I noticed that every single birdbath was full. I, too, was full – full of thanks for the opportunity to attend the retreat, full of joy at finding the focus I sought, full of peace at the way TCC practice calmed me, full of wonder at feeling the *Chi* moving through my body. I was like the birdbaths, filled to the brim.

Yet I knew that the wind, sun and birds would empty the baths once again. And I knew that I had to keep my practice regular to keep myself full and to keep the *Chi* flowing. I vowed to practice when I felt like it and practice when I didn't. I vowed to be consistent and mindful. I will keep practicing, coming to retreats and keeping myself full of TCC, just like the birdbaths that last morning.

An Update

BY AGNES FLEMING, TARRYTOWN, NEW YORK

Certainly my dedication to T'ai Chi Chih practice every morning before breakfast is beneficial to my spiritual and physical wellbeing. The softness, centering and continuity are great qualities to this practice. I continue to teach my small group twice weekly. One of the sisters awaiting surgery found the class so beneficial especially for improving balance. Her sister from the mission in Zambia picked up her TCC from where she left off some years ago. I was very pleased with the spirit and progress we all made. My work with the senior sisters, many suffering from some form of dementia, includes a moderate form

of seated TCC. The staff is happy to have something different and gentle to do with the elderly sisters.

It was nice having a New York meeting of TCC this spring, and I appreciate all the good news from *The Vital Force*.



Where in the World: Ocean Grove, NJ

Santa Barbara Retreat, February 2014

BY NANCY GARDIKAS DERR, CAMARILLO, CALIFORNIA

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I came to the retreat after a 10-year break from TCC, although it had always been a perfect moving meditation for me. (I have tinnitus so sitting meditation has always been difficult because I am never sitting in silence; there is always a loud ringing in my head.) The hand and leg movements of TCC and the focus on cir-

CONTINUED ON P. 23

Different Accents, Same Language?

BY NEAL ROY, PORTLAND, OREGON

I'm glad we've had some focus over the last year (or more, depending on how long you've been practicing T'ai Chi Chih) on the rest position. Here's my perspective. TCC is done all over the world, and in the U.S., we have pockets of thriving communities. When I attend the annual teacher conference, I love hearing different accents, despite the fact that we speak the same language. We speak with different inflections, some subtle, some not so much.

In that same vein, we also have different accents in our TCC practices depending on your teacher and your region. Think about it: we all know the movements. While doing them in a group, you can look around and see how well we move as a community. There are subtle differences because of body type and shape, as well as where you learned.

So when the rest position (or conclusion) was explored during Daniel's break out session last year, **it was met with excitement and resistance**. Justin says, "We come to a graceful conclusion." Knowing we are all speaking TCC, we come to rest after each movement. Here is where your accent comes into play.

Some people hold the conclusion longer than others. It's not good or bad; it just is. My perspective is we listen to Justin's words, but we also listen to our own inner voices.

Play with pausing longer and softening your knees; see what it feels like. Try not pausing longer and flowing right into the next movement. See what is most comfortable. For me, it changes from one practice to the next. I always try to be as consistent as possible. But sometimes my Minnesotan accent comes out, and I continue a little sooner than someone from California or New Jersey. When the *Chi* is flowing particularly well, a longer pause or rest is needed. Softening my knees and standing up slightly without losing my connection or focus in my feet; taking a breath; feeling the balance of my weight between the left and right foot and the heel and ball of each foot.

Let's be open to hearing accents and celebrating the beauty of our voices. TCC will teach us if we open ourselves to hearing what it's saying. Learning from one another is a great joy and important for the evolution of TCC. We all speak the same language.

Icebergs & Accreditation: More Than Meets The Eye!

BY CAROLYN O'DONNELL AND SHEILA LEONARD, NEWFOUNDLAND, CANADA

It's high iceberg season here in Newfoundland, Canada, also known as "Iceberg Alley," out in the middle of the Atlantic, 1000 miles northeast of Maine, and home to thousands of 'bergs each year as they head south. T'ai Chi Chih is very much like those icebergs. **Only when one delves deeper below the surface can one really experience and appreciate the fullness and depth.**

Holding that iceberg image in mind, it's easy for us to look back at our May accreditation experience in New Jersey with Dan Pien-ciak and April Leffler and see the similarities from our different perspectives as candidate and auditing teacher.

For me, Carolyn, as a teacher candidate, we began as a small group of eight, with many different backgrounds and diverse life experiences, yet with one focus. Our week began with refinements and more refinements, and moved into learning teaching techniques, shifting doubts to newfound confidences, as all candidates graduated. So many emotions flowed during the week. Having been declared teachers, we could now go forth and teach TCC. I may have been the only candidate coming from Newfoundland but we were all entering into a New Found Land as TCC teachers. I finally understand the affinity that other teachers feel about their accreditation experience.

For me, Sheila, as an auditing teacher, I came partly to support the teacher candidates (especially since one was my student) and partly to refine and update my own practice and hone my teaching skills and techniques. This was my third such experience, and I was again pleasantly surprised (and yet not) at how much deeper my openness to new ways of seeing and moving allowed me to go. My new view is still amazing. Openness and preparedness on the part of candidates, and sensitivity and receptivity on the part of supporting teachers, coupled with what Justin calls *teh* (inner sincerity), is key for an accreditation training becoming a transformative experience for all.

The invitation, ever old and ever new, to come and go deeper. Renewed thanks, Justin.



Lighter Side

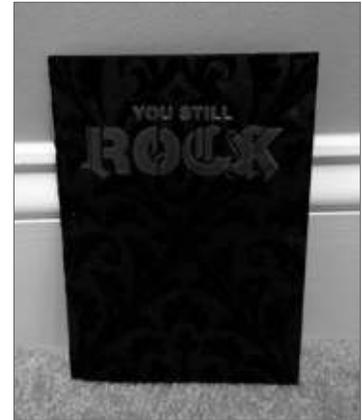
By SHARON SIRKIS, COLUMBIA, MARYLAND

During our final T'ai Chi Chih class, I ask my college students to bring in an item for show and tell. This brings the group together in a fun and creative way, and serves to get a feel for their experiences in the class. I ask students to think about what they've gained from TCC, and to bring in an item that best symbolizes this. We then sit in a circle, and each student takes a turn to show and tell. Here are some examples:

1. Laundry detergent: "I'm making a clean, fresh, start."
2. Quart of oil: "TCC eases my joint pain."
3. Construction level: "It balances and levels me out."
4. Can of Pringles potato chips: "It reminds me of my stack of coins; my posture is better."
5. Resistance Bands: "I felt resistant at first, but now I'm flexible."
6. Multi Tool: "You leave it alone and it does nothing. You pick it up and it helps you."
7. Check: "When I have money in the bank I feel happy and relaxed, and that's how TCC makes me feel."
8. Birth Certificate: "I feel like it was a rebirth for me."
9. Pillow: "I sleep like a rock."

And of course, some items make me laugh. One student pulled a bag of marshmallows out of a cereal box. He said the class was not what he expected. (in a good way).

And more recently, one student brought in a pack of cigarettes. He said that since TCC had inspired him to get more healthy, he was trying to quit smoking. When he said only two remained in the pack, I immediately said, "I'll take them." At that moment, the entire class burst into laughter. I didn't understand what was so funny, and then I realized that the class thought I wanted to smoke the cigarettes myself.



Outside Card: *You Still Rock*
Inside Card: *Mostly Back and Forth*



When moving, think of dinosaurs, solid in the legs and feet with small arm movements.

CONTINUED FROM P. 21

cularity are easy to get lost in. They help me focus on something besides my noisy head. I practiced for about a year then gradually stopped until 20012 when I took another class from a new teacher.

The retreat was all I hoped for and more. I felt a new sense of peace envelop me. With Antonia's guidance, I moved more gently and actually felt the movements directed from the *tan t'ien*. With Pam's guidance, I focused more on the soles of my feet between movements and felt grounded.

On the last morning, I awoke with a feeling of calm and joy. I made a cup of tea and walked the grounds like I did every morning, yet I felt so different. A storm had moved in, so it had rained a little the first night and even more the second. On the last day, the sky "opened up" and during our last practice, the rain came in sheets, accompanied by lightening and thunder. As I walked the paths I noticed that every single birdbath was full. I, too, was full – full of thanks for the opportunity to attend the retreat, full of joy at finding the focus I sought, full of peace at the way TCC practice calmed me, full of wonder at feeling the *Chi* moving through my body. I was like the birdbaths, filled to the brim.

Yet I knew that the wind, sun and birds would empty the baths once again. And I knew that I had to keep my practice regular to keep myself full and to keep the *Chi* flowing. I vowed to practice when I felt like it and practice when I didn't. I vowed to be consistent and mindful. I will keep practicing, coming to retreats and keeping myself full of TCC, just like the birdbaths that last morning.

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See www.taichichih.org/teacher-resources/

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Community Calendar

For the most up-to-date info and event PDFs, visit www.taichichih.org/events/

DATE / WHAT & WHO / WHERE / CONTACT

Sept 11-14 / Prajna Retreat w/ Sandy / Aston, PA / April Leffler / 610-532-6753
 Sep 25-28 / TCC Retreat w/ Sandy / Pecos, NM / Ann Rutherford / 505-292-5114
 Oct 6-11 / Teacher Accred w/ Pam / Santa Barbara, CA / Lisa Otero / 805-766-1342
 Oct 12-18 / Teacher Accred w/ Sandy / Buffalo, MN / Sue Bitney / 612-353-4968
 Oct 17-19 / TCC Retreat w/ Pam / Estes Park, CO / Maire Dotts / 970-412-9955
 Nov 13-16 / TCC Intensive w/ Sandy / Albuquerque, NM / Bruce Childs / 505-797-2060
 Nov 19-23 / TCC Intensive w/ Pam / Aston, PA / Stacy Moore / slsmot35@gmail.com
 April 19-25, 2015 / Accrediation / Aston, PA / Stacy Moore / slsmot35@gmail.com
 May 7-10, 2015 / TCC Retreat / Prescott, AZ / Dana Diller / 928-848-0824

- MORE WORKSHOPS & RETREATS -

Postings here are open to all teachers offering events wholly devoted to TCC.

Sept 11-14 / TCC Retreat w/ Carmen Brocklehurst / Albuquerque, NM / Judy Hendricks / 505-897-3810

Sept 20 / TCC Workshop w/ Sharon Sirkis / Marriottsville, MD / Sharon Sirkis / sirkisprice@verizon.net

Nov 16 / TCC Workshop w/ Sharon Sirkis / Marriottsville, MD / Sharon Sirkis / sirkisprice@verizon.net

Nov 22 / TCC Workshop w/ Sharon Sirkis / Marriottsville, MD / Sharon Sirkis / sirkisprice@verizon.net



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Name of the teacher who taught you T'ai Chi Chih _____

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