

The Vital Force



Journal of the T'ai Chi Chih® Community

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Opening practice began in a circle with 116 accredited teachers...

at the 17th Annual T'ai Chi Chih Teachers' Conference

Coverage begins on Page 6.



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**Justin Stone is the Originator of *T'ai Chi Chih!* Joy Thru Movement
Ed Altman is the Head of the *T'ai Chi Chih* Community**



The Vital Force

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The Vital Force, Journal of the T'ai Chi Chih® Community, is an unincorporated, non-profit association, serving T'ai Chi Chih practitioners worldwide. Membership in the Association includes four quarterly issues of The Vital Force and outreach services such as teacher referrals. Teacher memberships also include listing in and receipt of the annual Teachers' Directory.

The purpose of The Vital Force is to provide a medium by which teachers and students of the T'ai Chi Chih discipline may share, educate, inform and inspire one another.

Cover:



The cover photo was taken by TCC student Dale Sollars, husband of TCC teacher Ann Sollars, at the

opening practice of the 17th Annual TCC Teachers' Conference in San Antonio, TX. Dale volunteered as one of the videographers and also snapped photographs during the conference.

Also volunteering his time and effort at the conference this year was Columbus Smith, a professional photojournalist with impressive credentials. Nearly all the photos on the inside pages of this issue are Columbus' work. We were privileged to have a photographer with his background offering his services!

Thanks very much to Dale and Columbus!

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Letter from the Editor

The wonderful thing about our annual teachers' conference every year is seeing the teaching community in a different part of the country (and after next year's in Canada, we'll be able to say, "in North America") band together and offer up their collective best, often with a regional flair. It's wonderful because the conferences are never the same — they are dynamic and changing. Good new ideas come from each conference and are often carried forward by future conference committees.

We all owe our gratitude to the group of teachers who commit selflessly to this task of hosting the biggest T'ai Chi Chih event of the year, many working for up to two years in advance in researching and booking locations, planning the agenda, working out the logistics, coming up with a theme, publicizing the event in The Vital Force, and sometimes the local media. This is a completely volunteer effort, and absolutely qualifies in the category of "giving something back" (a phrase Originator Justin Stone has continually challenged us all to do.)

The "San Antonio Six" (as I call them) were absolutely amazing. Such a small group, such a big accomplishment. When they had volunteered for the hosting duties two years earlier, there had been nine local teachers committed to the cause, but after some out-of-state moves, their numbers were reduced to the Six. Led by Sr. Alice Holden, they also included: Stella Jaidar, Sophie Roland, Renza Baker, Lucky Sikora and Sr. Eugenia Stell. These ladies made it look easy — always gracious, always accommodating. Any time I looked around, there were always two or three of them posted at the doorways or in the foyer of the gym to assist with any needs that arose. Several of them told me that the most amazing thing to them was how they all got along so beautifully. When something was assigned, it got done. There weren't any hassles whatsoever in the group dynamics. Sr. Alice made it clear over and over that although she was the designated speaker and facilitator, the work was all group effort. With the challenges of a schedule that was changing sometimes hour to hour, Sr. Alice was the perfect no-nonsense gal to move us forward and keep us on track. Her job wasn't easy this year, but Sr. Alice was perfect at it!

The San Antonio Six had help from quite a few out-of-state teachers with the set-up and registration process as well as some of the photography and videotaping. I hope I'm not leaving out any names, but I know Bobbi and Andy Anderson, Mary Cameris, Deb Cole, Caroline Guillott, Amy Hackenberg, Nancy Bordley Hall, Carla Kelley, Bitsy LeBlanc, Robert Montes de Oca, Ann and Dale Sollars, and Rhonda St. Martin are all worthy of a big THANK YOU! They made it possible for a small group to actually execute the event they had planned for two years!

As promised, this October issue is devoted to coverage of the recent Teachers' Conference. In addition, coverage of the ongoing discussion of the teacher candidate deferral problem is also presented. I made it a priority to make sure that every person who submitted a comment or article on this topic would be published in this issue, and by expanding to our maximum size of 44 pages was just able to do it. Many wonderful unrelated articles are waiting in my "To Use in Future Issue" folder, and I expect to use many of them in the next issue.

Noel Altman, Editor



Readers Respond

[Editor's Note: On May 15, an e-mailed letter was sent to every current subscriber for whom we had an e-mail address. It let them know of changes in publication dates, and that the June issue would not ship until July. All of this information was repeated in the July issue, so that all readers would be fully informed. Following are some responses to the e-mail.]

. . . Thank you for your detailed e-mail regarding the new publishing dates of *The Vital Force*. Your reasons for the changes make eminently good sense. The contents of the journal are well worth waiting for so we bear the delay gladly. This week I will get my renewal off so I will be on the list when the second year of my subscription begins. . . . I am so thankful that Ed and you will be able to continue your leadership roles in the *T'ai Chi Chih* Community from your far distant location. It would be very hard to rejoice at what seems to be your good fortune if it meant that you would be lost to us in this capacity. And so for now, "Aloha."

Mary Schapker
Galloway, NJ

Thanks for the recent email about your move to Hawaii and the status of the *VFJ*. I am sure it will be in good hands in Albuquerque for the mailing. . . .

Linda Braga
Castro Valley, CA

I think that it [changing the publication months] is a great idea and like you said it will give you more time to cover and receive articles concerning the conference. Things have a

way of working themselves out. If we can eliminate unnecessary stress out of our lives, we are doing well. . .

Caroline Guillott
Lake Charles, LA

Thank you Noel for the update. This gives me the opportunity to tell you how much I appreciate our magazine and how much I look forward to it. I use a lot of the material for the classes I've taught, especially for those students that want to go on to become T.C.C. teachers. In my own practice, many of the articles help me to refine, rethink, and/or ponder both my practice and my fidelity to the movement of the Chi. Thank you so much for all the wonderful work you do to give us such a top notch magazine. . . .

Viola Bens, ose
Christopher Lake, SK
CANADA

I have some serious reservations about the July 2002 cover, although it utilized a technically good photo. Specifically, I am concerned with the prominence of the cross. Don't get me wrong, I am certainly grateful for all the work done by nuns and other Christians among us to further the TCC discipline. If I'm not mistaken, though, the *VFJ* is intended to serve our community of teachers and students, as well as to disseminate and introduce information about the TCC discipline to the world-at-large. In my mind, this July issue meets only half that criteria. The *VFJ* is a valuable tool to promote the TCC discipline and I always look forward to using the published nuggets that serve that goal. I make it a point to tell

students that the TCC discipline has no religious affiliation. But for beginning and intermediate students, as well as institutions to whom I'm pitching classes, this cover suggests otherwise. Since I do not want to share this issue with a disclaimer attached, I have not shared it. This is unfortunate and avoidable. As a professional photographer, I truly believe that a photo is worth a thousand words. I just hope they're the right ones.

The other issue I'd like to raise concerns the content of letters to the editor and the amount of space allotted for those letters. I often feel as if I'm reading personal letters to the editor that aren't for public consumption, or that merely serve the purpose of thanking those involved for putting out the *Journal*. Gratitude is imperative, and in my mind it needs no wider audience than subject/object (preferably merged). But I would personally rather read more letters or articles of substance. Perhaps there aren't any, though.

Please do not take this as a personal affront. I appreciate your work for the TCC community. It is merely meant as two thoughts between two editors, and as one community member to another.

Kim Grant
Boston, MA

[Editor's Note: Thank you for your response to the last issue. I acknowledge your concern about seeing a cross in the background of the cover photo. The *T'ai Chi Chih* discipline, as

continued on page 41



The debate continues...

[Editor's Note: The debate continues over what to do with the situation of *T'ai Chi Chih* teacher trainings producing deferred candidates at a consistent rate of 12% per year. This debate has continued to generate responses from readers since it was first proposed by Head of the *T'ai Chi Chih* Community Ed Altman in the March 2002 issue of *The Vital Force* where he asked for community feedback on one proposed idea.

The July 2002 issue was devoted to the discussion that ensued, and every submission to *The Vital Force* which related directly to the topic was printed at that time.

Since the July issue, more responses continued to flow in, and then the matter was fully discussed in August amongst the 116 teachers attending the teachers' conference.

Although he didn't attend in person, Justin Stone's comments were also considered in the discussion as a letter he had written to be read at the conference was printed off for every attendee. That letter is included in this issue. (See page 11).

Following the conference, responses from attend-

ing teachers, many of them quite long and well-thought-out, flowed in to *The Vital Force*.

It is exciting to me to see the larger *T'ai Chi Chih* community involved in the discussion. It is exciting to me to see *The Vital Force* used in this way — as a forum for discussion of an idea that affects the future of all of us, and *T'ai Chi Chih* Joy Thru Movement.

We also have responses from students who are preparing to become teacher candidates, and I am pleased to offer their perspectives in this issue.

Once again, all received submissions on the topic of what to do with the deferred candidate situation have been printed. I have presented the material in a *chronological* order — responses *before* the conference, *during* the conference and *after* the conference are interspersed with coverage of the teachers' conference itself. As a result, this issue does not begin with Justin Stone and Ed Altman's articles. Rather, it ends with them, since theirs were the last ones in, and since it is fitting that they have the final say.

Below and right are pre-conference responses.]

Read *The Vital Force* discussion re: teacher training. My thoughts:

One of the qualities of *T'ai Chi Chih* Joy Thru Movement is its "simplicity". And I too like to keep a perspective re: more institution.

The process for teacher cert should be kept simple, yet achieve the desired results: reduction in deferrals.

The process begins at the grass roots. If students are coming thru only to be deferred, then the referring teacher is lacking in understanding. Can this be corrected? I believe so. Consider the following.

1. Teacher & student use the certification check list from the web site. When the teacher is satisfied, he/she signs off on it (yes, date and signa-

ture). Student presents it at a 2-3 day precert screening workshop. A maximum number of students should be set. Eight?

2. Precert teacher uses this check list to evaluate the student. Use a highlighter to mark the areas that need improvement. I am sure that this can be determined in one session. Review this with student. Proceed with corrections as necessary. Use a different highlighter to mark areas that have showed improvement.

3. Lead teacher and student together evaluate the work with a final decision to advance or defer.

4. Either way the student has an evaluation product to take back to the referring teacher. The wise teacher will use this to improve/cor-

rect his/her teacher prep.

5. A deferred student uses the check list, preferably with a different teacher, as the student might not have related to a teacher's style of teaching. That teacher, when he/she feels student has corrected weaknesses, can sign off and the student reapply for precert.

6. The advancing student hones his/her TCC practice, perhaps for a period of months? The referring teacher again signs off and student applies for certification.

Video tape is not the best idea. It may show technique but it will not convey attitude, inner discipline, etc.

Neena Mitchell
Syracuse, NY



Dear Ed:

. . . In the current "Vital Force", I was impressed with the discussion of the training issue. I appreciate the honest and open way you have engaged the TCC community on this important matter. The type of leadership demonstrated by you on this bodes well for the health of the organization.

I agree with the solution taking shape: the 2-tiered process. It would have been great for me. As you well know from my training last year, I had good spirit, teh, attitude etc., but my technique left a lot to be desired. A pre-training course would have brought this to light, and given me time to work on it.

Thanks for your dedicated work on behalf of the TCC world . . . and I look forward to being with you at the New Jersey training in October. With fond regards,

Freddy Solomon
Colchester, VT

Hi, just a quickie, to let you know that we appreciate your efforts in keeping the far-flung TCC community together. Having just completed a trans-continental move, I sympathize with you and feel that you have nothing to apologize for.

I just got the new issue and must confess that I have not stayed current on the difficulty of adequately preparing TCC candidates. It was a great issue and I look forward to finishing it later.

Without a great deal of deep thought or meditation, I must say that a TWO-step process seems to be a great way to go. I learned where there were plenty of teach-

ers. Then, I lived and taught subsequent to my certification where there was no-one, until Ed came and taught in Orlando.

I witnessed the struggle of inadequately prepared candidates, as well as, candidates that were trained by instructors certified under Ed's predecessor. The solution may be as simple as an intermediate step in the training. It would serve a secondary purpose in deepening the practice of anyone who attended and might help those of us who are isolated. It could be part of a continuing education program (which I think is a great idea every three years or so).

Yes, money is an issue. I am, after seven years in Orlando, starting over, again. Unfortunately, that is why I am unable to attend the convention this year. Once I get back on my feet, I hope to audit a teachers training sooner rather than later, to deepen my practice.

When I finish this issue and find the previous one and read that one, I will revisit this subject with you. . .

Elissa Maguire
Kennewick, WA

Dear Noel,

First I want to thank you for your article starting on page 24 [of the July 2002 issue]. It helps fill in some of the history on the issue under discussion for those of us who are newer to the TCC practice.

I understand this discussion will continue at the Teacher's Conference. However, as a committed student I am very interested in what will happen and feel it important to share where I am. I would

like to apply an analogy from my Profession of Nursing to TCC Teacher Training. In both it seems to me that there is a need for levels of practice. In Nursing, the first level of practice is to be a good nurse. The next level is to specialize and teaching is a specialty. Continuing education is essential to maintain quality of both practice and teaching or any other specialty.

I strongly support the suggestion to separate the Teacher Training into two courses with the first having a focus on practice and the second having a focus on teaching. (This does not [correspond] to mandatory continuing education for teachers — that could come later.) This approach would have the additional advantage of providing intensive practice training for those who may not feel called to teach — or may help a candidate discern whether or not they are. The first level would come after the referring teacher has done what they can to prepare the candidate. It could be an advanced "intermediate" training where learning rather than teaching is the principal focus. In either case, I would see it not only as an opportunity to improve the student's practice but to also improve the quality of the entire TCC Community. I would personally be interested in the first level with an openness to eventually working toward teaching.

I am very grateful to have had good teachers in Kathy Albers and Susan Kissinger. However, I could not help but observe some other teachers in various situations and wonder about the variations. Sincerely,

Ann Marie Wyrsh
Student of K. Albers and S. Kissinger
St. Louis, MO