

The Vital Force

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for teachers & students

May 2015

Justin Stone: Teaching Tips

Teaching Tips For Teachers

(Also Valuable For Students) BY JUSTIN STONE

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The purpose of this material [i.e. the entire booklet with tips on individual movements] is to help T'ai Chi Chih teachers spot what mistakes pupils are making and to offer ideas as to how these faults might be corrected. It is absolutely essential that teachers be aware of what is wrong and know how to make corrections – otherwise the students will never get the full benefit of their practice. Moreover, it is entirely possible that the teachers, unknowingly, are making some of these mistakes in their own practice.

The material will probably be useful to students as well, enabling them to note their own errors and consider the hints as to how these might be corrected. Once the student is doing T'ai Chi Chih correctly, and practicing regularly, it is only a question of time before the student begins to realize the deeper aspects of T'ai Chi Chih and accord with the essence of the discipline. Then, it is hoped, he or she might be enabled to enter and accord with the great Cosmic Rhythm. What could be more important – or beneficial?

~ ~ ~

General Comments:

Two things must be realized at the beginning of study, and must be stressed by teachers:

(1) **T'ai Chi Chih is not to be thought of as exercise, even though** I believe it is the most beneficial of all types of movement, exer-

cising the internal organs and circulating and balancing the great Life Force we know as *Chi*, or Vital Force. Exercise brings perspiration and fatigue, while T'ai Chi Chih practice seems to add to energy. It certainly does not cover one with sweat! If one runs a mile or two, the perspiration that ensues will probably bring weight loss. The runner

steps on the scale and smiles, because he or she has dropped three pounds. Then a glass of water is consumed (and, later, a meal) and it will be found that the weight has returned.

Weight loss through T'ai Chi Chih practice is accomplished through the drying activity of the *Chi* circulation, not through a Turkish bath procedure. If the weight is excessive, it tends to be reduced gradually through the flowing of the *Chi* and this without effort. Most experienced T'ai Chi Chih teachers have seen many examples of this effect, sometimes with decisive benefits to the students.

Also, T'ai Chi Chih is not a martial art, with the strenuous effort of throwing someone through the air or delivering a harmful chop with the hand. The teacher should stress that T'ai Chi Chih is an *inner* discipline, with great outer effects, and tends to bring about relaxation, lessening of stress, and a growing feeling of serenity. If a student wants violent action, T'ai Chi Chih is not the discipline for him or her. Most people, however, seem to want a lessening of the stress of modern life and a growing feeling of physical



Justin teaching Working the Pulley, teacher accreditation class limited to 52 students, Monterey Peninsula College, California, 1988.

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).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

May The Vital Force Be With You

INTERVIEWS IN THIS ISSUE

The Vital Force posed the same series of questions to a number of T'ai Chi Chih teachers in the community, with the intention of sharing their light. We have published the first four interviews in this issue, and we hope and expect to share more throughout the year. Whether you are a student or teacher, we also hope they inspire you vis-a-vis their thoughtfulness, integrity, vibrancy and the sheer variety of voices within our community. Enjoy.

CONFERENCE 2015 – AUGUST 6-9, NORTH CAROLINA

Read all about it at www.taichichih.org/conference-2015. It's not too late to register.

INSIDE MAY

This edition follows up on some compelling interviews from the February issue – with a few more teachers sharing their motivations for teaching T'ai Chi Chih, their ideas about training the next generation and connecting with others in the TCC community. If you would like to contribute, please email me for a set of questions that will help frame your thinking.

JUSTIN'S STORYTELLING: TRUTHS TO LIVE & DIE BY

During his younger years Justin created children's records for a publisher-friend of his. He didn't have a contract, but rather relied on a mutual agreement between the two of them. Justin trusted what he knew to be a clear understanding. The recordings went on to generate millions of dollars but Justin never received a penny because the

publisher reneged on their deal. Justin always referred to his publisher as stealing the royalties out from underneath him. The publisher had been able to do this because the t's had not been crossed and the i's had not been dotted.

Justin always told stories with a pointed purpose. And he told them to (and for) specific people in the room. When I became the CEO of Good Karma Publishing in January 2004, Justin relayed this particular story when I and another member of the TCC community were in the room. It was a haunting story.

Justin's heightened awareness allowed him to see things, to Know – whether in the present or future. No matter our listening prowess, Karma unfolds one way or the other. Knowing what I Know now, I'd still rather play the part of the trusting and trustworthy actor. Any day. It's all a play within a play; the lesson has been internalized. With each turn of a screw and on the drop of a dime, we actors choose our roles.

ANIMALS & TCC

Most of us have heard stories about animals being attracted to our presence as we practice TCC. Some of us have experienced it. And we know how viral animal stories and photos can become on social media. To that end, please send photos and short stories about the intersection of your practice with wild or domesticated animals. We'll share the interspecies love in *The Vital Force* and on the web.

WITH GRATITUDE. KIM GRANT, ALBUQUERQUE, NM

Table of Contents

Justin: Teaching Tips for Teachers	1
May The Vital Force Be With You	2
Freedom & Justin Stone	3
Folsom State Prison	4-5
Guiding Thoughts: Sandy	6
Teacher Training Tips	7
Teaching & Connecting	8
Using Our TCC Words	9
Teaching & Connecting	10-11
Justin: Teaching Tips for Teachers	12-13
By Teachers, For All	14-15
More Than An Event	16-17
Canadian Prison	16-17
Events	16-17, 23
Teaching TCC To College Students	18-19
By Students, For All	20-21
By Teachers, For Teachers	22
Lighter Side	23
Community Calendar	24

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.

Giving

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Gifts to *The Vital Force* are fully tax deductible, always appreciated and used effectively to reach tens of thousands of practitioners around the globe.

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.

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What Is Freedom?

BY LARRY BLOOM, SANDY SPRINGS, GEORGIA

The clock reads 3:16 a.m. on January 1st. I lie awake with so many thoughts running through my mind. Be present. Be present. Being present is the thought that keeps popping up the most. I have to remain in the present.

The sweet emotional expression of *guqin* music flooded yesterday's T'ai Chi Chih practice as we merged with other "Circles of Light" around the country to help Franky Carrillo's dream become a reality. None of us know Franky personally, but each could identify in their own way with the simple request from a man who served 20 years in Folsom State Prison as an innocent person and was finally exonerated and released.

For me, the *guqin* melody was like poetry without words. The seven-stringed zither without bridges is one of the most classical Chinese instruments with over 3,000 years of history. Its ability to express human feelings with a high degree of sensitivity elevates the spirit. What a great background for our homage to Franky's wish. *Chi* seemed to be springing from all around, and I soon found myself in a delicious no-thought state as TCC took over my practice.

The timeless trip to the cosmic consciousness pose passed, and I soon found myself bowing and repeating: "I am grateful, I give thanks." As conscious thoughts slowly reappeared, they were escorted by the soft utterance of three words by my teacher, Sheryl Adair: "What is Freedom?" The room was instantaneously bathed in a reflective and profound silence as if somehow engaging in a sensory connection with Franky's experience, one that words could not express.

The silence was broken with a few respectful responses. "Freedom depends on the situation," said one. "Not being imprisoned," said another. The concern that "unbridled freedom can lead to anarchy" was also expressed. These perhaps obligatory responses quickly contributed to our mutual appreciation that the question was one for contemplation, not answering.

This morning Sheryl's question again came to mind. We read about freedom, dream about freedom, rejoice in the notion of freedom, teach, advocate and hope for freedom, but what do we mean by freedom? As I contemplated the question, the "Pledge of Allegiance" came to mind with its notion of "liberty and justice for all." Is liberty the freedom to live one's life without threats, fear or some sort of retaliation? And is justice the principle or quality of dealing fairly with others and not infringing on their right to freedom?

With one question leading to another I returned to the notion that freedom means many things to many people. Does it look like someone walking out of prison? In Franky's case it does. The Sandy Springs Circle of Light congratulates Franky on his well-deserved and overdue freedom and extends our warmest wishes for a sweet and *chi*-filled life.

Editor's Note: For more about Franky, see page 4 and 5.

At left: "Listening to the Qin (Guqin)" c. 11th century



Remembering Justin

BY SHERYL ADAIR, ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Morning. Sarasota, Florida. A gentle breeze dances with Old Glory on its flagpole. The setting is serene. The mangroves, the bay, the birds coming and going to their island, in clear view. What a spot for this T'ai Chi Chih practice. Inside the house, my fragile, soon-to-be 97-year-old uncle lies in bed recovering from shingles. He's an extraordinary man of goodness, generosity, vision and boatloads of integrity. Justin Stone always reminded me of him. Coincidence that this is the fourth anniversary of Justin's passing and I am here?

Got a last minute invite to drive down with my uncle's accountant, an old friend of mine who now lives in the mountains of North Georgia. Nine hours each way with one day visit in between. My uncle must be a pretty special person to get that kind of personal service near the end of tax season. And so my thoughts return to Justin Stone. Also an extraordinary man. A man of similar values. A man of "that" generation. How fortunate to have been deeply influenced by two such men.

Justin was of service to humanity and left us with a precious gift. What will we do with that gift? Will the integrity and pureness of TCC be lost? Adjusted a little here, changed a little there, year by year? How will we hold it? I feel the weight of that responsibility. As I did Carry the Ball to the Side, I had an ah-ha moment as my hands came over the top of the circle. The feeling of the energy I carried seemed so alive... so soft and powerful, gentle yet strong and so very, very loving. In that moment I felt that I was carrying all of life. Thank you, Justin.



Franky Carrillo, An Introduction

By JULIE HERYET, PLACERVILLE, CALIFORNIA

The amazing thing about Franky Carrillo is his grace. During his wrongful incarceration at Folsom State Prison he never let the prison system own him. He never got a tattoo; he never became an inmate. And when he was released and people asked him if he was angry, he said, "You go be angry for me. I don't have time for anger. I have a life to live." Even after all the time he lost, Franky lives a life of forgiveness. Soon after his release, he reached out to the judge who passed his sentence, as well as the prosecuting District Attorney. He has had dinner with both of them, and has befriended the former head of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. He was determined that no one would be carrying guilt on his behalf. He shared this with the inmates during the recent TCC Banquet at Folsom, and he told them that because of the path he has chosen, he is in a position to be of service to them and change the system on their behalf.

The first day I went into Folsom with Judy Tretheway, Franky was wearing white shorts and a white shirt. (Inmates have to wear a blue shirt or pants at all times, so Franky was breaking the rules, but I think the guards decided to let him get away with it.) I assumed during class that he was a volunteer. After class he walked us back across the yard and through the final cellblock and then stopped. I said to Judy, "Isn't Franky coming with us?" She just smiled and said, "There's something different about him isn't there? He's innocent." That was two years before he was released.

It was hard after that to witness his suffering. At one point, as his case got closer to winning, he'd gotten so depressed he stopped coming to T'ai Chi Chih class. The prison administrators told him he'd be out by Thanksgiving, but the holiday came and went. Then Christmas passed. One day I saw him on my way to class and said, "Please come; it will help you." He came, and never missed a class after that. For Franky's last class, he stood in the center of the circle as we did Push Pull.

(We often do this in Folsom. The men either stand in the center, or they put the image of a loved one in the center and share his/her name.

And everyone sends their love energy to those people. We emphasize not depleting one's own energy when doing this, but pulling it in and then sending it out, like a channel.) As Franky stood in the center, he told us he'd be gone soon. This demonstrated a great deal of trust because sometimes others will try to sabotage another's upcoming release. He stood in the center, arms and palms open to receive our love, tears rolling down his face. It was an incredible moment. I later received news of his release while at my own teacher training in March 2011. Two years after that, I met Franky again in a park in Los Angeles in March, where he was gathered with friends and family to celebrate the third year of his release and his 40th birthday. I

led him and his family and friends in a circle TCC practice under blue skies. When we finished, I turned to hug him, and he sobbed as a free man. He's quite a guy.



A Day To Reflect On Freedom

By MERLE SMITH, ATLANTA, GEORGIA

On March 31 at 5pm EST our T'ai Chi Chih class dedicated our practice to the freedom of a man we had never known. We were told that Franky Carrillo had been incarcerated unjustly for twenty years. Our practice symbolized the hope and support that TCC provided while he was in Folsom State Prison.

Now that Franky has been released his practice continues to inspire him and other inmates still incarcerated. It was a privilege to participate in the community-wide support of Franky and the other Folsom inmates.

The energy created in our TCC circle felt powerful and purposeful. Our teacher Sheryl Adair explained that Franky's personal journey brought him to a place of forgiveness. His strength of character serves as an inspiration for all of us seeking to know the meaning of freedom.

Folsom State Prison Banquet: Circles of Light

By JULIE HERYET, PLACERVILLE, CALIFORNIA

On March 31, 2015, the 3rd Annual T'ai Chi Chih Banquet and Retreat was held at Folsom State Prison. In addition to guests Sandy McAlister, Judy Tretheway and Minh Mark, we had a special guest this year. Franky Carrillo, a former inmate who was released in 2011 after serving 20 years for a wrongful conviction, returned to Folsom to attend the banquet and visit his old friends. He also came to do TCC with them, in what will become an annual Circles of Light event.

When Franky was an inmate at Folsom, he used to look across the American River valley at an oak tree on the hill. He would dream of doing his TCC practice there as a free man. So after the banquet, Franky and Judy (who taught the Folsom class for 13 years) left the prison to meet TCC instructor Elizabeth Ebrahimzadeh and other TCC enthusiasts waiting for them. They gathered under the oak tree on the hill overlooking the prison, where they could see the chapel where the prison class was taught. At 2pm they began to practice (along with the prison class and TCC groups all over the U.S., Canada and England), fulfilling Franky's dream. As the 2pm hour approached, the TCC class inside the prison, led by Sandy McAlister, eagerly gathered into their circle.

Prior to beginning, I named the individuals and groups joining them; they excitedly counted down the seconds. At precisely 2pm, Sandy softly announced "Rocking Motion" and led the practice.

It was one of the most amazing TCC practices I've ever experienced. We were enveloped in *Chi*; it was palpable. We felt surrounded by a web of love connecting us all. Thank you so much to all who participated in what we hope will become an annual event.

Franky Carrillo called on his way to the airport later that day and shared that he "felt like a new man." It had been like slaying a dragon. Going back into the prison that held him captive for so many years, being able to share his new life with his old friends. And then to be able to walk out through the gates and live out his dream of practicing on the hill, free and surrounded by people who supported him. It was truly a day of healing. And not only for Franky.

The men in the prison class said of that day that they felt, "carried along by the energy ... wrapped in all this love ... part of something special ... connected to people who care ... like we were all praying together." Yes it was a shared, moving prayer for peace, forgiveness, tolerance and serenity.

Thank you, Justin Stone, for opening the door to Folsom State Prison, and for modeling a life of compassion and humility. Thank you to all who participated. Franky Carrillo and the men at Folsom said, "Please join us" and you did. And it was beautiful.

Unexpected Personal Healing

By JULIE HERYET, PLACERVILLE, CALIFORNIA

The more things went wrong (planning and executing the events of the day) the more the universe kicked in to support us. The prison administration required quite a bit of documentation from Franky in order to process his guest pass. Documents that they had never required before, that he had to get from his attorney and the court. It was a very difficult process, and yet he didn't give up.

The longer it took to process his pass, the longer he had to wait to buy his plane ticket and the more expensive it became. Community contributions flowed in, helping offset the financial burden for Franky to participate in the banquet and Circles of Light event.

Also, inmates attending the event were supposed to receive a permission slip called a "ducket" the night before, a slip that would allow them to be released from their cells. But when I arrived Tuesday morning, none had received their duckets or been placed on the "daily movement sheet." I had to go from building to building to get the men out.

When we were all assembled in the chapel, one man rose to the stage with tears in his eyes and said, "Julie was not going to stop until every single one of us was here today. No one has ever done anything like that for me before. I am so grateful." Them not receiving their duckets made it possible for them to experience being valued and cared for. My lesson? There are no problems, only opportunities for growth.

Poems from the Folsom Class

truth
does lie
within us
the imprisoned
splendor that
our flesh
hides
— ANON

how
can you
get away
from the thing that
makes you you
and makes
life
— ANON

one
day I
learned tai chi
then I learned me
and how to
begin
life
— ANON

Transformation Inside & Out

BY SANDY McALISTER, HAYWARD, CALIFORNIA

For the TCCcommunity.net newsletter in June 2014 I wrote about my experience visiting Folsom State Prison and joining the men for a T'ai Chi Chih Retreat and Banquet Day prepared by their teacher, Julie Heryet. This year the Third Annual Retreat and Banquet Day was held on March 31st., and I again was present. Everything I wrote about the experience last year held true for this year, with the addition of a few new men to the group and two more visitors adding their joy to the occasion, Judy Tretheway and Franky Carrillo.

Judy Tretheway taught at the prison from 1998 to 2011. She beamed as she greeted many of the men she had originally taught TCC. The men were so happy to see her again and expressed how much her exuberance and lightness-of-being picked up their spirits.

The other visitor, Franky Carrillo, learned and practiced TCC while serving time in Folsom. After 20 years of wrongful incarceration he was exonerated and is now a free man. He talked to the men about his life since being released and his realization that he had choices as to how he could live his life. He chose not to be bitter, angry or resentful, but to reach out in forgiveness to the District Attorney, the prosecutors and even the judge who passed his sentence. He is now actively working to change the system and the laws for these men.

It was powerful for the men to see Franky and his transformation into a free man, a man grounded in who he is, enabling him to walk freely back into prison. TCC is one of the tools that support his path that, since his release, has led to love, becoming a father and becoming a student at Loyola Marymount University. But what Franky said is the most important thing he does now is to introduce himself as a former inmate. He said, "I am your face out there. I am working to destroy the stereotype of how a former inmate looks, of who he is."

Many teachers and students in the U.S., Canada and U.K. joined the Folsom group at 2pm for a TCC practice. As Colleen Crossen described it, "Our Seal Beach group came together a few minutes before 2pm. We shared thoughts on how we often limit ourselves and others by focusing on flaws and stereotypes. Our intention was to celebrate with Franky and all of you by choosing to move into the infinite possibilities for transformation, for ourselves and for everyone. We would look to each movement from the rest position as a new beginning and opportunity."

The following is a reflection of my visit to Folsom Prison last year: "To transform means to change outward appearance or inner nature. I saw the outward transformation of these men. I heard from them about their inner nature transformation. Some of the outward could not have happened without the inner. And some of the inner change could not have happened without the outward change. Several of the men expressed how [TCC] has been a tool and support to them with this transformation and I could see and feel that."



Franky Carrillo and T'ai Chi Chih teachers practicing outside Folsom State Prison.

response? Are we aware of particular "buttons" that when triggered send us off into an emotional outburst or shut us down? Are we aware of our habitual ways of responding?

Becoming aware is a big step toward transformation, and the practice of TCC is a simple tool that shines a light inward. Becoming still, not just physically, but stilling our chatterbox mind and turbulent emotions allows our inner being to be affected by the *Chi* and changes happen. Sometimes people have big ah-ha moments and sometimes they are more subtle. But with continued practice, changes in our nature happen: rough edges soften, patience abounds, thoughtfulness spreads, equanimity shines. Justin often remarked that the most common comment he received from people was, "T'ai Chi Chih changed my life."

In Justin Stone's *Spiritual Odyssey* there are several articles he wrote about the *Chi* affecting the mind and the mind affecting the *Chi*. As we practice TCC the *Chi*, the life force flowing in us, is affected. We find ourselves softening, slowing down, letting go, and our being, our essence responds and there is a transformation in the way we feel physically and emotionally. Our inner nature, how we respond and react, and even our thinking process are affected by these changes.

Our outside is generally easy to transform. We can change our clothes, get a new hairstyle, have a massage or go on vacation and we feel differently, but it is usually only temporary. It is the inner nature of our being that takes time and dedication to transform. How many times have we found ourselves wishing we had given more thought to our words before giving a

Focus In The Soles Of The Feet

By DANIEL PIENCIAK, HOWELL, NEW JERSEY

Anyone learning T'ai Chi Chih will see and hear the title words of this article in Justin Stone's instructional materials, and hopefully also from his or her instructors.

Justin has explained how doing this after each set of movements balances the *yin* and *yang Chi*. We are told that focusing in the soles of the feet also helps to keep the mind from wandering. A well-known Eastern saying states, "The one who keeps their concentration on the soles of the feet will heal a thousand ills." Quoting the originator in *Spiritual Odyssey*, "The root of T'ai Chi Chih is awareness" ... "the Essence of T'ai Chi Chih."

I have found that there are specific ways that we can focus on the soles of the feet during our movement as well (not only when we "come to a graceful conclusion" ... "come to rest"). One specific awareness can be very helpful in moving correctly, improving balance and completing the weight shift. I refer to the imagining of coins placed under the soles of the feet (in this example, three).

I recommend trying out this idea that there are three dimes placed under each foot: two at the widest part of the front of the foot (the two contact points just behind the toes that are often referred to as the balls of the feet), and one under the center of each heel.

On both the forward-and-backward and side-to-side weight shifts, as the knee finishes bending (or softening/flexing) and the weight has arrived on that leg, feel how the weight is distributed on the sole of the foot. Is the weight more on one side of the foot than other or more forward on the front of the foot than on the heel?

I believe that if our feet are correctly placed, the pelvis will arrive directly over the foot at a center of gravity on the leg, so that the weight feels equal on all of the three coins, or contact points, somewhat like a tripod, while the ankle and toes are completely relaxed.

When the weight does not feel evenly distributed on these three points, one's stance might be too wide or too long, or the torso may be leaning, or the knees bending too much, or not enough. The point is that this awareness has a great potential to help teach us TCC.



The Value Of TCC Retreats

By PAM TOWNE, OCEANSIDE, CALIFORNIA

There are many great benefits from attending a T'ai Chi Chih retreat, as those who have been to one already know. It is a delightful way to deepen our understanding and experience of TCC in a serene environment with a group of like-minded friends. It offers a time of deep relaxation and personal renewal. And it provides connections with the larger TCC community.

Most of us don't have time to do two full TCC practices a day plus spend additional time refining the movements. We can give ourselves that time on a retreat. Doing more than our usual TCC practice generates a strong flow of Chi and allows for deeper insights, inspiration and healing.

Retreats are generally held in beautiful and peaceful settings conducive to retreating from everyday activities and giving ourselves time to relax. There is ample free time during the day to walk, read, meditate or simply do nothing. What an opportunity to renew body, mind and spirit.

Special connections and new friendships happen for many at TCC retreats. Of course, wonderful people are attracted to TCC in general, and retreats draw them together from all over the country. In 2011, Californian Mary Kuester and Texan George Anderson-Wood became friends at the Santa Barbara retreat. Every year since, they have looked forward to seeing each other at that retreat.

A TCC retreat is wonderful to share with a friend or loved one. Couples and sisters come year after year because of the fulfilling experience. This was the first year since 2006 that Ted and I weren't together in Santa Barbara. Ted had come through chemotherapy, radiation and surgery last year for esophageal cancer and was recovering well. But in January he was knocked out by a virus; problems digesting food became severe. He was just too weak to get to Santa Barbara this March.

Thinking back to our first TCC retreat together, I recall when we were first dating in 2006. Someone canceled at the last minute, so I called Ted and asked if he'd like to attend the following week. He accepted my invitation in a heartbeat, and it was at that retreat where romance began to blossom. I can't promise you romance, but I encourage you to give yourself the gift of a TCC retreat.

Editor's Note: Ted died on April 6th.

All Benefit 100%

By HANNAH HEDRICK, MOUNTAIN VIEW, HAWAII

My dear fellow teachers, thanks for sharing from your heart and the soles of your feet your responses to the “Interview Questions” in the February *Vital Force*. I could usually guess the teachers from the responses. I treasure our teacher community beyond words; the organic evolution keeps me *Chi-ful*.

My practice and approach to teaching change as I “mature” (at 76 years young). I practice because it is an energy-balancing practice that I can share with others. Each class is its own “spiritual community.”

I currently teach at a nursing home, a senior residence, the Hawaii Island Home for Recovery (people transitioning from homelessness), and Hope Services’ program for recently released offenders. Participants range from being severely limited physically and mentally, to physically and emotionally fragile, to amazingly strong from working out while incarcerated, to regular middle-aged women (and a couple of men). Students in my own classes have health concerns ranging from COPD and diabetes to cancer and strokes.

So I won’t be training any “next generations” of TCC teachers. I’m grateful for the opportunities I had, as the first accredited teacher in Chicago, to have hosted accreditation courses and even a national conference. Then and now, “personal, spiritual connectivity” forged a relationship that led toward teaching (then) and toward shared practice (now). **I’ve always perceived**

“stumbling blocks” as stepping stones toward a destination appropriate for the students, and I’m grateful for the many times when that destination turned out to be accreditation followed by active teaching, even at a very small scale.

Connecting with other teachers has been the same kind of “personal, spiritual connectivity” I experience with students. I have seldom missed an annual conference since I was accredited in 1986. The affinity of our devotion to TCC creates an immediate bond with teachers I am meeting for the first time, even if I interact with them for only a few minutes.

“All Benefit 100%” refers to my experience that anyone who practices TCC at *any* level receives 100% of the benefits available to that person at that time in that personal and physical place/space.

While my intention is always to practice with integrity, I do so with mindfulness rather than yardsticks or expectations.

I experienced great joy recently when visiting one of my students at a rehab center after she had fallen and fractured her foot in several places. I anticipated the worst, since she has extreme scoliosis and walks with a walker; she does seated TCC. Her face lit up when she saw me and she could not wait to show me all of the TCC movements she could do while lying down, including Light at the Top of the Head! She was explaining to the attendant that the attendant could do these movements standing up just by shifting her weight back and forth

(which I demonstrated). Lillian was receiving 100% of the benefits of TCC because she was not only doing the movements with as much integrity as possible, she was also sharing her “Joy Through Movement.”



Justin with Carmen Brocklehurst, 1989.

We Can’t Lose

By CARMEN L. BROCKLEHURST,
ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

I once heard my first teacher Helen Brungardt Pope say, “Life is a circle, you can’t lose, but you must choose which way you will go, and that is the positive. Keep remembering that you will come back to the place from where you started.” It is comforting to know that we live in a user-friendly universe. We are meant to succeed. We don’t always help the situation with our attitudes or our beliefs, but the universe tries to help us.

Our T’ai Chi Chih movements demonstrate that this is true. We start from a *yin* position and move into a *yang* position, then change back into a yin position, and continue this until we notice that our mood has changed, our body isn’t as stiff, our attitude is different. We do not feel the same at the end of our practice as when we started. Our highs and lows have evened out, without any drama.

As TCC teachers we have the opportunity to study this way of change, in depth. All of us change daily, but many of us try not to change, which is painful. Justin often said that trying to change from a strictly mental perspective was very painful, but that if we allowed ourselves to simply do our movements, well and daily, that change would occur naturally. Every day we have the opportunity; daily practice is a kind way of changing, of growing. If life begs us to grow, perhaps we can help by making time to practice. Perhaps participating in one of the weekly free practices at the New Mexico TCC Center would be helpful.

Recently I participated in a community event with over 400 participants, where one of the offerings was an introduction to TCC. As participants gently learned four movements, I could tell that the practice was gently allowing them to change. There were the usual reminders: move with softness, stay in your feet, relax your wrists, waist and shoulders. At the end of the short session, something good was already taking place. In a gentle way we were all learning the win-win way of life. We were learning to love and share the *Chi*.

Speaking TCC

By RICHARD KARASIK, SARATOGA, CALIFORNIA

Justin often spoke of T'ai Chi Chih "doing you" versus you doing TCC. When TCC does me, then I speak TCC. The rest of the time I just speak about TCC. Can we speak TCC so people get it, or are we condemned to speak about it?

Are there better ways to use language to present TCC or do we abandon language and just go for the demonstration and invite participation? It is ironic that just at the moment we need to find a way to speak TCC, one of our primary ways of passing on information – language – seems to fail us miserably.

Perhaps amongst practitioners of TCC the language we have created to speak about TCC is "close enough for jazz" when we speak with each other. The more we do TCC together, the better the jazz. But what about speaking with others?

If you assume my words mean the same thing as your words, it's a trap. You and I are different. None of our senses work exactly the same way. Someone from Alaska and another from Los Angeles might say, "It's cold out," and might be describing entirely different scenarios.

Further, words that are "close enough" for TCC practitioners are not necessarily the same ones that students will understand in the same way.

How do we use language to get our points across? If someone is confused do we cover that up with more words, or yell when it doesn't look like we are getting through? I suggest that being confused is a very high psychodynamic space and is an opening for learning if we take the opportunity to treat it that way. A confused student is an opening for learning. A confused student has a much more open "listening space" while grappling

for answers, and we should work with that openness.

Develop a common vocabulary with the students. Explore what your students think "palm up" means, or what "circular" might mean. Continue to explore this with students in an ongoing basis. Connect words to actions.

People new to movement arts often have no real idea of how to connect the idea of "circular motion" to the physical act of moving circularly. Part of our jobs is to put out a breadcrumb trail that students can follow until they discover their own answer.

If you think this level of language disconnect is unlikely, simply talk a new student through Passing Clouds without demonstrating it and watch what happens.

The key thing a student brings to the game is mindfulness or attention. One good way to ensure that students are mindful is to have them demonstrate movements back to the class.

Following the leader and adding corrective help (demonstration, discussion, student re-teaching the teacher) is the only way students will discover the breadcrumb trail that allows them to build their own common language with the rest of the TCC community.

Part of speaking TCC is languaging it – giving it voice beyond the individual interpretations of words. How do you "language" TCC to a blind student, when all of the language you use refers to things the student may never have seen or felt? How do you "language" TCC to someone who does not speak your language?

I have explored methods involving mindful-

ness, description, diagrams, imitation, and even having the person let me move them or have them put their hands on me when I move. All of these techniques work in different ways at different times.

As a teacher I have to find a way to get into my student's "listening space." In order to offer help I have to speak so that they can hear and understand. Not only do I have to speak TCC, I have to speak about TCC and I have to know the difference.

Using only words allows people to tune you out; you can watch their eyes glaze over. When that happens we have failed to get into their listening space. Saying the same louder and maybe with anger, and maybe waving your arms wildly will not help the situation, and only further exacerbates the lack of connection.

Creating a common language involves words and actions, and shared experiences that help you get into another person's listening space. The more that happens, the more learning occurs. When we all practice together, and are mindful of it, we are building deeper connections and more breadcrumb trails.

Take time to explore the language we use and change it up from time to time to give different brain paths a chance to explore.

Justin always said, "A couple of inches this way or that makes no difference." In speaking don't get hung up on exact words. For example, one can say graceful conclusion or peaceful pause or come to rest or settle or pause. Each triggers different pathways in different people, but all hopefully lead to the same general place.

I am currently saying "come to stillness" because stillness is a quality I am exploring.

What quality are you exploring that you are trying to give a voice to?

TCC does us without worrying about the words we use to speak it. Yet in order to pass it on we must often employ words. Let us do so mindfully.



My Story

BY RAYMOND REID, PORTLAND, MAINE

This is my journey. I went to my first T'ai Chi Chih class in Montclair, New Jersey, thinking it was a T'ai Chi Ch'uan class, which I had learned in San Francisco in 1983 and had pursued for many years. I had taken external and internal martial arts since I was 19 and the one thing I had always been searching for was a spiritual dimension. I knew it was out there; I had taken Aikido when I was younger and, because of its philosophy, **I knew there could be a spiritual aspect to all this.** For the most part, T'ai Chi Ch'uan classes I had taken had no meditation feeling to them; it was all about the physical. I was ready for T'ai Chi Chih when it came along. It was a big surprise.

I think of T'ai Chi Chih as another *qigong* system and, although its principles are based on the physical foundation of T'ai Chi Ch'uan and TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine), which gave birth to the meridian system, by the fifth class I knew this was very different and I was hooked. I also remembered that Justin Stone was a T'ai Chi Ch'uan master.

I was especially impressed by Justin's writings, especially *Spiritual Odyssey*, where he made reference to Krishnamurti, whom I had seen in New York City in the 1970's and who had a great impact on me. Much of what Justin had to say resonated with me, especially being in the here and now, which I feel T'ai Chi Chih emphasizes.

Justin's focus on relaxing also rang a clear bell. One of the great masters of T'ai Chi Ch'uan was Master Cheng. In his book, *Master Cheng's 13 Chapters on T'ai Chi Ch'uan*, his first and number one rule is relaxation: "Relax. Relax. Be Calm. Release the whole body."

I didn't get serious about T'ai Chi Chih until I suffered heart problems.

In 2007 my doctor told me that my ejection fraction rate (the percentage of blood pumped from the left into the right chamber) was twenty-five percent. For most people it's between fifty-five and sixty-five percent. After practicing T'ai Chi Chih for all these years, mine is now around seventy percent, which mystifies my cardiologist. I tell him it's the *Chi*.

In 2009, I received my certification, which brought Montclair's teacher population to five. New Jersey has more teachers than most states, and I took full advantage of it training with Carolyn Perkins, Kate Von Frank, Dan Pienciak and Antonia Cooper.

MAINE

Maine's population is 1.33 million, while Portland (where I'm the

only full time T'ai Chi Chih teacher) has 66,000 people. The New England area, I think by temperament, has not fully embraced either T'ai Chi Chih or T'ai Chi Ch'uan, although there are many yoga studios around Portland. When I moved here, Maine had three other T'ai Chi Chih teachers in the north; now there are five. When I came there were no T'ai Chi Chih teachers in New Hampshire, Vermont or Massachusetts; now there are two or three in each. So T'ai Chi Chih is slowly growing.

My support comes from T'ai Chi Ch'uan teachers, from whom I still take classes (my roots). And I've demonstrated T'ai Chi Chih to my T'ai Chi Ch'uan class. One of my teachers offered plants for my T'ai Chi Chih studio and hooked me up with "Mended Hearts" for whom I did a demo. As business owners we often talk about the travails of marketing, advertising, getting more students. Up here success comes from word-of-mouth, which can take a long time.

My students are my inspiration. My best student (I always say half-kiddingly) is 90 years old and does T'ai Chi Chih daily – even when he suffered from mononucleosis and pneumonia. He loves T'ai Chi Chih, which has increased his balance and he considers it mediation, although he "could never meditate." He helped me demonstrate T'ai Chi Chih on a local television station a few years ago. He has, what Justin refers to as *teh*.

I'd never taught before and it's my students who have supported me and whom I've learned from. Students love the feeling they get from doing T'ai Chi Chih – the general feeling that it transports them to another plane.

I predominantly get female students between the ages of 50 and 90; a number of them belong to religious communities. (Students include four pastors and one Buddhist priest.) I also have multiple sclerosis students for whom T'ai Chi Chih has greatly helped with balance.

For some, T'ai Chi Chih has had an immediate impact. My very first student reported that after five weeks of classes she asked her doctor to cut her arthritis medication in half (which he did). The doctor also reported that my student's blood pressure had never been lower in 18 months.

A few students have expressed an interest in teaching T'ai Chi Chih; one is actively pursuing accreditation. As a teacher I look for that "inner sincerity" that Justin talks about.

I leave the spiritual aspects up to the individual; my focus has been on preventive health aspects of T'ai Chi Chih. During the Mended Hearts demonstration, I learned that two of the biggest post-operative factors were depression and the inability to be active, both of which are positively affected by T'ai Chi Chih. What T'ai Chi Chih means to me is "One World, One Breath."



My Story

BY PIA KNIGHTON, HOUSTON, TEXAS

I went to the Cenacle Retreat Center in 2002, in Houston, Texas, looking for more spirituality in my life. The lobby was filled with brochures offering different programs, but the only brochure that drew my attention was for T'ai Chi Chih classes. "I want to do this," I said to my friend, so we registered for a once-weekly class with Carletta LaCour. I loved it. I did not miss one class and bought the DVD for home practice. Twice a year Carletta offered a beginner's class, which I took at least once a year. My friend and I practiced every week together for six years (until she moved).

By 2009, Carletta said, "Why don't you become a TCC teacher?" The thought had never entered my mind but she planted the seed and shortly afterwards I decided to learn more. The website, taichichih.org, was extremely helpful; I printed everything I could get my hands on. I practiced all the movements daily for two years, and asked Antonia to critique me, for which I was so grateful. Carletta and I met once a week for her to critique my movements, and she signed off my attendance for teacher accreditation. For my second signature I drove to Lake Charles, Louisiana, and worked with my dear friend, Caroline Guilott. I was certified in March 2011, in San Francisco by Sandy McAllister at a beautiful retreat center.

Back in Houston, I started planning my classes. Carletta asked if I could teach for her at the Cenacle due to a loss in her family. So I started teaching right away and loved it and still do. Since I was still working full time as a certified psychiatric R.N. at Menninger Clinic in Houston, I did not have much time to arrange classes. But I did start teaching a class weekly in 2011 to the adolescents at Menninger Clinic, and I asked them to fill out a brief survey when discharged for my research project. (The survey continued until 2015 and demonstrated that TCC had reduced anxiety for the adolescents.)

In 2013, when I transitioned to part-time at the Menninger Clinic, only working on weekends, I was freed up to pursue teaching TCC. Luckily, I found a yoga studio five minutes away from my house; the gracious owner only charges me \$20 an hour to teach in a large ballet room with mirrors. I taught eight one-hour classes (covering all 19 movements and one pose) in the Spring and Fall.

The thrill of seeing people feel the *Chi* and serenity inspires me to teach. To help people circulate, balance and store the *Chi*, in order to receive the many wonderful benefits, is why I teach. It gives me so much joy to share TCC.

In 2014, the CEO of a new psychiatric hospital in Houston invited me to interview to teach T'ai Chi Chih there. I was hired on the spot after giving my presentation. Since then I have been teaching twice weekly to adult psychiatric patients, and it has given me great joy to see them smile and relax during the movements and afterwards. On their discharge papers they state that TCC helped them more than any other modality. How rewarding.



I started a new class in March with ten students. I have found marketing somewhat challenging but I have also found that www.taichichihouston.vpweb.com has brought in students, along with my TCC Houston community Facebook page.

I attended my first TCC retreat in Spring 2014, connecting with about 25 students and teachers, which was like getting a wonderful second family. I again attended Carmen's retreat in Albuquerque, New Mexico in Fall 2014, and I look forward to many more. I am excited to attend my first teacher conference this year. Twice annually I stay with teacher and friend Caroline Guilott, attend her TCC class, and we just have fun together. I have met so many wonderful people during retreats and on Facebook.

I am happy to say that I found the spirituality I was looking for – and much more. I have enjoyed reading all of Justin Stone's books. I wish I had met him, but I do listen to his CD on TCC in the car, so I feel as if I did.

swing
using
yin and *yang*
bat moves in sync
perfect arc
contact
joy
– JIM HARRIS

Teaching Tips For Teachers (Also Valuable For Students)

By JUSTIN STONE © GOOD KARMA PUBLISHING 2009

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

wellbeing. **The effects of T'ai Chi Chih practice are very compatible with a loving, not a combative, nature.**

(2) It is all-important that the student be taught how to move correctly. From the very beginning teachers note whether the student is doing the movements softly (with “the effort of no effort”) and with continuity – no stopping and starting, or hesitation, during the movements.

Beyond this there is the delicate matter of balance. As the emphasis goes from the back leg to the front leg – from the substantial (*yang*) back leg to the front leg, which gradually becomes substantial (*yang*) – the body weight must shift *gradually* at the same speed as the arms move. Many students shift their weight quickly and suddenly and then move the arms to catch up. This is a serious mistake. It is particularly noticeable in the different forms of Pulling Taffy. If the weight has switched rapidly to the front or side foot, and the hands lag behind, it very often results in both knees being bent, so *both* legs are *yang* (substantial) at the same time and there is no *yin* leg. (Then how can we balance the *Chi*?)

The same is true in moving from front to back, or returning to the original side. Teachers, particularly new teachers, seldom give thought to this shift of weight before they begin to teach. It is necessary, in one's own practice, to understand the fundamentals of this shift and then look for mistakes on the part of pupils. It is assumed that an accredited teacher does the movements correctly; students will tend to imitate what the teacher does in the way that he or she does them.

More experienced teachers realize these matters, but they, too, can be subject to carelessness in their own movements, and also overlook such faults on the part of their students. In some cases a demanding teacher can be better than a “kind” one (one who overlooks errors), and the student will usually appreciate special attention from the teacher. T'ai Chi Chih students tend to be sincere aspirants, and they usually expect teachers to correct them.

The teacher might want to explain why T'ai Chi Chih is done softly, without effort. The meridian channels in the body are the passages through which the *Chi* (Vital Force or Intrinsic Energy) flows. The importance of these channels can easily be understood from this example: Chinese physicians now routinely perform painless operations without anesthesia. They know that the various meridian channels connect in the ear, and Chinese “anesthetists,” using needles, can reach any part of

the body, external or internal, through a simple twist of the needle in the patient's ear. This is not theory; it is being done every day, and it shows the importance of the meridian channels. Tension causes them to contract, and the *Chi* cannot flow freely when the channels are constricted.

‘if the universe was abolished, this Chi (Prana) would have the power to create a new universe’

to as *Prana*. In many of my books I refer to the all-importance of the *Chi*, which is the force through which we are created and sustained, and, through T'ai Chi Chih, we have the power to balance and greatly enhance this Life Force. The Indian sage, Sri Aurobindo, said, “If the Universe was abolished, this *Chi (Prana)* would have the power to create a new universe!”

I want to stress to the teacher the importance of the wrists, the knees, and the waist. When a student walks through the door I can tell the degree of tension he or she is carrying by looking at the wrists and the waist. If they are free and easily pliable, there is little internal stress. But stiff wrists and waist mean internal problems, and both wrists and waists must be loose and pliable in order to do T'ai Chi Chih correctly.

Watch to see that the student does not use her shoulders to get out of turning from the waist. And be sure the knees bend as much going back as they do going forward. Also, most movements are done primarily with the wrists, not the arms, with elbows



Justin, unknown date and place.

sometimes remaining close to the sides, as in Passing Clouds. When doing Carry the Ball to the Side, many students keep their wrists locked and do the movements with arms and shoulders, with considerable effort. Watch for this, and see that the wrists are loose and that the waist turns readily.

Of course, it is necessary to stress that the torso – the top of the body – does little, remaining straight (and not leaning forward or back), as though suspended from the ceiling by wires, much in the manner of a puppet. T'ai Chi Chih is done primarily below the waist, not with the upper body. The breathing is natural, not contrived.

And don't let the student ask intellectual questions as to "why?" this is done in this manner – there is no end to such questions – and the benefits of T'ai Chi Chih come from *doing* it, not questioning it or trying to understand "why?" To practice is all-important, to discuss aimlessly is a waste of time. Be firm about this.

The soles of the feet are very important in the study of T'ai Chi Chih. They are called the *Hsueh* (Bubbling Spring); I think of them as the "Fountain of Youth."

It is important that the teacher emphasize the advisability of putting one's attention in the soles of the feet while performing T'ai Chi Chih. The soles of the feet are connected to the *tan t'ien*, two inches below the navel, by a central meridian channel. Concentrating on the *tan t'ien* is difficult, whereas concentration on the soles of the feet is easy and tends to focus the student's mind while moving; it is not good to have the mind wandering around aimlessly while doing T'ai Chi Chih. Of course, there are more important reasons for this focus, having to do with the circulation of the *Chi*, and such concentration has real healing powers.

So, from time to time, the teacher must remember to remind the students of such concentration, and to remember to use it himself or herself. **Just saying it once will have no effect at all.** Actually, repetition is an important part of good teaching.

Movements are usually done in sequences of nine – such as 9, 18, 36, etc. It is not necessary to do them this way, however; some students might want to allot a certain time to each movement.

The Chinese believe that "9" is a lucky number, but I often use "12" or "6," depending on the situation.

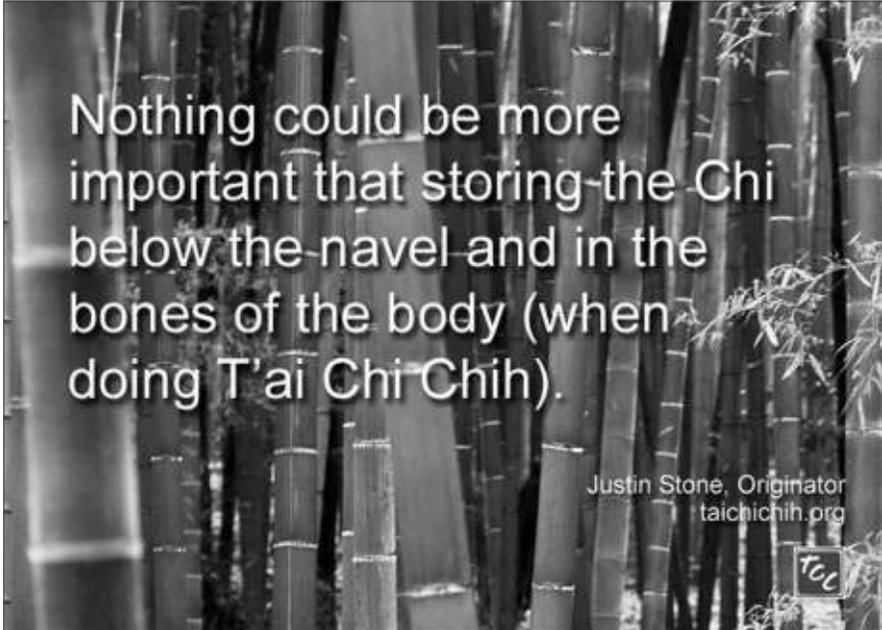
Seldom, if ever, are the arms fully extended. In doing such movements as Daughter on the Mountain Top, it will be noted that the arms are bent at the elbows, and the crossing of hands does not take place far from the face. If the student is seen to extend the arms too much, explain it is not necessary, and might lead to the student bending forward or to the side, instead of keeping the torso straight up and down as explained above.

T'ai Chi Chih is "Joy Thru Movement" not drudgery. Attitude is all-important. If a student is having great difficulty with a movement, tell him or her, "No sweat. Just skip that movement and do the others." (This doesn't apply if he or she intends to eventually take Teacher Training.) There is great room for laughter and joy in T'ai Chi Chih practice, and the power of group *Chi* is felt by almost everybody in group T'ai Chi Chih practice.

All these points are necessary in preparing students for T'ai Chi Chih lessons and in guiding him or her as classes progress. There is more to teaching T'ai Chi Chih than simply teaching where to place the hands and feet!

*there is more
to teaching
T'ai Chi Chih
than simply
teaching where
to place the
hands and feet*

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).



Nothing could be more important that storing the Chi below the navel and in the bones of the body (when doing T'ai Chi Chih).

Justin Stone, Originator
taichichih.org

An extremely important point to emphasize is "swimming through very heavy air" (without effort), a seeming contradiction. If the student feels that he or she is "exercising," the movements may be rushed, particularly on the back swing. The true feeling is one of swimming through heavy air, and, if this is done slowly and evenly, the maximum benefits can be attained. This is part of teaching the student how to move correctly, and the teacher should repeat this instruction from time to time during the course of the lessons.

Teaching How To Let *Chi* Flow From The Center

By CAROL NELSON-SELBY, SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA

Letting *The Form Move The Chi* Teaching T'ai Chi Chih in a health club presents its own challenges and rewards. The greatest challenge is that attendance is always in flux: one week I have almost all veteran practitioners, and another week half the class might be newcomers or students who attend sporadically because of health or work issues. As a result, I need to teach the basics at almost every session. **The greatest reward, though, is that I teach basics at almost every session.** As a result, I have had to find ways to teach the core of TCC (*flowing from the center*) in a way that works for students at all stages of their practice.

Teaching How It Feels, Not How It Looks

I often have the group start by making a circle, and with their hands loosely held behind their backs, begin the side-to-side locomotion of Carry the Ball to the Side. I choose this move for beginners because any compromise to the completeness of the sideways weight shift is more easily recognized since we actually bring in the “empty” or *yin* leg on the third step. If the student leans to the side or reaches to bring in that “giving” (or empty) leg, he or she immediately realizes that the weight has not yet been centered on the “receiving” (or “filling”) leg.

Once the students internalize the sense of a soft, unwavering vertical plumb line (running between the weight-bearing part of the foot up through the *tan t'ien*, heart and to the spot between their eyes) and realize that the body is not moved by pushing or effort, but rather by relaxing both legs and letting the body's weight “pour” completely from one side to the next as the straightened leg is bent, they are ready to try the *yinning* and *yanging* step.

I sometimes ask them to think of their spine as a slightly melting stack of little ice cream sandwiches on a plate (the hips) so that they are not tempted to lean their shoulders into the movement, or reach with their arms when we add them later.

Chi Flows From Side-To-Side Like Water Being Poured From One Vessel To The Other

I ask students to consider that even the forward step is also side-to-side, and that the feeling of allowing the energy to be given up by one side in order to be received by the other is the same in both types of move. Again, with the hands resting behind us and an upright relaxed body and gently bent legs, heels together, we begin to orient their body's center plumb line over the right foot, always moving from the *tan t'ien*. *When all of the weight is over the right foot*, we gently set the heel of the left foot forward and slightly to the side (without reaching), set the left heel down, then immediately bend the left leg and allow the hips, which are bearing our relaxed upright body, to flow into that side *until the right side is empty*. All of the weight is now on the left leg and the body is centered right above that left foot.

It is essential that absolutely no energy is put into the back foot during this weight shift, because that would cause the body to lean forward, and more importantly, it would hold *yang* energy in the side that needs to be waning into a *yin* stage (becoming the empty vessel). As with any energy exchange (think a piston or a battery), the more energy that is taken out, the more energy that can be put in.

Chi Flows Because The Center Is Moving – Wait For It To Happen

The other element of this approach is letting the hands become like dinghies pulled behind the powered craft (the *tan t'ien*). The hands are always pulled by the power source and have no power of their own. Once I took power away from my arms/hands I began to truly experience TCC doing TCC.

To help students feel this, I verbalize the idea that the energy that moves the arms comes from, and actually mentally follows, the generation of movement that starts with the *tan t'ien*. In each move students are asked to relax, think of where the center weight is and where it is going, and once that core weight shift starts, *then* they can *let* something happen with their arms/hands.

Think of the hands in Bass Drum moving forward because the *tan t'ien* has started for-

ward, energizing them. Think of the arms in the various platter shapes moving to the right or left because the *tan t'ien* has started off to the right or left dragging them with it, then let the hands refine the circular shape (rather than thinking of the arm movement as making circles on their own related to which foot is forward).

Think of the arms rising in the “Daughters” *because the tan t'ien* has started moving forward, creating the energy which motivates them to gracefully rise, then allowing them to gently fall in their beautiful patterns, like raindrops flowing down a window, or the glittering stars of fireworks in the night fading as the *tan t'ien* moves backward: a gravity-powered energy pump, each *yin* becoming the genesis of the following *yang*. Forward and back, rising and falling, filling and emptying: part of everything that lives.

Moving From The Center Prevents Fatigue And Injuries

This shifting of all of our weight when we walk and practice TCC in this natural way protects our knees, because they correctly align themselves between the weight-bearing part of the foot. The hip socket can then relax until called upon again. I have observed with my older or injured students that the size of the step or the depth of knee bend is much less important to achieving a deeply-felt practice than is the completeness of the weight shift. Even people who have to use walkers can experience a wonderful flow of *Chi* although they are only able to take small, shallow steps.

I have had my share of arthritis and other age-related physical issues, and many of my students come to me because they are not able to do much exercise due to health problems. We have all found that by religiously focusing on experiencing a full weight shift with each move, the body is always relaxed, and the “empty” side gets to rest, so the legs do not tire no matter how long we practice. In fact, most students find they have much *more* energy after class than when we began, and go on to the rest of their day with a very positive attitude. You might even call it joy.

In The Flow

By ROBERT MONTES DE OCA, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

[Author's Note: This is a story told by a man who experienced this incident recently.]

Just another Saturday with friends, this man was thinking. He'd just head home like normal. Enter I-40 west uneventfully in Albuquerque at Juan Tabo Boulevard. Then he noticed a car at Louisiana Boulevard making a strange turn onto the freeway. It was like the person driving was confused and didn't want to exit on Louisiana. The car turned directly into oncoming traffic. The car cut across lanes of traffic going in the opposite direction. The man heading right toward this car saw a likely scenario unfold, and he knew that if he didn't take evasive action, his vehicle would T-bone the other car on the driver's side.

Being in the flow, clarity defined the situation and what needed to be done. He needed to slam on his brakes while swerving into the left lane to keep from crashing into the other car. And so he did, avoiding what would surely have been a tragic accident. This man is truly grateful for being in the flow.



Moving Meditation: Hiking & TCC

By MARY WICHMANN, ROCHERT, MINNESOTA

Several years ago I purchased hiking boots and poles for hiking while away from Minnesota that winter. But just before departing, a dermatologist scraped the top of my left foot (during a pre-cancerous procedure), which prevented me from wearing shoes or boots for an extended period. Since sandals are the preferred footwear in Arizona anyway, I put the new boots and poles in the back of the closet. (We are now retired and living six months in Arizona.)

My husband is fussy, especially about his vehicle. In Minnesota we have two; during the winter we share his new sporty black car, but it isn't allowed off road. In order to participate in water aerobics and sitting meditation in Arizona, I do a quick one-mile bicycle ride across the bridge that connects the community.

Last month an email asked for input from community members interested in starting a hiking group. My first thoughts were negative:

Gravel roads lead to the mountains. How would I get there? I've never done this before. What if I can't keep up?

I worked it out, though, during T'ai Chi Chih practice. I'd buy the hiking pass and share it with whoever was going to drive. I took a deep breath and replied: I'd love to learn to hike.

Walking in the Sonoran Desert, around Saguaro Lake or up the Superstition Mountains is another form of moving meditation like TCC. And on those walks I have experienced ah-ha moments, had meaningful conversations and developed deep friendships. Again similar to what I experience being part of the TCC community.



At left: Mary Wichmann, third from left

TCC Workshop in Loveland, Colorado, February 2015

BY MARIE DOTTS, HOST, LOVELAND, COLORADO

This was a very special weekend for me. It was a weekend of grounding, connectedness and joy. A weekend where my T'ai Chi Chih teacher, Judy George from Minnesota, met and shared her gifts with a growing TCC community in Colorado.



A weekend of bridging two TCC communities. A weekend realizing that we really are one worldwide community, and that we all have gifts to help grow that community.

My desire to invite Judy began with the need to find a second teacher for my growing number of teacher candidates. There are no other teachers in Northern Colorado; Judy has a wealth of experience in mentoring candidates. A lot of you experienced Judy's gifts at the 2013 conference during her Joyful Feet Workshop. She loves to help people release, open and ground through the soles of their feet. Because of her work as a yoga and pilates teacher and as a personal trainer she also has a deep understanding of body alignment.

We all know that grounding and alignment are key to letting go in our TCC practice. It was wonderful to see awareness grow in the students and myself as we discovered our feet and body in ways that we would not have without Judy's guidance. What a joy it is to discover and connect with ourselves in a new way. We thank Judy for generously sharing her heart and gifts with us.

This workshop planted a new desire to bring other teachers to Northern Colorado to share their gifts and connect more communities. The modestly priced (\$75) workshop format worked well. Although it was not overnight, it ran all day Saturday and on Sunday morning. Amy Tyksinski will join us in October and help us play with the principle she discussed in the February Vital Force, "What compels me most recently is how to help students access the principle of 'effort of no effort' through their tan t'ien."

I must be honest: There is a habit energy in me that can feel threatened by the light of others. That part of me felt shaky after Judy left. The habit energy's voice was, "I have nothing to share. My students will not want me as a teacher now that they have experienced Judy." TCC has taught me to have compassion for that voice. It is not who and what I am. It is a conditioned part. Just this week a teacher candidate shared concerns with me about her ability to teach – as she compared herself to me.

When we identify with the conditioned mind there is always fear, doubt and comparison. The gift of TCC is that it teaches us to identify with our tan t'ien, our true center. In that place there is only love, acceptance and wholeness. We are always enough just the way we are. There is no other to compare with. The light of others only helps us open up more to our own light. We rest in our own gifts that only our unique journey could create. The Oneness needs us to share them. No one else can. I hope we can share our gifts with each other more and more. We will all grow in Joy because of it.

TCC Retreat in Estes Park, Colorado, October 2014

PARTICIPANT COMMENTS COMPILED BY MARIE DOTTS,
LOVELAND, COLORADO

I am surprised at the progress in three days. I am beginning to feel connections with my body and the ground beneath me that have been eluding me. All of which provide a gentle push toward daily practice from a once weekly practice.

– STEFANIE DEANGELIS

I've come home. And now have a family. And am meeting my own needs more softly. – ANON

Confidence. The retreat helped me refine and correct my movements, and it clarified things. Positive energy. – ANN FOSTER

Western manifestation of Eastern art balancing on the fulcrum of paradox. – CHRISTINA SCHULTZ

It was helpful to spend time on movement details and then put pieces back together. It was a joy to meet with others in a deeper practice.

– SUSAN GOLDMAN

I experienced more subtleties: my pelvis rocking through the weight shift, a wide range of wrist motion, a flow surge from practicing so much in such a short period time. – PEGGY FREEH

Gratitude for organizing a group experience where so much energy is shared. – MARY SCHIEFERECHE

I arrived with only with four weeks of training. This retreat helped me focus on the 19 movements as a whole. I experienced feeling *Chi* in my hands. Being in a group working together helped me progress. New connections, friends, family.

– BONNIE SCHOWALTER

Community. Inspiration. – SANDY ROERIG

I became aware of the latent joy. I am beginning to allow it and letting go of my rigid motions. My desire is to preciously nurture my light so it can shine. Hinges have been oiled; gait is easier; hips move differently. – ANON

I was surprised by the number of people in Northern Colorado doing TCC. – MARY TAFOYA

Butterflies, Prison & TCC

BY SHEILA LEONARD, ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND, CANADA

“Don't ask yourself what the world needs;
Ask yourself what makes you come alive. And go do that.
Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

– Howard Thurman

Because I was more rewired than retired, becoming an accredited T'ai Chi Chih teacher was the beginning of a new exhilarating chapter in my life, taking me unexpected places, both within and without.

During Fall 2014, I was dreaming again of teaching TCC classes to groups of inmates at Her Majesty's Penitentiary in St. John's where I live. After our first meeting, Heather, my prison program contact person (surprisingly a former student) was convinced and in a heartbeat secured funding, arranged a tour of the penitentiary and a meeting with those likely to benefit most. It had long been tugging at my heart, each time with a little more momentum and passion.

I knew it was time. Somehow the ever mysterious unfolding of the universe brought our energies together; we have just completed a 10-week session. Feedback from all sides has been wonderfully positive; another class is ready to begin. Other inmates have since asked about doing it, although class numbers are limited by time and space as well as security issues.

I continue to be totally awed by the response of the inmates for whom I offered the introductory session in September. And I had been just as awed each week with the group's engagement and enthusiasm. They clearly entered wholeheartedly and enjoyed the sessions. The men's amazement and delight in themselves grew each week, and they let it show. Individual thanks and handshakes every time they left a session were heartwarming and humbling. Near the end they even taught me their prison handshake. Awed.

My introductory session was with the full set of inmates on one particular “Range.” I did a silent demonstration, engaged them in some of the movements, and talked about what TCC is, how it works and how they might benefit. I presented TCC to them initially as a way to help themselves feel better on all kinds of levels using their own natural inner resources, while opening to the possibility of finding a new freedom though in prison. All were amazed. Many nodded as one person, considered a leader, commented after the silent demonstration, “I sure feel a lot more peaceful than when I came in here five minutes ago.” Another wondered, “Where did you get the nerve to come here?”

Through an unexpected turn of events I had worn my orange butterfly shirt to that initial class by accident, instead of my usual TCC shirt. But it was no accident at all. It fit beautifully and the butterfly image triggered conversation around how TCC can change us from the inside out, and even begin to transform our lives. They were enthralled when I shared James Hecker's story of becoming accredited and teaching TCC while serving time, and of TCC's amazing impact on decreasing the return rates of prisoners. A *Chi* moment, a God moment. Amazing, however you look at it. Before I left, the sign-up sheet was full.

Throughout the building, staff had observed our classes on security cameras and experienced their own awe and amazement at what they saw in the practice and in specific individuals. Students mused aloud about some guards' surprised reactions, sitting a little taller as they spoke.

Many staff expressed a keen interest in doing TCC, some just from seeing it on the security cameras. From the start we had been exploring the idea of a staff-only lunch hour session. That initiative has been well received by administration, partly as a morale booster after a particularly difficult Spring experience. The administration is among those most keen about participating. Heather has been encouraging about getting approval to move it forward.

Awe and gratitude say it all for me. Clearly a joy and a privilege. Justin Stone, the originator of TCC, calls the *Chi* a Divine Intelligent Energy. Our only job is to get out of the way and allow the rest to happen. Indeed, God is doing something new here, as always. Open to where the *Chi* may lead, one small step at a time.



Practicing T'ai Chi Chih overlooking Folsom State Prison, California.

College Students & One Teacher: Together

By APRIL LEFFLER, PROSPECT PARK, PENNSYLVANIA

I ask my college students to keep a weekly journal about experiences they have while learning/doing T'ai Chi Chih and collect it twice a semester. It helps me get a sense of where the students are since there is little time to share in the 50-minute class. It also encourages the students to go within.

Many times I am thrilled to read how much the students are gaining from practicing TCC in class and on their own because, quite frankly, it is sometimes very challenging to read some of their blank faces. Below are excerpts from some journals:

"Going into this class I was already excited to see what we would be doing: was it going to be martial arts style or more like yoga/meditation. After the first day and upon meeting April, I realized that the focus is mainly on energy and stress levels. I could not have been more excited to pick such a significant Physical Education class for my freshman year. Most students really dread having to take a P.E. class but I would honestly suggest all students to give TCC a try. After just one day I can already tell April is a genuine and positive instructor.

The transition from high school to college can be difficult, and I'm still working on adjusting to everything. TCC was my last class on Thursday and afterwards I felt so calm and at ease. Usually I feel rushed to the point where I'm power walking everywhere (which was the P.E. I almost took), but after the class with April I sort of slowed down my pace and enjoyed the walk back to my room through campus. I have great results and peaceful energy already after day one. This is exactly what I need to keep me sane through my first semester." – QUINIA BENBOW

~ ~ ~

During the beginning of the semester, I tell the class about Justin as well as the history of TCC. As the semester goes on, I usually ask the class, "What's the name of the Originator of TCC?" And I've heard many variations of "J" names (e.g. Joshua, Joseph, Jeremy) over the years. As the weeks go by, I eventually say, "Okay, what's the Dude's name?"

The following excerpt reflects this: "Today during class I thought, 'I'm glad I took this class. Justin Stone was probably a really cool dude and a lot of people probably still thank him today.' April sometimes talks about TCC retreats she's been on and I think it would be cool to attend one. I'll add it to my bucket list."

~ ~ ~

Sometimes students write about sharing the movements they've learned in class with their friends or family:



"Today instead of facing the mirrors or getting in the circle, we tried something different and all looked out the window. Change is good because you never know if it could make for a better class mood. I could feel everyone more focused in a way; maybe looking at the trees and into the distance helps the *Chi*. It helped me and I felt a lot smoother doing the movements. I'm sad that our class is coming to an end soon.

Sometimes after class I go back to my dorm and instead of taking a nap I'll show some friends the new movements we learned. They laugh because they think I look funny, but they also know that it relaxes me and I enjoy class." – QUINIA BENBOW

~ ~ ~

At times it's obvious that the class is feeling it and moving accordingly:

"I thought doing the TCC movements as a group was calming and refreshing. It was motivating to see the whole class move as one, almost fluid motion because it made me feel less awkward about engaging in TCC around my classmates. When I looked around and saw all my classmates entering their own Zen zone, I felt at peace because I realized they were not watching how I was doing TCC; they were focusing on how they do it." – F.F.

~ ~ ~

Other times it's nice to read it:

"In this class, I felt vibrations in between my hands when I practiced the "Big Wheel" [Carry the Ball] movement. In addition, I felt heaviness between my palms, which took me by surprise. I felt that I was carrying something heavy between the palms of my hand as I slowly shifted my weight while moving my arms in continuous, large circles." – F.F.

"I enjoyed listening to Ms. Leffler's advice about not 'letting outside influences affect you.' That really inspired me because I was so stressed out with college tests and exams and about my future. Sometimes thinking about the future can cause more mental distress and harm than positive reflection. I am implementing TCC movements into my weekly routines. When I am feeling really stressed I may do Around the Platter or Daughter in the Valley. I truly believe that focusing on the present and not

Teaching TCC To College Students

worrying about the future has helped me manage my emotional state in college. I am really happy I choose to take TCC during my freshmen year because it has helped me with the adjustment process.” – F.F.

~ ~ ~

If a student seems bored or unfocused, repeatedly scattered or distracted during class, I do my best to detach and realize that there is only so much I can do as a teacher. I can lead a horse to water, as it were.

Below is a humbling account from a social media assignment of what TCC can do, in spite of how the student is in class:

“To learn more about TCC I went to a couple of different social media websites to see what other people were getting out of TCC. So far in class it has been hard for me to “leave my mind at the door.” There is always so much to think about – from my English major homework and my resident assistant work to thinking about my family back home. I thought the class would help relieve some of the stresses cluttering my mind. But so far the class (50 minutes of complete silence) just pushes the thoughts to the forefront – allowing me to process everything I have to do that day or week.

First I went to Pinterest.com. The first image was titled “10 to Zen.” The description stated that ‘T’ai Chi Chih is also called Joy Through Movement. Joy is our true nature.’ I wondered how one could reach a place of joy through TCC, and the picture laid out the rules to reach it. (Let go of comparing. Let go of competing. Let go of judgments. Let go of anger. Let go of regrets. Let go of worrying. Let go of blame. Let go of guilt. Let go of fear. Have a proper deep-rooted laugh at least once a day.)

I quickly realized the things listed were what clouded my thoughts. Comparing myself to my peers. Competing with my peers to be the best at whatever we are doing. Judging those to whom I am not even truly known. Angry about things I have no control over. Regretting past actions and choices. Worrying about how I will stay in school for all four years. Blaming others and myself for the conditions I find myself in. Guilty for making my mother pay for college. Fearful of not graduating on time (or at all). And then realizing that with those, I have no time for a good laugh.

So with this newfound information I practiced the movements we had learned so far by myself. I turned the lights off in my room, chose a time when it’s quieter in my resident hall and attempted the movements. Thoughts were still at the forefront of my mind when I began. Worrying about things I could be doing that could be more “productive” than this. Someone walked by to use the washing machine and that pulled me even more out of focus. But then I returned to focus on the Pinterest list. Starting with the first point and moving my way down the list I decided to move through my problems with the different movements of TCC.

By the end of my solo practice, my head was a lot clearer. I lost track of time and at the end, it was almost time to go to work. **I had spent at least two hours practicing TCC without distraction by my thoughts.** I was completely in the

moment of what I was doing. I had a feeling of complete quiet. There was nothing going on in my head. I was surrounded my stillness and quiet; it was very different than what I was use to. Hopefully when I get to class on Thursday I will be able to take what I learned and apply it in class. It may be different with others in the room and trying to stay with the pace of the class, but I have a tool now. A tool that allows me to “leave my mind at the door” even though it is a gradual process.

– TYLER G.



TCC Appears In Everyday Action

By CHARLIE WILLIAMS, TUPELO, MISSISSIPPI

A competent young orthopedic surgeon recommended T'ai Chi Chih as a resource in my recovery from a total knee replacement four years ago, and reiterated the recommendation after a second such surgery on the companion knee two years later. I'm pleased I followed his advice. TCC was unknown to me when I wandered into my first class simply seeking better physical balance. Since then, through participation in weekly classes and practice at home, not only has my physical balance improved nicely, but I also have received enhanced mental, emotional and spiritual balance.

I'm now beginning to have experiences where TCC principles become useful in my everyday life. During the recent extended absence of my companion, I had such an occasion. In her stead I had agreed to take over the morning chore of feeding wild birds that flock from the woods adjacent to our rural house. Before leaving, she demonstrated to me the careful spreading of birdseed along wooden railings that surround three sides of our exposed rear deck.

As I approached the first morning of my new bird feeding duties, I found myself standing on the deck covered in a sheet of ice. However, thanks to the practice of TCC, I remained calm and breathed deeply. It came to me that my body knew how to safely execute the required action.

I slowly sank down and placed all of my weight into my left leg. I then moved my right foot in a small sideways step and glided to my right side, placing all of my weight into my right leg. After moving my left leg alongside my right, I sank down again and began the feeding, distributing seed. Before each succeeding step I confirmed that all weight had fully shifted to the receiving, substantial leg before moving. I successfully repeated this maneuver along the entire perimeter of the icy deck, and when I completed the seed distribution I'm certain I could hear the observing birds rejoicing in the woods. Joy through movement, perhaps.

For me, this fulfilling experience underscored two of the primary TCC principles – focusing in the soles of the feet and shifting the weight correctly. Knowledge of how to move properly was essential on that frigid morning. While literally on thin ice, my body had been grounded securely during the bird feeding process. I'm more balanced and centered in my physical body movements than ever, and for that I am grateful to TCC and for the caring instruction and support of my teachers.



Intensive: A Step Towards Teaching TCC?

ATTENDEE REFLECTIONS COMPILED BY STACEY MOORE,
DOVER, PENNSYLVANIA

"I became interested in T'ai Chi Chih when I saw my 90-year-old mother watching it on television. She answered my question why she was watching it with a smile and 'it makes me feel good.' So I began going. After 10 years, I felt I could teach TCC. Having been an academic teacher for forty years, I focused on the Intensive as a step to accreditation and teaching. After attending an Intensive in November 2014, I discovered new meaning to words heard over the years, "TCC is preformed primarily below the waist." My past academic process of research, study, perfecting, testing, moving through graduate degrees and achievements melted away into a new energy of becoming a TCC teacher.

While practicing side-by-side with accredited teachers and candidates, I was not adding knowledge. No, I experienced a deepening within the movements. It is this deep-down-experience of peace and joy that I want to share with others. Mother taught me much about life and although she never actually got up from her chair to do the movements, I now experience what she did watching TCC." – CHRISTA THOMPSON, ASTON, PENNSYLVANIA

"I found it ironic that on the final day when asked to comment on one or two issues we should focus most closely on, my immediate response was, 'I need to stop relying on physical strength' and 'I need to stop anticipating the next move.' For the last year it's been abundantly clear that those are the two issues constantly at the heart of almost all stumbling blocks in my life. What perfect proof that thought follows Chi and Chi follows thought!" – JESSICA LEWIS, CLAYMONT, DELAWARE

"I don't know how to help you fix your leaning back,' he said. How does a student studying to become a teacher deal with that comment? You can blame your teachers, say the trainer did not like you (and therefore was not fair) or say the trainer's assessment was inaccurate. Or you can choose to be open to your awakening.

My awakening came shortly after an Intensive. At the time I did not understand that Daniel was encouraging me to trust myself and look within to find what was needed to fix my posture. I am now open to all that TCC offers and highly recommend the retreat to all choosing this path. My sincere gratitude to Daniel and Stacey. – OREANN KEMPADOO, SPRING VALLEY, NEW YORK

Marionette

By DONNA DEFFENBAUGH, ARIZONA

“A marionette is a puppet controlled from above using wires or strings ... a marionette’s puppeteer is called a marionettist.” (In our culture, we often refer to someone who does not think or act for him or herself as a “puppet,” and that word creates quite a doubtful impression. For purposes of this metaphor, we’ll put down that negative connotation.)

T’ai Chi Chih is my marionettist. When I first came to TCC, I watched as my teacher slowly, gracefully and with intent, positioned her hands, arms, waist and feet. I marveled at the ease with which she moved. How could one as tense as I come close to proper practice? How could one as stiff as I create a path for vital energy to renew my body and my spirit? How could I?

I watched. I waited. My feet stumbled and my muscles ached. I put my left foot forward and pushed my hands as best I could, teetering as my body rocked front to back, side-to-side.

I studied. I practiced. My neck and shoulders refused to yield. I held fast to the lifelong rigidity that kept me upright – that kept me out of balance.

I began to heed my teacher’s counsel to pay attention to the soles of my feet. I felt the earth under me, keeping me stable, focused, stronger than before. Then it came to me: “I will let you be my marionettist; I will be the puppet.”

The very next practice I set my feet firmly on the earth, and set my eyes completely on my teacher’s hands and feet. I imagined a string or wire reaching from her hands and feet all the way to mine. When my marionettist softened her hand or angled her foot or bent her knee, mine had no option but to follow. (The strings, you see.) When my marionettist pushed the air or pulled the energy, I kept in constant rhythm. (I had no choice because of the wires, of course.)

Time passed. Classes came and went. One day in practice, as taffy stretched, clouds passed, and joyous breath inspired – it happened. There was a shift ... a passing of the torch ... a subtle change ... a sudden awareness.

Someone else, something else, controlled the strings. My eyes, my hands, my senses no longer fixed on my own thoughts or connected to my teacher, TCC was now my marionettist.

“One day ... suddenly I realized nobody is doing anything. I had myself out of the way. T’ai Chi Chih is doing T’ai Chi Chih and it’s a very, very ecstatic feeling.” – JUSTIN F. STONE

A Discovery

By MARGARET LANG NELSON, MINNETONKA, MINNESOTA

A few weeks ago I was consulting Justin Stone’s photo text for guidance on Six Healing Sounds when a receipt fell out of the book. It was dated September 8, 1987 and said “Received of Margaret M. Lang, \$50, 8-week T’ai Chi Chih class. 5:30pm – 7:00pm. El Centro Pastoral. Thank you. Carmen L. Brocklehurst.”

Margaret M. Lang was my mother, who in 1987 was a vibrant 80-year-old, living with my father in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I had no idea she had taken a TCC class.

I can’t remember where the book came from, but I must have kept it when I was going through her things after she died in 2003. I have used that book many times, having stored materials in it from my own TCC classes, which began in 2008, in Minnesota. After all those years, that receipt and its connection to my mother and TCC only came to light a few weeks ago. Amazing.

Reflections On Learning TCC ... One Year Later

By GAIL HORLICK, ATLANTA, GEORGIA

I was introduced to T’ai Chi Chih at a retreat for women. In a beautiful mountain setting, with light streaming through the windows, I was amazed I could feel the energy. About a year later when another opportunity arose, I knew that despite my busy schedule this was something I wanted and needed to do. I was feeling stressed, worried and at times depressed. I’m not sure what I expected to gain.

This week marks a year that four of us have been learning and practicing TCC with Sheryl Adair. I always leave class feeling serene, calm and peaceful. Even though I don’t practice as much as I’d like, I feel

different. I am calmer. I still worry and feel stressed at times, but my emotions are more balanced. Is this all due to TCC? Probably not. I’ve made some other changes, too. Is it partly the TCC? I’m certain of it. I believe the benefits will continue to grow over time. TCC is an important part of my life. I am grateful. I give thanks.



Evaluating Student Learning In TCC Surviving a WASC Accreditation Process

By LINDA BRAGA, CASTRO VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

Teaching the spiritual practice of T'ai Chi Chih in today's techno culture requires patience. It also requires skills in how to teach and how to evaluate students' progress. The end goal is helping all students learn the form and apply it to their lives. The depth of physical and spiritual benefits each student experiences along the way is just one measure of that success.

TCC classes are taught to a wide variety of students. Often classes are held in non-academic settings, such as parks or sports clubs. Evaluation of student progress is done indirectly by the teacher, aware of a student's strengths, weaknesses and which skills need improvement. Most teachers do not give out report cards or conduct surveys. Most adult students do not expect an evaluation of their skills. But times are changing.

Funding for adult school programs now demands measuring student progress, being accountable, and documenting what teachers are teaching, and how and what students are learning. Many adult schools are now requiring more rigorous goals and objectives, more collection of data about progress, and measurable results of direct instruction.

This year some adult schools in California are going through a lengthy WASC accreditation process so that students may qualify for federal and state grants. This process of evaluation is underway in San Leandro adult school where I teach TCC.

Gathering Data

The process began with a yearlong preparation that included a series of staff meetings and collecting data from our students. In September, we used a generic self-assessment survey created by the district. The teachers viewed it as useless, too vague. We were invited to design a better one. Each teacher created a survey specifically designed for his or her class.

In December, students completed the new survey. Teachers quantified the responses and analyzed the data. They looked for trends for groups of students, areas of weaknesses and strengths, and areas needing more focus in teaching. Staff meetings became frequent, interesting, motivating and even fun.

In early 2015, we looked at how our data fit with the goals and objectives set forth by the district. From that process, we targeted specific teaching strategies that needed to be changed/improved.

Conclusions & Action Plan

After gathering and quantifying the data, teachers formed conclusions about their data. Looking at group data – rather than individual responses – helped teachers to see the bigger picture of how well their teaching strategies were working.

The Action Plan included detailed descriptions of changes to be made to improve teacher effectiveness and student learning. Here was one of my action plans:

The self-assessment asked students to rate themselves as to their current level of skill in TCC: "beginner, intermediate, or advanced."

Results and Comments: Students rated themselves lower or higher than they actually are. Many thought they were higher because they had taken TCC for a number of years. These levels are useless, unless there are descriptors of each level.

Action Plan: Create a definitive list of sub-skills within each level for "Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced."

In January 2015, I met with 17 Northern California TCC teachers and presented the three levels, asking them to look at each descriptor. Each descriptor was read aloud and comments/suggestions were made

with a good exchange of ideas. We moved toward consensus-building as we worked together. We now have a revised edition of "Levels of TCC" for the NorCal TCC teachers. Teachers working at the college level teaching TCC were thrilled with this collaborative effort to define what skills applied to each level. They said that this was exactly what was needed in their testing and evaluation process.

These levels will serve as a checklist of accomplishments for each TCC student. Practicing at home is an important step in becoming more skilled. Advancement in skills and understanding are now more concrete and well defined, based on specific sub-skills. This is motivating and very helpful to students. They can determine the next step in advancement for themselves – a quality that all good students possess.

This process of accreditation has produced some great changes already. Some benefits include:

- Ongoing teacher collaboration; sharing teaching strategies and techniques that are the most effective.
- Improved use of teaching strategies for presenting and reinforcing learning.
- Continued revision and refinement of surveys to get meaningful data that reveals progress. We will use these during the next session.
- Continued gathering of data using a multiple-choice format and rating scales of 1-5, rather than open-ended questions.

In March, the WASC team arrived and evaluated the adult school programs. The final report will be submitted to the district in June. I look forward to sharing more information with TCC teachers after we analyze all the findings of the evaluation process.

TCC Retreat in Santa Barbara, California, March, 2015

By GAIL NIETO, WRIGHTWOOD, CALIFORNIA

It was another beautiful California day to begin my second visit to the Mt. Calvary Retreat House. I felt peaceful and excited settling into my room and meeting T'ai Chi Chih friends. At the first session, Sandy McAlister reminded us that TCC can be a practical as well as a spiritual practice to help us through times when we need it most. It softens us, opens our hearts and makes us more aware of our surroundings and what is going on inside us. Through stillness and inner reflection, we connect to the vibrancy of life. All of this and more came to fruition in the next few days.

During our daily workshops and practices, Sandy helped us refine foot placement, hand movements and body alignment, and to focus on the tan t'ien. She also emphasized softness, circularity, flowing and grounding with each movement. Dixie Adeniran, a teacher from Ventura, California, felt she received a gift from Sandy when she reminded us to "glide – arrive" while shifting our weight. Applying this allowed time for the tan t'ien to move fully forward and fully back. I felt this movement as a gentle flow. We felt our minds quiet as our TCC practices became moving meditations.

One morning Sandy asked us to begin with an anchor word for the day that we would share that evening. Several people chose "listen-



ing" or "receptive." Some chose "letting go" as many in the group were struggling with life changing issues. George Anderson-Wood, from Houston, Texas, selected "openheartedness" allowing her to receive from others and be open and authentic with others. She made true connections that day and felt bliss. Ann Corbett from New Jersey especially enjoyed the monk's hospitality and felt it was well worth the long trip. For some, the labyrinth in the terraced garden became a reminder for calm acceptance in the midst of all the twists and turns we face.

At the end, we reflected on what we would carry into our daily lives. We agreed that by letting go we can be present and accepting without judgment, which brings joy. We realized that our bodies, minds and spirits can be transformed through regular TCC practice and that retreats offer clarification, joy and friendships.

The Lighter Side

The Lighter Side

By SHARON SIRKIS, COLUMBIA, MARYLAND

1. After I taught Six Healing Sounds to my college class, I asked them to form a standing circle. Would anyone like to volunteer to sit in the middle of the circle? I mentioned how it's a creative way to practice the movement, as well as a fun way to see if the person in the middle feels anything when the rest of us are aiming the movement directly towards them. I went on to say how some students feel something and that others feel nothing. I mentioned that I'd ask about their experience after we finished the movement, and that they were free to share as much or as little as they wanted. It was clear that there was no pressure to make anything up; there was no good or bad.

Devyn volunteered to sit in the middle. After we finished doing the movement, I asked if there was anything he wanted to share. I was surprised when he said, "I felt attacked." Whoah, this was a new one. I tried to quickly process his remark, since students usually say, "I felt heat," "I felt a wave of energy," "It felt nice," or "I really didn't feel anything." I thanked him for being honest, and he took

his place back in the standing circle.

My karate background popped into my head; I instantly knew what he meant. I asked whether his personal space had been invaded. Yes. To demonstrate my point about personal space and boundaries, I stood really close to him (expecting him to move back and create distance between us), and asked, "What would you do if I stood this close?"

Instead of backing up, he stretched his arms wide in the air around me, as if to give me a great big hug.

2. At my college T'ai Chi Chih classes, I distribute a handout with pyramid poetry and invite the class to create their own. A few brave souls read their poems aloud. Then I tell them to make a paper airplane out of their poems. Giggles abound, reinforcing the theme of fun since it helps with letting go in their TCC practice. Once it's time to fly their homemade planes, I announce, "Looks like everyone's ready, so let's fly our planes." And Jackson, who was busy helping another student with her plane says, "Hold on a minute, I'm still taxiing."

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Community Calendar

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

DATE / WHAT & WHERE / CONTACT

- May 7-10 | TCC Retreat w/ Pam** | Prescott, AZ | Dana Diller | 928-848-0824
Jul 17-19 | TCC Retreat w/ Dan | St John's, NL Canada | Sheila Leonard | 709-727-7863
Aug 6-9 | Teacher Conference | Black Mountain, NC | Vicki Schroeder | vickitcc@gmail.com
Aug 9-11 | Seijaku Accreditation w/ Pam | Black Mountain, NC | Dan Pienciak | 732-988-5573
Aug 9-11 | Seijaku Introduction w/ Dan | Black Mountain, NC | Dan Pienciak | 732-988-5573
Sep 9-13 | TCC Intensive w/Pam | San Antonio, TX | Alice Holden | 210-525-1232
Oct 16-18 | TCC Workshop w/Sandy | Tupelo, MS | Ron Richardson | 662-844-6473
Oct 23-24 | TCC Workshop w/Sandy | Kansas City, MO | Lorraine Lepine | 913-901-8818
Oct 25-29 | TCC Intensive w/Sandy | Philadelphia, PA | April Leffler | 610-532-6753
Oct 27-30 | TCC Retreat w/Pam | Santa Barbara, CA | Pam Towne | 760-421-7589
Oct 29-Nov 1 | Prajna Retreat w/Sandy | Philadelphia, PA | April Leffler | 610-532-6753
Nov 16-21 | Accreditation w/ Dan | Albuquerque, NM | Mary White | 505-980-7329
Feb 24-28, 2016 | TCC Intensive w/Sandy | Littleton, CO | Marie Dotts | 970-412-9955

- MORE WORKSHOPS & RETREATS -

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

- May 9 | TCC Workshop w/ Sharon Sirkis** | Marriottsville, MD | Sharon Sirkis | 410-730-1986
May 16 | Seijaku Workshop w/ Carmen Brocklehurst | Albuquerque, NM | Judy Hendricks | 505-897-3810
Jun 20 | TCC Workshop w/ Sharon Sirkis | Marriottsville, MD | Sharon Sirkis | 410-730-1986
Aug 23 | Seijaku Workshop w/ Ann Rutherford | Saratoga, CA | Darlene Karasik | 408-867-3567
Sep 24-27 | Learn Seijaku Retreat w/ Carmen Brocklehurst | Albuquerque, NM | Judy Hendricks | 505-897-3810
Oct 9-11 | TCC Workshop w/ Amy Tyksinski | Loveland, CO | Marie Dotts | 970-412-9955

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