

The Vital Force

Journal of the T'ai Chi Chih® Community

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Table of Contents

Articles by Originator and Head

- 4 Understanding TCC Form . . . Stone
- 5 The Spirit of Kauai Altman
- 15 Purpose of New Course . . . Altman

Events Coverage

- 8 TCC Retreat - Arizona
- 10 TCC Intensive - New Jersey
- 12 TCC Intensive - Illinois
- 16 TCC Retreat - Hawaii

Articles by Teachers

- 6 Energy Management McLain
- 7 Seek Peace Within Leffler
- 22 East Coast Teachers' Retreat . . . Cole
- 23 A Love Story Renewed Cooper
- 24 Guatemalan TCC Dream . . . Puckett
- 25 I Became Accredited! Flynn
- 27 Student Stories McLaughlin

Articles by Students

- 21 Teacher Thanked Labonte
- 21 Teacher Eulogized Gerdes
- 26 My Experience Simorangkir
- 28 What Class Has Meant France
- 29 Story Shared With Teacher . . . Vrba
- 29 Balance Improves Hollek

Creativity Expressed

- Cover Photography Grant
- 4 Photography Maisel
- 7 Photography Maisel
- Back Page Poetry Bradley

In Every Issue

- 2, 34 Information on *The Vital Force*
- 2 Letter from the Editor
- 3 Readers Respond
- 18 Calendar of Events
- 20 News Shorts
- 32 Karmic Komments
- 33 Good Karma Publishing Distributors
- 35 Contacts Lists / Membership Form
- 36 The Lighter Side...

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



The Vital Force

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

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

Cover:



Our cover features the photographic work of TCC teacher Kim Grant. Kim, a professional photographer, has graced our publication's cover once before (VFJ, December, 2000).

In summertime, who doesn't think of going to the seashore for rest and relaxation? Kim's photo captures the tranquility of a day in the dunes.

Cover photo © 2000, by Kim Grant, Boston

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Letter from the Editor

Earlier this year, a newly-accredited TCC teacher, **Lisa Thorburn**, ran into a problem that the TCC Community Website was experiencing (which we didn't know about). She contacted her former teacher, **Sandy McAlister**, with the information, requesting that it be forwarded to the appropriate person. Sandy sent it on to VFJ Webmaster **Ted Fleischman**. What Lisa had discovered is that when her company installed a new firewall for their internet server, they were able to "block" certain websites from being accessible by employees — ones that include "such things as sports, intolerance, partial or full nudity, violence, etc." Once this "block" was installed, Lisa found that the TCC Community Website was no longer accessible. She noted, "Research and the process of elimination revealed that the taichichih.org site was not accessible when 'Partial Nudity,' 'Full Nudity,' or 'Sexual Acts' was clicked as a grouping to block."

Ludicrous and hilarious (to some) as this might seem, it was having a very undesirable effect in terms of limiting access to those interested in T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement. Lisa included in her e-mail message the process to correct the situation, which Ted was then able to do. We are grateful to Lisa for taking the time to notify us of this obvious problem and include a solution, as well. Thank you, Lisa! Thanks, also, to Sandy, for her part, and to Ted for correcting it. If any of you, readers, come across situations regarding the TCC Community Website that don't seem right, we would certainly appreciate your taking the time to inform us with all that you know, as Lisa did, so we can remedy the problem.

Lisa's effort underlines the point that the guardianship of T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement is the responsibility of ALL of us — teachers and students alike. There is more to keep track of, more work to be done than can possibly be done by a few, but with hundreds, indeed, thousands of TCC practitioners worldwide, the tasks CAN get done if people care enough to make the effort. Remember, this is a community of individuals acting (or not) from Teh (the power of inner sincerity). We have no organization, although there is one corporation (Good Karma Publishing, Inc.) and a couple of associations that have very specific roles. One, the T'ai Chi Chih Association, runs the TCC Center in Albuquerque, NM, along with putting out The NM T'ai Chi Chih News. The second, The Vital Force Association, puts out The Vital Force, Journal of the T'ai Chi Chih Community and also serves as the first contact many in the public have with T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement — via the TCC Community Website. Serving the public in this way also includes offering a way to contact someone (VFJ Information/Outreach Coordinator Kathy Albers) for more information about teachers in their area or with general questions about the practice.

Other than that, there are no staffs, no funds, and no ruling body, although, unofficially, Justin Stone, as originator of this spiritual discipline, has largely been the guiding force behind every major decision made in leading the community — at least in the last nearly seven years that Ed Altman has been his chosen Head of the TCC Community.

We are a community. A community of individuals, each with our part to play in moving T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement forward. What is your part?

Noel Altman, Editor



Readers Respond

Hello!

My name is Jean Michel Victoire. I'm trying to learn the *T'ai Chi Chih* form since 10 months. My teacher is Catherine Briussel (she is wonderful!) in France. I see your programme on the net so I just want to say you that *T'ai Chi Chih* practice change my life and that I hope that one day I'll can have my accreditation in France! Hope see you later! By by!

Jean Michel Victoire
Le Chambon sur Lignon
FRANCE
Student of Catherine Briussel

I am a stained glass artist. I have been doing *T'ai Chi Chih* practice for two years and have found it has helped me to have an infinite flow of creativity. My hands cannot keep up with the creative designs that come to my mind. It might encourage other struggling artists to know this. I am grateful to the *T'ai Chi Chih* community, my teacher, Debbie Cole, and Justin Stone for making this available in my life. . . .

Carol Boyette
Odenton, MD
Student of Debbie Cole

Aloha Doug, I am not teaching any Chih classes right now, and I don't like to waste paper. What is the cost of membership if you exclude the teachers directory? I won't want a directory until I start teaching again.

Terry Jennings
Honolulu, HI

[VFJ Membership Coordinator Doug Harned replied to Terry:

You and I are on the same page as far as the teachers directory goes. I wish we could make it optional for all teachers (even if there is no discount as it takes extra work to make things optional.) This way if a teacher did not expect to need the directory they could not receive it and save the paper. Maybe you could write Noel and express your views. (I already have).

VFJ Editor's reply: Hi again, Terry! I appreciate your view. I believe that there are teachers out there who do not value receiving the Directory, and it's very costly for us to produce. It is not known how many teachers do not value it. This is an item I have considered polling the VFJ teacher membership about, but haven't gotten to...There are other membership topics I want to include in such a poll...

At this time, I do not want to change the policy (without input from the community). Long ago, an old VFJ staff had it as an optional (\$5) item to add on to a teacher membership (\$25), but the problem with that is that it drives up the per unit price if we produce fewer, so I'm not sure it would be worth it to do it at all if it's not for every teacher member. In 1996, then-VFJ Editors Lois Mahaney and Liz Salada must have reached a similar conclusion; they eliminated the option and instead made the teacher membership cost \$30, which included the Directory.

My feeling is maybe we'll discontinue it entirely, since the great majority of active teachers elect (along with their VFJ membership) to be listed on the TCC Community Website, and most folks can get online these days (if not on their own computer, then on one at the library or a friend or family member's computer). There is information in the Directory that we do

not put out on the web (and won't), so we would have to figure out how to get that out to the teachers...perhaps with a much-smaller listing of that information put out less frequently than every single year.

Again, no change for now — just ruminating. Would want input from the entire community via some sort of poll before making any changes.]

I sent in \$35. to renew my VFJ subscription at the end of November, 2002.

To date ... I received a copy of the October, 2002 VFJ (past tense, wanting the next coming (Jan) but never received January or the 2003 Teacher's Directory.

I DID receive the April, 2003 issue yesterday.

I'd like the January issue + the Teacher's Directory (if one was printed) ... and don't feel the October, 2002 issue should have been sent (as part of my year's subscription).

Thank you and would appreciate a response ...

Note I did e-mail VFJmembership@yahoo a few days ago without response. A possible change?

Ralph Garn
Syracuse, NY

[Editor's Note: Hi Ralph! You did send your information to the right place — VFJMembership@yahoo.com. That reaches Doug Harned, who

continued on page 30



Understanding the *T'ai Chi Chih* form

By Justin Stone

To be a good teacher, one must understand the movements—all of them. Just to tell the students to place their hands here or there is certainly not enough. In certain movements the hips swivel and the waist turns, which I will emphasize in my video to the Conference. There are reasons why we finish movements by placing the hands

parallel to the floor—when we start moving, the Yin and Yang aspects of the CHI separate, and coming to rest in the described manner allows the YIN and Yang to flow back together and we are not fragmented. The Cosmic Consciousness pose at the end of our practice allows the YIN and Yang to completely come together, and we again are whole. All these small bits of information must be conveyed to the student. The correct shifting of the weight is all-important. The circularity and polarity of each movement must be pointed out. We do not just push out in “Push Pull”; there is a slight circular motion, and we emphasize one side or the other as we push, to balance the Yang leg on the other side. The visualization in “Pulling in the Energy” is all-important if one wants to receive the total benefit of the movement.

It is taken for granted that teachers practise each day and try to improve their own movements, until, eventually, they will sink into the Essence of the *T'ai Chi Chih* form (which many never reach)



Photo: Alice Maisel

and finally realize that no-one is doing anything; *T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement* is doing *T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement*.

We are dealing with the Great Cosmic Force (actually, far beyond the cosmos) in TCC practice and can think of the CHI as the modus operandi of Divinity if we are so-minded. In India this great force is thought of as Shakti, and CHI is one with this substance, without which there would be no life or any manifestation at all. Think about this. It's not only the present that depends on this force; your entire future is tied up with it, all the way to Infinity.

To be a shallow teacher and just point out where the hands go is disappointing. Practise and learn to understand the movements and the overall meaning of *T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement*.



The Spirit of Kauai

By Ed Altman

I've done a lot of personal reflection since moving to Kauai last year. Living in this island paradise has had a strong influence on my life and my *T'ai Chi Chih* practice. Many teachers have asked what it is like to live here and I am happy to respond briefly in print.

First and foremost, Kauai is a place of spiritual power. Many are drawn here to live their life's work, and it is no accident Noel and I ended up here. It is a place of tremendous personal growth and the island is alive with the universal life force. Once, years ago, while visiting Folsom prison with Justin Stone, he spoke to a group of inmates. During his talk he said: "From the Eastern point of view we are all living the same life." He was speaking about our connection and unity through the life force, and those words changed my way of thinking. They brought me closer to an understanding of Universal consciousness. In the same way, living here on Kauai has allowed me to expand that moment of awakening and live it more fully on a daily basis. I am constantly reminded of it and called to live from that place of truth in my thoughts, words and actions.

I have also been profoundly affected by my experience of the "Spirit of Aloha". Far more than a travel slogan, the Aloha spirit is a living art — a path of the heart. The word itself has many meanings: hello, goodbye, welcome, love, peace, compassion, generosity, grace, etc. Like the essence of one's *T'ai Chi Chih* practice, the spirit of Aloha is something each person must come to understand and embody on his or her own terms. For me, when I hear the word "Aloha" my heart translates it as "let there be love between us". This feeling resonates very strongly with the joy that comes from my personal *T'ai Chi Chih* practice. It must be shared.

On Kauai, growth is all around and cannot be held back. Plants continue to grow throughout the year and eventually overtake everything in their path. Birds and wild chickens seem to call from every tree and bush, and geckos and other insects are commonplace within our home. Some are more welcome than others. It may be some time before I greet a flying cockroach with the Aloha spirit, but I know it is there for me to grow into. I have a much easier time dealing with the geckos who are our most prevalent visitors. Their chirping calls sound a lot like laughter and ring through the house encouraging us to join in.

With all this growth there is also a strong sense of impermanence. Everything that has been created will inevitably be destroyed. Even the island itself is being worn away to return to the sea from which it arose so many years ago. All life has sprung from the ocean, and spending time playing in or walking along it is very rejuvenating. It fills me with a sense of strength, clarity, and simplicity. The motion of the waves somehow brings stillness to the mind. Especially when the full moon shines serenely over the evening waters. It speaks directly to the heart.

On Kauai, as in our *T'ai Chi Chih* practice, we each must discover and explore the great strength in softness. The opportunity to learn about and live in accord with the life force is invaluable and there is much to be grateful for. Those who are accredited have something of great value to pass along to students seeking depth and meaning in their lives. May we continue to offer it with a sense of gratitude and clarity of heart. May all sincere students experience joy in their *T'ai Chi Chih* practice, and may the sincerity of our wonderful community support each of us in living a life of balance, integrity and fulfillment.



Working With Energy Management (Ener-chi Connections)

By Christeen McLain

When first learning *T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement*, practitioners may report a pleasant tingling sensation in their hands. Often the hands may become heavy, feel either hot or cold to the touch, or become blochy or red. The senses become awakened as one gradually becomes aware to moving out of the "spell" of automatic thinking and responses. With further practice of movement, senses awaken throughout the body with itching, hot or cold flashes, a sense of numbness, and tingling throughout the upper and lower torso. The flow of the electrical current becomes sparked and the sensation of a gentle, consistent release of soothing tingling responses occurs from head to toe. These responses vary from one individual to another. One of my students, after weekly practices for 10 years, was preparing to move out of town. She was a cancer survivor. She stated that in all the years she had been working with me, she had humored my reflections on the sensory responses as she had never felt those sensations. She reported "I practice [the] *T'ai Chi Chih* [form] because I feel an overall sense of peace and serenity. I also know it will keep me healthy. That is what keeps me practicing." Grateful for her honesty, I now let students know they may not feel anything but better! There is no 'one-stated' outcome for how one feels when practicing this movement. Just try it and see how YOU feel. All it takes is a willingness to learn something new.

As I have grown in understanding of how the 'chi' or life force works through the body, the originator of *T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement*—Justin F. Stone—has affirmed our knowledge base with the teachings he has learned from his travels to the East. When first accrediting teachers with this form, Justin would diminish our enthusiasm as our psychic senses were enhanced. He stated that each person has gifts which will be ignited by their practice of the *T'ai Chi Chih* movements. The true integrity of the chi will guide the person to mindfully follow the path of expression granted 'the face they were before they were born'. Often my students get impatient. "Tell me more about the meridians, give me the upgrade version of this form, you can't possibly know everything by just doing these simple movements?!" were examples

of the requests and demands. If students returned to classes after years of absence, comments such as: "Why didn't you tell me that then?" might arise. After training with Justin for years, I would know how he would respond—"Why do you have five fingers?" With his Zen training, he answers questions with questions. With my nursing training, I answer questions with what I know and state "The chi continues to teach me. When you practice, more becomes known".

Each of us has our own truth. Our truth may change as we grow in our understanding of life and the lessons we've chosen to work on this life time. It is the greatest gift to speak the truth as we know it—and then accept that our truth may change! Justin is true to what he knows, I am true to what I know. Being true to the self is what counts. In this way, we can accept and acknowledge differences. Intellectual battles decrease and power struggles dissipate. Fertile ground for self-growth in relationship to another is established.

I have been acclimated and under the spell of intellectual achievements and knowledge base accomplishments. Through the years I have discovered this can occupy my time completely. Does this bring happiness?

Often one's habit energy patterns or vashanas with "doing", achieving or over-achieving can gobble up one's happiness. Like the little Pac-man video game... gobble gobble gobble. Does this bring success?

Who is in command of this one precious,
priceless life?
Who is the saboteur in your life?
And just where did you place those car keys?
Is your life mind-filled or mind-ful?

Giving oneself the opportunity to experience "serenity in the midst of activity" is not just about the outer environment—it is about the inner environment in our own mind/body. *T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement* has been a teacher to, in, and through me since 1978. The journey is an adventure, an awakening.

*The breeze at morning has secrets to tell you—
don't go back to sleep*

- J. Rumi



Seek Peace Within

By April Leffler

Justin Stone has often said that the interior landscape is far more vast than anything in the material world.

This statement may not make sense to people who focus on acquiring things to validate their sense of self-worth. Perhaps this statement doesn't even register on society's radar screen, where much of the focus is external on bigger, better, and faster and on buying even more stuff.

The frenzied pace of the world seems to be sweeping people into a river of chaos, confusion, fear, unhappiness, uncertainty and imbalance. Stress and burnout seem to be THE NORM.

What are we to do to keep up and survive as we continue to gobble up life? This continual fast pace is taking a toll on us as individuals, as a society, as a nation, and as a planet.

Let's consider that perhaps the world has gotten into such an extreme state of madness and turmoil because of the cumulative effect of several billion individuals' dissatisfaction and inner turmoil. Imagine that the current state of the planet is simply a mirror image of the cumulative inner landscape of billions of people! The violence and aggression in the world reflects the violence and aggression within us as individuals. How many people can truly look in the mirror and feel love and acceptance for themselves? How many of us are self-critical and judgmental? Aren't these forms of violence? How many of us add stress to our bodies through consumption of alcohol, sugar, caffeine, nicotine and a poor diet? Aren't these forms of pollution? How many people are battling illness and disease? Doesn't this sound like war?

What can we DO to s-l-o-w d-o-w-n and savor life? We can start first by BEING rather than DOING. Practicing the *T'ai Chi Chih* form in a mindful manner is an excellent way to begin to slow down and get in touch with our inner landscapes.

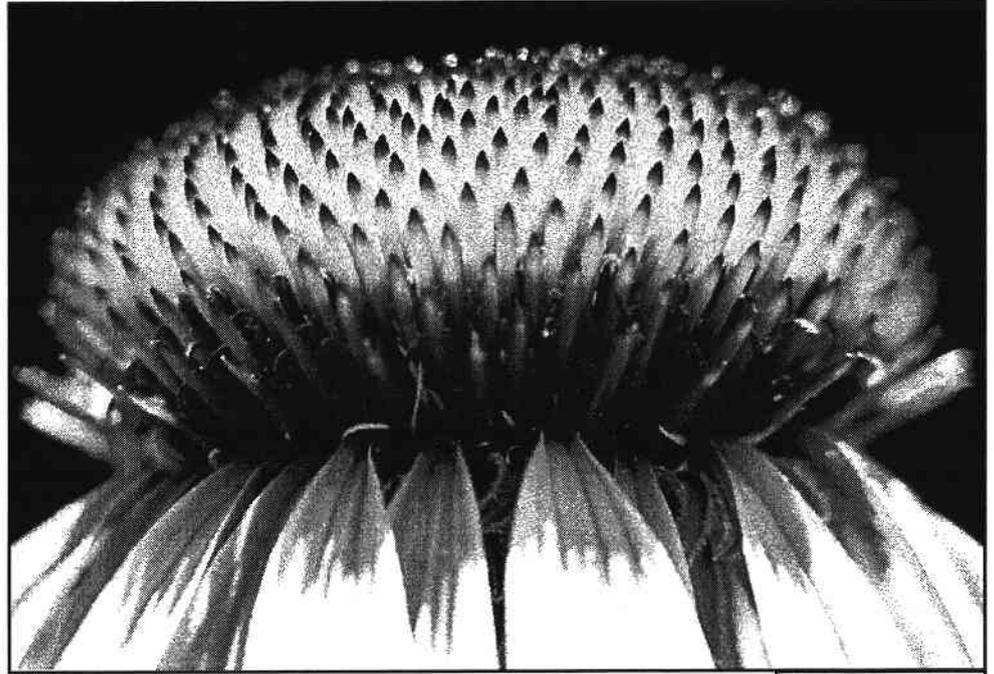


Photo: Alice Maisel

Additionally, reminding our *T'ai Chi Chih* students (and ourselves) to return the attention to the soles of the feet and take a deep breath, gently allows us to bring our focus to the present moment. The habits of worrying about the future and obsessing about the past often melt away over time, as we repeatedly focus on the moment and breathe deeply. We begin to concentrate on our interior landscape. After experiencing an hour or so of quiet, we begin to get in touch with those areas that are out of balance. As the mind begins to quiet down, the body follows and becomes relaxed (and vice versa). It is common for tension, stress and worries to fall away.

Many people are amazed when they experience feelings of peace and quiet during a *T'ai Chi Chih* class. Such feelings are often a dramatic contrast to what they are used to experiencing. Eventually this peaceful and quiet awareness spreads into our lives as we practice daily, the *T'ai Chi Chih* form.

Imagine feelings of peace and quiet BEING THE NORM in our lives, in our society, in our nation and on our planet! Is it crazy to think that the condition of the planet is just a mirror of our cumulative inner landscape? Who knows? But wouldn't it be nice for each of us to contribute to peace by starting within?



April 3-6, 2003

For third straight year, Sedona, AZ is site of *T'ai Chi Chih* retreat

By Robin Spencer
Course Host

& Sue Kenney
Participating Teacher

This was truly a time of retreating from the world, immersing ourselves in *T'ai Chi Chih* practice for three days & experiencing the flow of Chi as the energy of Love. We relaxed in the secluded beauty of nature... refreshed our TCC practice...and renewed body, mind & spirit.

Leaving our busy lives behind, 30 of us anticipated our weekend retreat as we drove through the beautiful red rock country near Sedona, Arizona. Just off the freeway, the 12-mile dirt road provided amazing vistas of wild flowers blooming in the desert, as well as distant mesas and powerful mountains. It was easy to see why these red rock formations and nearby energy vortexes attract many yearly visitors to the great Southwest Desert.

At the end of the dirt road, we arrived at the Mago Healing Garden and were immediately impressed by the seclusion of this property. The buildings, designed by a student of Frank Lloyd Wright, were constructed to blend into the desert and red bluffs. Our simple rooms and predominately vegetarian meals provided exactly what we needed.

Led by Pam Towne, this long weekend offered us all...teachers, students,



Course Instructor Pam Towne (far right) leads the group of 30 attendees in *Bass Drum* during one of the movement sessions over the long weekend.
Photo provided by Robin Spencer

teachers-to-be...an opportunity to deepen our *T'ai Chi Chih* practice. We were united in the awareness that we are all perpetual students, disciples of a form that reveals much about our inner selves. We experienced the vast landscape around us as we explored the far more vast interior landscape.

During our initial evening gathering, we were asked to empty ourselves of worries, travel energies and expectations. We were asked to express our intentions for the weekend. As we shared around the circle, John Smallwood from Bethesda, Maryland said his intention was "to be peace." That thought permeated through all of us and helped define our entire retreat experience.

There was a gentle flow to each day as we began our mornings

with group practice outside in an open area among red rocks. Each day included morning & afternoon workshop sessions during which



Course Instructor Pam Towne (left) shares a smile with Course Host Robin Spencer.
Photo provided by Robin Spencer



Pam, with her softness of movement and her softness of presence, encouraged us to examine and refine our movements.

Justin Stone's emphasis on the importance of "How to Move" was uppermost as we explored the underlying principles of flowing from the center, moving with softness, yin & yanging correctly, circularity, polarity and focusing in the soles of the feet.

The presence of teachers, students and teachers-in-training allowed us to accomplish much.

We worked in small groups and with partners, always with the purpose of discovering "How to Move" with greater ease & less muscular effort. With joy in our hearts and smiles on our faces, we sang "Joy, Joy, Healing Thru Joy" to conclude our practice.

The theme for the retreat was "Filling the Empty Cup." Initially, we were asked to empty our cup — our life. Only after we emptied would we be able to receive. Each of us was given a small white cup and every evening, we received a filling gift. The first evening we received hot tea as a symbol of nourishment and love; the second evening we received the cup containing a lit candle as a symbol of the light in our lives; and on the final evening we received special rocks as a symbol of life, the vital force and grounding energy from our earth. Taking the cup and rocks home provide a reminder of this retreat experience.

The days were brought to a close with a Sacred Circle Dance, during



Enjoying the crisp air outside, attendees follow Course Instructor Pam Towne (far upper right) in a full practice.

Photo provided by Robin Spencer

which we affirmed: "there is no division...only unity...the Chi that flows in you...is the same that flows in me."

Initially, we were strangers arriving from Alaska, New Jersey, Oklahoma, California and states in between. Amidst our *T'ai Chi Chih* practices, our leisurely meals and free time to reflect and explore, we formed a strong bond. In the end, we were sad to leave this place of beauty, togetherness, Chi and "being peace". Yet we left feeling **filled** with love, joy and gratitude. Thank you Justin!

Attendee Comments:

Sedona is one of most beautiful places in the world, so it seems natural for the chi to flow. I came to this retreat, anticipating a change from a long period of inactivity due to multiple surgeries. The sharing of love and peace proved to be a healing experience. Pam and the other teachers were generous with their knowledge; I know that my own practice has

improved. I will remember this time with joy.

Ellen Greyson
Santa Barbara, CA

*I came to rest in divinity. To be with the rich barrenness of the desert. To experience liberation within the confinements of the *T'ai Chi Chih* practice and of the isolated location. And to be surprised. I rested. I was enriched. I was liberated. And I will continue to be surprised as the blessings of this time are revealed to me.*

Sue Kenney
Sacramento, CA

When I bring softness to my practice, it allows chi to bubble up through my body. When I bring softness to my life, it allows emotions to bubble up through my soul.

Rita Otis
Omaha, NE
Student of Sr. Maureen Conroy



May 2-6, 2003

First-ever TCC Intensive, held in NJ, attracts 20 teachers and students

By Dan Pienciak
Course Host

As spring brought forth the blooming process so too did my interior landscape unfold and bloom.

Sharon Matesi
Pennsylvania

It was good to be back once again in familiar and welcoming surroundings at the Mount Saint Francis Retreat Center in Ringwood, NJ for the first *T'ai Chi Chih* Intensive course held early in May. The natural setting was just as beautiful, if quite different from last October (where the NJ Seijaku and TCC Teacher Trainings were held in 2002). Instead of a riot of colored foliage that intensified as the week progressed, mere signs of life at the beginning of the weekend became buds, and then actual green leaves by the day we left. The message of nature was clear: the new beginnings of something good....

It was especially good to gather for this Intensive, knowing that it was the fruition of much expressed need for increased opportunity for serious students, and especially for aspiring teacher candidates to work on their movements before they arrive at a teacher training, as well as a response to teachers to want to learn how to better know what to look for in teacher candidates with whom they are working (as well as in their own movements!).



Course Instructor Pam Towne (left, facing attendees) leads the group of 20 sincere students, teacher candidates, and accredited teachers in refinement work on *Working the Pulley*. Photo: Dan Pienciak

I think it is accurate for me to write that, for the teachers there, it was strange to experience what felt like the first three-and-a-half days of a teacher accreditation, and yet knowing that it was not a teacher accreditation. Students were there, of course: one serious student, and 10 students preparing to attend a future accreditation course when ready.

And so, we found ourselves in old, yet new territory. I think that for me, this fact first "hit home" when Pam admitted, "I've realized that I don't know how this course is going to end up on Tuesday!" And so, with her very able guidance, knowledge, and years of experience, we explored together and found a very beneficial path toward improving the "flowing from the center," and embodiment of all of the other principles of how to move in our TCC practice.

As our days progressed, the word "Intensive" rang more clearly in our ears as a very appropriate name for this course. In seated sessions following meals, Pam went over the principles of how to move in detail and we all, teachers and students alike, took helpful notes for our future and immediate use. Later each morning and afternoon, we opened ourselves to new awareness of these principles in our own movements, working as partners, and observing each other as well. What better way to describe our experiences than in the words of some of those who attended!

I have truly refined and deepened my T'ai Chi Chih practice.

Sr. Rita Jean DuBrey, CSJ
New York

The most valued and valuable lesson I have received at the TCC Intensive is



the confidence I now have in the internal wisdom — the prajna. By trusting the knowledge within, I need only to apply practice and time, to be assured of progress in TCC practice, and growth in understanding.

Bill Moore
New Jersey
Student of
Fran Warren

For the first time, I have come to experience and to understand the movements of T'ai Chi Chih [Joy Thru

Movement] as an integrated whole.... and I feel I have begun to more clearly and real-ly experience the Chi. I leave more deeply committed to daily practice and to growing with it. The spirited atmosphere of these days, of the group, was key to all of the above being able to happen for me. Thank you so much, for so very much.

Sheila Leonard
Newfoundland, Canada
Video-Instructed Student

I began the class doing 'cosmetic' movements (and not realizing that) and left knowing far more about myself.

Diana Bahn
New York

Thank you for the deeper level of softness, and the sense of FLOW that I am going home with.

Lucia Veteran
Pennsylvania

This course has been a great spiritual experience for me. It has taught me



An outdoor practice led by Course Instructor Pam Towne (third from far right) is a refreshing change of venue for the attendees as they put into practice the movement tips they've received during the day. Photo: Dan Pienciak

so much about emptying myself, letting go of tension and expectations. My TCC movements feel like they are flowing better than before. This course has helped me tremendously in deepening and correcting my TCC movements.

Cindy Behler
New Jersey
Student of Sr. Juanita Morales

But what about that darned signature??? !!!

Yes, 10 of 11 students came to the intensive as part of their preparation for teacher training. And what wonderful preparation it was! Perhaps there are those who would measure the success of a teacher training course by the number of participating candidates who actually get accredited at that course. Makes sense.

At this course, however, it was realized by Pam and I (and hopefully by all who attended) that the success of the course was not to be measured by referral signatures given (indicating ability of the student to

demonstrate and embody the principles of T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement in their movements). Rather, its most definite success came in that ALL who attended left with a more clear understanding of their own practice, and for those aspiring to become teachers, understanding clearly their level of preparation and what still needs "work" in their practice.

I think I can safely (and happily) report that every teacher there left understanding our own "homework" to be done, and more confident and respectful of what is needed from a teacher in helping a student who is a "teacher-candidate" better prepare for an accreditation course. A strong recommendation for both other teachers and serious students to attend a future Intensive will certainly be part of that newfound confidence!

And I also think I can accurately report that each student left the course more confident in the sincerity and availability of assistance from teachers and the TCC community at large,

continued on page 30



May 28-31, 2003

Students and teachers find value in attending TCC Intensive in Illinois

By Donna McElhose
Course Host

Midwestern hospitality bloomed Tuesday night at the home of Bobbie Weichman. Local students brought deliciously prepared food to share with the Intensive attendees that came from Florida, Nebraska, Missouri, Indiana, Iowa, California, Wisconsin and Illinois.

Thru the combination of the potluck dinner, sharing conversations, and Pam's discussion on the Intensive, the attendees came together, feeling more relaxed and finding new friends. A ceremony of sharing the chi, and bringing all into the circle concluded the first evening. The stage was set.

The first day began with Pam discussing exceptions and letting go of them, encouraging us at the very beginning to relax, flow from the center, and to set our intentions for the Intensive and asking each student and teacher to let go, empty their cup of expectations, high or low, of limiting thoughts, and restrictions holding them back. The days seemed to fly by — principles being applied, adjustments made, letting go of old habit energies, meeting new mistakes, and reviewing our intentions.

Lectures, group practice and full practices filled the days, as each absorbed what they could to improve their individual practice, the empty cup of the first day slowly filling with new understanding of

the flowing of the *T'ai Chi Chih* discipline.

A special thank you to Roberta Taggart and Anne Perkins for arriving very early each morning. They offered extra help and assistance to the attendees, with each person receiving assistance with what they needed. Receiving gentle instructions that they incorporated into their new understanding of their practice. The attendees loved this time.

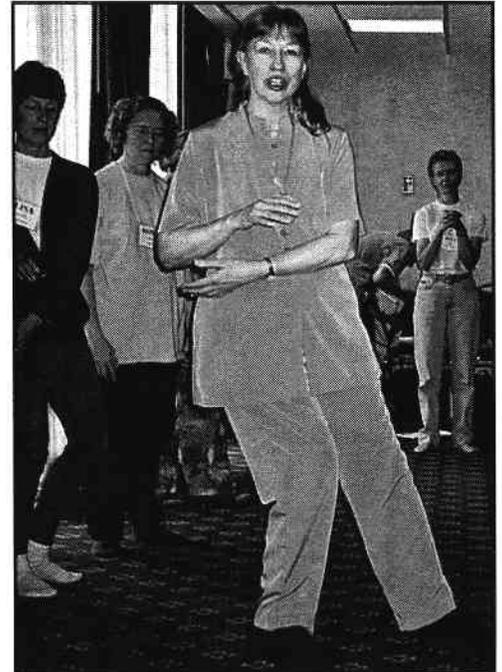
I truly enjoyed hosting the second Intensive — meeting new friends first by email and by phone, then in person at the Intensive. Thank you all for the delight you brought to this gathering of serious *T'ai Chi Chih* practitioners. It felt as if each attendee left with a new blossoming of their practice, as a bud — slowly opening to become full and then to become a bud again. May all of you continue to blossom anew.

Attendee Comments:

The purpose of the Intensive was to enhance the Intrinsic Energy Flow. It did!

Gregory Robert Buss

This experience was joyful. Being in a loving, supported, and nonjudgmental environment is most gratifying. All serious students, especially those aspiring to be teachers, will benefit greatly from experiencing an inten-



Course Instructor Pam Towne (front, center) makes a point while demonstrating *Anchor Taffy* as (L-R): Lisa Jacobs, student of Donna McElhose, Teacher Robin Kidd, and (far right), Rita Otis, student of Sr. Maureen Conroy look on.

Photo: Donna McElhose

*sive. You will come to know your practice on a much deeper level and discover many aspects of *T'ai Chi Chih* practice that were always there but now they are blossoming. This was a great experience. Simply Great!*

Bob Steffen

This intensive deepened my practice. Definitely going to a different level. I also came to see my attachment to being a teacher. I came to see that as different from my desire to be a teacher. Perhaps what I think is lifting me up is actually holding me down. What I cling to — thinking it makes me look good or makes me right or makes me better than others (those



poor unfortunates who don't have my wisdom) — is really keeping me attached when I was created to fly.

Rita Otis

Student of Sr. Maureen Conroy

I came to the Intensive to deepen and enrich my practice of T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement. I got what I came for — and more! The teachers who participated contributed enormously. It was so enriching to me to have several perspectives and so many role models. Each of the participants warmth and sincerity touched me deeply. Donna McElhose was the ultimate host — from the first e-mail contact to the conclusion.

Ann Marie Wyrsh

Student of Kathy Vieth Albers



(L-R): Teacher Gregory Robert Buss is aided by fellow teacher Roberta Taggart in stepping forward to the right depth, while Lisa Jacobs, student of Donna McElhose, works on her own. Photo: Donna McElhose

I really enjoyed these three-and-a-half days of intensive work, thought provoking lectures and sharing in the principles of T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement. I am coming away with a better understanding of Yin & Yang and where it is (and is not) in my TCC movements. I better understand how the TCC movements are really a small part (or not the total picture) of what TCC Joy Thru Movement is all about, i.e. the spiritual aspect — letting go, Zen, the empty cup. I think Pam Towne is a lovely person, and embodies the TCC spirit (as does my teacher, Donna McElhose). Donna did a great job preparing us for the intensive and I am still amazed at just how much I have received from this workshop. I totally recommend this to other serious students of the TCC form. Roberta Taggart has also been a wonderful addition and helper as a TCC teacher, and I've enjoyed her suggestions and tips/ideas as well.

The spirit of nonjudgement has helped me overcome some of my over self-criticism to allow for greater advance. I am excited to continue my self-practice as I have found greater awareness of Chi.

I think this intensive is necessary for teacher training. Keep up the good work!

Lisa Jacobs

Student of Donna McElhose

The four day intensive in Gurnee was a joyous experience. Donna and her students were welcoming hosts. All of the attendees were generous and caring (so nice to know we all share the same journey). The assisting teachers were available and willing to help us work through any and all issues. The



(L-R): Course Host Donna McElhose shares a hug with Course Instructor Pam Towne. Photo: Donna McElhose

T'ai Chi Chih community is truly blessed to have Pam as a teacher trainer. Her joy is contagious and her direction and guidance much appreciated. I am so grateful for this experience and highly recommend it to others.

Carol Raasch

Former Student of Sr. Merrie Frances Seidl

I think that every serious student or teacher should attend an Intensive to renew their form and increase their knowledge.

Judy Pritchett

continued on page 14



Event feedback

continued from page 13

My first thought was an "ego" thought, but an important one — I survived the Four-Day Intensive quite well having Fibromyalgia. It was such a pleasure to meet serious TCC students and teachers from different parts of the country. We built a special bond while learning new things about ourselves and our practice. I would like to see more small group work with teachers. I learned and grew the most in those sessions. Problems could be caught and worked on immediately. I especially would like to thank teachers Roberta, Donna, and Anne for getting up early to work with us before the regular session started. Thank you to Pam for sharing her knowledge of the TCC form. A big thank you to Donna for sponsoring this Intensive work shop!

Bobbie Weichman

Student of Donna McElhose

Value of this Intensive is very high. It allowed me to discover my defaults and create the program for improvement.

I would like to thank all teachers and students for sharing their experiences, and giving me the opportunity to share mine. Special thanks to Pam for not just observing and correcting my mistakes, but for showing how to teach: with patience, integrity, and Teh — inner sincerity.

Alla Meerson

Student of Robin Kidd

I enjoyed the community of people I met here. It gave me a better broader

view of techniques, and variations of abilities. I sincerely hope the organization starts requiring CEU's and/or recertification in the near future to encourage all teachers to be on the same level plane. This will greatly help in achieving consistency around the country between teachers. If you are able to grow to this level at this juncture, the teachers will be needing a teaching or teachers guide video to assist them growing in their isolated area of the country and prepare for recertification process down the road. Thank you for this community that continues to evolve.

Andrea Skillman

Student of Donna McElhose

I would highly recommend to others — both teachers and students — that they take part in an Intensive. As a teacher, I know it has helped me deepen my practice and my life. I also think it was good practice to the students being in a somewhat pressured situation before going to a teacher training. I wish there was some way to make it a little more relaxed, but I guess that is what retreats are for. And I am left wondering — IS THE BAR TOO HIGH? I still have to get my thought together about that question.

Robin Kidd

Caring environment — at the very beginning when working with a partner to be a "loving Mirror" and this set the tone of the whole Intensive — the free giving and receiving of helpful and honest comments to one another, in a supportive community.

I loved Pam's emphasis on finding three major points to work on in our practice (a practical checklist to take home), something equally important for students and teachers.

I felt that both the students (and certainly I as a teacher) craved even more individual corrections, and would have benefited from more small-group work.

Anne Perkins

As an experienced teacher attending my first intensive, I found the opportunity to explore basic principles of T'ai Chi Chih [practice] with greater awareness and application, finally feeling the connection of hands, feet and t'an t'ien in a way that gave the term "continuity" a deeper level of understanding/integration.

Roberta Taggart

Invaluable! I don't know how anyone could do teacher training without the intensive. I received help, direction and gentle correction that I could not have gotten anywhere else. I would recommend it to all serious students.

Lyn Majchrzak

Former Student of
Sr. Merrie Frances Seidl



Head of TCC Community clarifies purpose and format of new course

By Ed Altman

This year the *T'ai Chi Chih* community began offering a new type of course to allow serious students and accredited *T'ai Chi Chih* teachers to work side-by-side to improve their personal practice. Two such *T'ai Chi Chih* Intensive courses have been offered thus far and both were well attended. The feedback I've received from these courses has been nearly all positive, but there are certainly some further improvements to be made. This type of fine-tuning is to be expected with any new course offering, and I'd like to address some concerns raised about these courses in the last month.

As stated in previous issues of *The Vital Force*, attendance at an Intensive course is strictly optional. Neither teachers nor students are required to attend for any reason. There is also no signed referral needed to attend an Intensive course, but students need to have practiced the *T'ai Chi Chih* movements for at least one year and be recommended by their teacher. This allows the course to provide a challenging level of instruction for both serious students and accredited teachers rather than just catering to the needs of beginning students.

The size of Intensive courses is limited to 20 people to ensure that all attendees receive personal attention from the course instructor. Every attendee is treated as a sincere student, and everyone will have the opportunity to practice with the group, have their movements reviewed and receive feedback and suggestions. The course also includes time to speak about the underlying philosophy of the movements to gain a deeper understanding of how to move well. This topic is always taught in a teacher training course and will be of great interest to many students.

Regardless of one's commitment or level of proficiency, Intensive attendees will find valuable instruction and feedback about their *T'ai Chi Chih* practice. The Intensive will be very valuable for serious students wanting to go deeper into their *T'ai Chi Chih* practice without the necessity to become accredited to teach. For those

who want to become accredited, I believe the Intensive will give them a greater level of preparation and confidence going into their accreditation course.

T'ai Chi Chih Intensive course instructors have extensive teaching experience and will give teacher candidates realistic feedback on their readiness to attend an accreditation course. They may even be asked to provide a "second referral signature" for some attendees. If Pam, Sandy or I feel a teacher candidate is moving well and ready to attend a teacher training, we will provide a referral at the conclusion of the Intensive. If not, the student will leave the Intensive with a good sense of what lies ahead before such a referral would be appropriate. However, the second referral signature can be received from any accredited teacher, and focus on this signature will not be a major concern during the Intensive course.

Accredited teachers have sometimes expressed frustration that when they audit a teacher training course the focus is on the candidates rather than the auditors. This is as it should be, but it leaves many auditors wanting more personal instruction from a senior teacher. It has also been said that although the teachers' conference is a wonderful opportunity to deepen one's commitment to teaching the *T'ai Chi Chih* movements, the size of the group makes it difficult to get personal instruction from Sandy, Pam or myself. At last year's conference it was clear that teachers seek a more intimate setting to work on improving their personal practice with some of our community's most experienced teachers. The Intensive course is that setting.

T'ai Chi Chih Intensive courses are not for everyone, but they were created in response to the interest of sincere students and accredited teachers during the last several years. I hope all members of our community will consider attending an Intensive, and I encourage teachers to tell their students about these courses. I trust that those who attend an Intensive will not only find it helpful in deepening their personal *T'ai Chi Chih* practice, but will also discover a stronger sense of sincerity and fellowship within the *T'ai Chi Chih* community.



June 12-15, 2003

First-ever TCC retreat on “garden isle” of Kauai “transforming” for attendees

By Noel Altman
Course Host

The winds sing of it, the rain falls through it, the palms move to it, the earth churns with it, the ocean rolls in it. It is spirit moving form. It is the soul of all creation. It is aloha.

-What is This Thing Called Aloha

As we watched from under the protection of our huge lanai (a roofed, but open on all sides, wooden deck), it appeared as if a light snowfall was wafting down in a diagonal direction from the mountains behind the bunkhouse towards the lawn that expanded out from the lanai. “It’s so beautiful.....” a teacher gushed. “It looks like snow, doesn’t



Attending teacher Nancy Jo Bleier from Alaska is welcomed to the retreat by Course Instructor Ed Altman. Photo: Noel Altman

it?”another asked.

That was just one magical moment of many (including views of the full moon arising from behind the clouds after our evening campfire and

s’mores, and two sightings of double rainbows in a cloudy/sunny sky).

For so many, this retreat was a complete departure from their everyday lives. We were in magical surroundings, in cool (not humid) Kokee State Park, on the beautiful, tropical island of Kauai, Hawaii from June 12-15. There was no snow, but there were frequent “mistfalls” of rain which only added to the renewing, refreshing aspect of the retreat. Fortunately, and, again, almost magically, the rain would usually mist down when we were safely protected under the covered lanai, flowing in our *T’ai Chi Chih* practice, or eating a meal inside the cozy lodge (which I just found out is on the Register of National Historic Sites), or even at the tail end of our (optional) two-hour “Hawaiiana” hike by a Sierra Club guide — just as we reached the entrance to the camp!

Was the universe, or the chi, or whatever you may call the great force which moves this world, at work,



TCC teacher Sr. Antonia Cooper (center) arrived with four of her students — all of them from New Jersey, (L-R): Peggy Lee, Betty Rice, Claire O’Brien, and Alba Cordasco. Photo: Noel Altman

taking care of us for this only-days-long-yet-somehow-timeless moment in time, creating a “cocoon” as Teacher Trisha Jewellen Hargaden from New York called it? I think all who attended would agree, Yes, it was so. And as Course Instructor Ed Altman added to Trisha’s comment, “It has been like a cocoon that we may all like to stay in, and yet — what is the purpose of a cocoon?” We all nodded, knowing the answer. “Transformation,” he stated.

Teachers and students from as far away as New York, New Jersey, Illinois, New Mexico, California and even Alaska made the long journey to attend this retreat in Hawaii. The great majority of them decided to take advantage of coming by expanding their visit by several days or even up to a full two or three weeks of exploration of this and other Hawaiian islands.

We had a small, intimate group of 12 attendees, plus Ed and I, and our fantastic caterer, Caela, who not only



Attending TCC students and teachers synchronize their pace to follow Course Instructor Ed Altman (second from left, at front of group) in refining *Daughter in the Valley* during a movement session on the wood-planked open-air lanai in the cool morning air while the sounds of tropical birds and wild roosters could be heard from the surrounding jungle.

Photo: Noel Altman

prepared each creative and beautifully-presented meal from scratch (using many fruits and vegetables she had grown herself), but also catered individually to the varied dietary restrictions of our attendees. Nearly every person listed Caela's cooking as one of their favorite aspects of the retreat on the evaluation forms. "Caela's food was outstanding & a spiritual experience," noted Teacher Nancy Jo Bleier from Alaska.

"I felt every detail was taken care of, from the bathroom details to bedclothes, spare towels, water — everything we could take for granted was thought through, making our stay easy, pleasant and happy," noted Trisha.

With the physical needs taken care of, each person was free to move ever deeper in his/her *T'ai Chi Chih* practice. I asked Ed, since we had such a small group, to treat everyone as a student (even the most experienced teachers — giving them much-needed time and space to delve deeply — internally — into their own

practices, without having to maintain an external focus, as they do when teaching classes). The teachers seemed to greatly appreciate this. "We ARE all students," Ed stated. Every teacher nodded in agreement.

"In the time we had, a lot of the principles were covered. . . . Ed led everyone to a greater depth in their practice," noted Teacher Donna McElhose of Illinois. She added that "being a student, not having to be in teacher mode" was one of the favorite parts of the retreat for her.

"Ed gave over 100% Teaching to us. His suggestions in moving, being soft — moving/flowing from the Center — are building in me and my TCC practice," wrote Nancy Jo.

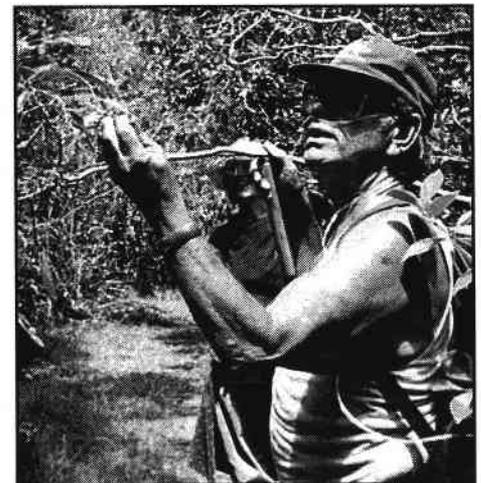
"[There was a] good balance of full practices for generating compound chi and focused work on principles. . . . I liked the focus on principle rather than the fine detail (ie. nit-picking)," noted Teacher RuthE Mandel from New Mexico.

Trisha noted, "Ed, I really liked how you facilitated the group. It allowed me to drop down to a deeper level & focus on my form. I appreciated the lack of pressure; it allowed me also to experiment."

"Ed respected each person's experience & level of TCC [practice] & began from there — everyone benefited. . . . This retreat exceeded my expectations in the input on 'how to move.' Ed's teaching becomes clearer & more refined in helping me to understand principles & apply them," wrote Teacher Sr. Antonia Cooper of New Jersey.

In his closing remarks on Sunday, Ed noted how pleased he was to see that Sr. Antonia (a longtime and much-looked-to senior teacher) had been completely immersed internally beginning with the first practice on Thursday afternoon. Although she had four of her students in attendance, she wasn't looking at them.

continued on page 23



As TCC teacher Trisha Jewellen Hargaden (rear) looks on, Sierra Club guide Les Ventura holds down a branch of the Koa Tree during the guided hike. He explained that the highly adaptive species, after suffering years of drought in which it lost most of its tiny leaves, actually produced a new, larger type of leaf so that it could still photosynthesize. Today, the species grows with **both** types of leaves on its branches! Photo: Noel Altman



Calendar of Events

<p>Aug. 29 thru Sept. 1, 2003</p> <p>18TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL T'AI CHI CHIH TEACHERS' CONFERENCE Location: Banff, Alberta, CANADA Contact: Chery Ann Hoffmeyer P.O. Box 57032 2020 Sherwood Drive Sherwood Park, Alberta CANADA, T8A5L7 Phone: (780) 467-8701 e-mail: chaiholichealth@shaw.ca</p> <p>Resident fee: \$560 CAN. Commuter fee: \$360 CAN.</p>	<p>Sept. 26 thru 28, 2003</p> <p>TCC RETREAT w / PAM TOWNE Location: Santa Barbara, CA Contact: Linden Royce 639 Festivo St. Oxnard, CA 93030 Phone: (805) 983-4023 e-mail: timlindy@msn.com</p> <p><i>(Contact host for pricing information. Note: Space limited to 30 attendees.)</i></p>
<p>Sept. 6, 2003</p> <p>TCC TEACHER RENEWAL (9am - 4pm) w / ED ALTMAN Location: Gurnee, IL (Chicago Area) Contact: Donna McElhose 18160 Twin Lakes Blvd. Wildwood, IL 60030 Phone: (847) 223-6065 e-mail: Dmcelhosechi@aol.com</p> <p>Attendance Fee: \$30</p>	<p>Oct. 10 thru 11</p> <p>TCC WORKSHOP w / PAM TOWNE Friday: 1pm-5:30pm Saturday: 8:30am-11:30am</p> <p>Oct. 11, 2003</p> <p>TCC TEACHER RENEWAL (12:30pm - 5:30pm) w / PAM TOWNE Location: Lubbock, TX Contact: Nancy Beck P.O. Box 94664 Lubbock, TX 79493-4664 Phone: (806) 799-6603 e-mail: warpweav@nts-online.net</p> <p>TCC Workshop (Students): \$35</p> <p>TCC Workshop <u>or</u> Renewal Fee (Teachers): \$35 Discounted rate (Teachers), both days: \$50</p>
<p>Sept. 8 thru 13, 2003</p> <p>TCC TEACHER TRAINING w / ED ALTMAN Location: Gurnee, IL (Chicago Area) Contact: Donna McElhose 18160 Twin Lakes Blvd. Wildwood, IL 60030 Phone: (847) 223-6065 e-mail: Dmcelhosechi@aol.com</p> <p>TCC Teacher Training Fee: \$450</p> <p><i>(Registration and payment need to be completed by July 31, 2003)</i></p>	<p>Nov. 15, 2003</p> <p>TCC TEACHER RENEWAL (9am - 4pm) w / ED ALTMAN Location: Albuquerque, NM Contact: For the NM TCC Center: Ann Rutherford 1534 Wagon Train SE Albuquerque, NM 87123 Ann's Phone: (505) 292-5114 e-mail: ruthergary@aol.com</p> <p>Attendance Fee: \$40</p>



<p>Nov. 17 thru 22, 2003</p> <p>TCC TEACHER TRAINING w / ED ALTMAN</p> <p>Location: Albuquerque, NM</p> <p>Contact: For the NM TCC Center Ann Rutherford 1534 Wagon Train SE Albuquerque, NM 87123 Ann's Phone: (505) 292-5114 e-mail: ruthergary@aol.com</p> <p>TCC Teacher Training Fee: \$450</p>	<p>Jan. 27 thru 30, 2004</p> <p>TCC INTENSIVE w / ED ALTMAN</p> <p>Location: Santa Barbara, CA</p> <p>Contact: Pam Towne 107 Calle Vista Camarillo, CA 93010-1711 Phone: (805) 987-3607 e-mail: ptowne@inreach.com</p> <p>Student/Teacher Attendance Fee: \$200</p>
<p>Nov. 18 thru 23, 2003</p> <p>TCC TEACHER TRAINING w / SANDY McALISTER</p> <p>Location: Ringwood, NJ</p> <p>Contact: Dan Pienciak P.O. Box 122 Ocean Grove, NJ 07756 Phone: (732) 988-5865 e-mail: wakeupdaniel@aol.com</p> <p>TCC Teacher Training Fee: \$450</p>	<p>April 22 thru 25, 2004</p> <p>TCC INTENSIVE w / SANDY McALISTER</p> <p>Location: Houston, TX</p> <p>Contact: Sr. Carletta LaCour, OP 6505 Almeda Road Houston, TX 77021 Phone: (713) 741-8298 - or - E-mail Caroline Guilott: rcsguilott@aol.com</p> <p>Student/Teacher Attendance Fee: \$200</p>
<p>Nov. 20, 2003</p> <p>DAY OF "JOY THRU MOVEMENT" CELEBRATING T'AI CHI CHIH PRACTICE</p> <p>Location: Worldwide</p> <p><i>(Teacher Aida Wilks initiated this annual celebration which falls on Justin Stone's birthday, Nov. 20)</i></p>	<p>POSSIBLE FUTURE EVENTS:</p> <p>If interested in a <u>potential</u> event described below, please contact the host.</p>
<p>Jan. 23 thru 25, 2004</p> <p>SEIJAKU TEACHER TRAINING w / ED ALTMAN</p> <p>Location: San Francisco Bay Area, CA</p> <p>Contact: Athene Mantle 1717 "D" St. Hayward, CA 94541 Phone: (510) 886-3829 e-mail: chigoddess@hotmail.com</p> <p>Seijaku Teacher Training Fee: \$300 Auditing Seijaku Teachers: \$20</p>	<p>Spring 2004</p> <p>SEIJAKU RETREAT</p> <p>Location: New Jersey Shore</p> <p>Contact: Janet Oussaty: (908) 359-1380 e-mail: jousaty@earthlink.net</p> <p>Sept. 2004</p> <p>TCC RETREAT</p> <p>Location: Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, CANADA</p> <p>Contact: Donna Aldous: (306) 236-4610 e-mail: aldous.home@sasktel.net</p>

Justin Stone is the Originator of T'ai Chi Chih! Joy Thru Movement
Ed Altman is the Head of the T'ai Chi Chih Community
Sandy McAlister and Pam Towne are T'ai Chi Chih Teacher Trainers



News Shorts

TCC Teachers' Conference 2003: "Joy on the Mountaintop"

Registrations are "flowing" in for the annual teachers' conference — is your registration in yet? I am sure that you want to be part of this history making event, the first *T'ai Chi Chih* Teachers' conference to be held outside the United States and in the picturesque setting of the Canadian Rocky mountains. As of press time, there were 105 teachers registered and 13 significant others are joining them. We hope you will be joining us as we are "inspired" in our *T'ai Chi Chih* practice and our teaching, as we "refine" our *T'ai Chi Chih* practice and teaching skills, and, as we renew our commitment to *T'ai Chi Chih* practice and teaching.

See you soon in beautiful Banff as we joyfully flow with the chi on the mountaintop.

– Chery Ann Hoffmeyer

Master's degree thesis study by TCC teacher proves that practice positively affects blood pressure and balance in young adults

Eastern philosophies and alternative medical practices, such as *T'ai Chi Chih* (TCC) Joy Thru Movement, a gentle form of exercise and meditation, are gradually becoming more mainstream in western culture. Although there are many benefits to practicing the *T'ai Chi Chih* form, most of the literature relates to the elderly population. This study investigates the impact regular TCC practice has on blood pressure and balance in a younger population.

Twenty subjects, ages 20-39, were randomly assigned to either a TCC or a walking group. Initially, all subjects had their blood pressure checked, their balance tested using the NeuroCom® Balance Master (a clinically accepted machine commonly used by physical therapists for assessment and balance training), single leg stance and functional reach tests to determine baseline data. The TCC group participated three times a week for 45-60 minutes, for five weeks. A certified TCC instructor led one session a week and the investigators led the other

two with the assistance of a video of the teacher. One of the investigators led the walking group, up to 45 minutes three times a week for five weeks.

After five weeks, both groups repeated the balance and blood pressure tests. Statistical analysis showed a significant decrease in systolic and diastolic blood pressure in the TCC group and a significant increase in left single leg stance time, with eyes closed, in the walking group. These results provide significant information on the ability of TCC practice to reduce blood pressure in a younger population, and add to the information on the use of TCC practice as a treatment option for patients with various types of health concerns.

– Sarah Williams

[Editor's Note: Now an accredited teacher, Sarah conducted this research when she was still a teacher candidate with the help of accredited TCC teacher Heather M. Helgeson. It was part of her proposed (and completed) master's degree program in physical therapy.]

Three publications tout benefits of "tai chi" practice in recent issues

In the March&April 2003 issue of *AARP Magazine*, a publication of AARP (American Association of Retired Persons), an article by Melissa Gotthardt entitled "The Tao of Pain: Get arthritis relief by mixing Eastern and Western medicine" lists "tai chi" as one option for reducing arthritis pain.

The article quotes John Klippel, M.D., the Arthritis Foundation's medical director, and mentions that a copy of the publication entitled "Tai Chi from the Arthritis Foundation" can be requested by calling 1-800-283-7800. VFJ readers interested in ordering a back issue of this AARP Magazine issue may call the editorial offices of the magazine at: (202) 434-6880.

In the March/April 2003 issue of *Arthritis Self-Management*, a column by Robert S. Dinsmoor entitled "Definitions" contains a description of "Tai Chi" wherein "Tai Chi Chih, developed by tai chi master Justin Stone" is specifically mentioned as one form that readers might consider.



Dinsmoor explains, "Studies have suggested that regularly practicing tai chi can improve balance and lower blood pressure. Tai chi may also help strengthen muscles, increase range of motion, and reduce stress." He notes that *T'ai Chi Chih* practice is "designed to provide these benefits without placing stress on the joints."

In the May 2003 issues of Mount Sinai School of Medicine's publication, *Focus on Healthy Aging*, a long and thorough article entitled "Tai Chi: Good Exercise at Any Age" includes illustrations of people performing *Pulling Taffy* and *Push Pull* (and labels them by the same names), although no specific mention is made about the TCC form.

This article cites three studies on "tai chi" published in the *Journal of American Geriatrics Society* (May, 1996), *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* (2000, 4th quarter issue), and the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (August 2002) which all document benefits gained by practice. To order back issues, *VFJ* readers may call 1-800-571-1555.

– Noel Altman

[Editor's Note: Although none of these articles is solely devoted to coverage of *T'ai Chi Chih* Joy Thru Movement, with a little extra explanation when using them with the public, they could be helpful for teachers to have in their "file" of promotional articles — especially useful when trying to set up TCC programs at medically-related, educational, or other institutional or "big business" facilities.]

TCC communities volunteer to host next three Teachers' Conferences

Thanks to the behind-the-scenes coordination of Head of the TCC Community Ed Altman, three major TCC teaching communities have volunteered to play host to the annual Teachers' Conference in upcoming years.

St. Louis, MO teachers will play host for the first time in 2004, while Albuquerque, NM teachers, having hosted before in 1989 and 1998, will host in 2005. Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN teachers, who have hosted before in 1991 and 1999, will host again in 2006.

Many thanks (in advance) to these dedicated communities for their selfless service in putting on the biggest TCC event of the year, and for the countless hours that go into the planning beforehand.

– Noel Altman

Student thanks his TCC teacher

I was able to get my grade last evening, and it made my day. I took my wife out for Mother's Day last evening, and I was beaming. I really enjoyed our *T'ai Chi Chih* course, and I still practice the movements. I go to the nearby parks at lunch time, and I find a quiet, sunny spot with birds and flowers for my routine. I find that I'm better able to cope with the activities of the day, and I no longer get angina attacks. I will always reflect back fondly on our course.

Thank you for making a difference in my life.

Leo Labonte

Student of Janet Oussaty

Student eulogizes her TCC teacher

I am writing to inform *The Vital Force* and the *T'ai Chi Chih* community of the death on May 11, 2003 of my *T'ai Chi Chih* teacher and friend, Sister Merrie Frances Seidl, SSND. She was 55 years old.

I first met Sister Merrie Fran, as she was known to us, in July, 1997 when I became her *T'ai Chi Chih* student at Mount Mary College in Milwaukee, WI. Shortly before that time, she had been diagnosed with cancer. During our first class session, I found out that she had just received her first chemotherapy treatment. I admired the way she conducted our classes, even though she must have been going through a time of great personal challenge.

Since 1997, I have taken her TCC course each year. Throughout her ongoing battle with her illness and extended periods of chemotherapy, she continued to teach *T'ai Chi Chih* classes until this spring, when her condition worsened and she was forced to stop teaching.

Sister Merrie Fran was an excellent teacher. She not only taught *T'ai Chi Chih* classes, but also taught second grade for many years and later worked with hearing impaired students. She was a woman of faith who had a gentle and happy spirit, a good sense of humor, a positive attitude, and a devotion to her students. Her personal integrity and inner sincerity made an impact on all who knew her. I am grateful for all that I learned from Sister Merrie Fran. I will miss her very much. I'm sure that her other students feel the same way.

Lynn L. Gerdes

Former Student of Sr. Merrie Frances Seidl



Building Community

East Coast teachers reconvene for second year at NJ oceanside retreat

By Debbie Cole

On Friday, May 2nd the sun was shining and a cool breeze floated past the waves as I and 20 other *T'ai Chi Chih* teachers joined together for a weekend of community and sharing at the New Jersey shore. Some might call our weekend a sabbatical, a retreat, a get together, or just 'fun in the sun,' but whatever you call it, we all connected on the first practice — done in a large circle around a room that looks out on the ocean.

Neal Giacomelli and Sister Antonia Cooper did a wonderful job of taking care of registration and reservations (at the beach houses) as well as planning this wonderful weekend. Neal came up with our catchy name — "CHI by the SEA '03"— after some discussion of possibilities from others. The lovely surroundings and wonderful catering by three very talented and loving women — Thank you Lonnie, Diane and Roberta! — added beautifully to the satisfaction of all.

We spent some time the first evening just getting acquainted and reacquainted with each other with the help of Sister Antonia Cooper and Linda Braga's cards "Images for TCC Practice." We noticed how the shore had already influenced us as we sat around the room in a spiral, watching the evening unfold. Though most of the teachers were from NJ, we also shared space with teachers from NY, PA and MD.

The sense of community was important to all of us (confirmed by the comment sheets filled out afterwards) as we independently shared different stories of how TCC practice has enhanced our lives or made situations easier to handle. Many of us enjoyed some time to ourselves on the beach, still quiet from lack of tourists. Through the process of the weekend we took some time to share our creative energies by writing some Pyramid Poetry or whatever else came to mind ...

*The sea has spoken
Can we hear the words?
Winds still blowing*

*Waves ... birds ...
Life will whisper in your ear
But one must be quiet enough to hear*

Saturday allowed more time for refining our practice and sharing more teaching techniques. Sr. Antonia was especially generous with some wonderful and helpful handouts, even sharing Pam Towne's video with all of us. Michael Isaacs shared how he has his class start out in a circle with Rocking Motion and Bird Flaps its Wings — the rest of the practice facing the same direction, and then back together for Cosmic Consciousness Pose in the circle again. Others passed along teaching tips learned at previous gatherings, such as April Leffler's idea about yinning/yanging with one hand on the lower back of the person next to you. (April wasn't even there!) Terminology, or how we describe the movements, was discussed for its effectiveness in different situations. Things like "bring your knees forward" "your hands should be as if resting on pillows" or "let the ball dissolve (fade — let it go)".

Sr. Antonia facilitated a discussion on how to conduct "intermediate" or on-going classes and we shared what has worked for some of us in the past. After trying our hand at the pyramid poetry, we had some unstructured time for self-reflection. Saturday evening was particularly special because we shared the "famous" rededication ceremony conducted by Sr. Antonia — always a beautiful experience.

Though we enjoyed some serious and thoughtful discussions over the weekend, we also had fun laughing at ourselves, especially when Sr. Antonia was lamenting about what a hard time she was having getting into prison (to teach of course!)

Sunday morning we got back together for a practice and brunch before heading our separate ways. I enjoyed the final practice outside, facing the shore, as I drank in the beauty of the day in ultimate gratitude for this inspirational practice and warm community experience.



A Love Story Renewed

By Sr. Antonia Cooper, OSF

Once again I was reminded of the beauty of nature as lush flowers surrounded the site where I enjoyed a weekend of renewal and deepening of my *T'ai Chi Chih* form. The time was June 12-15, the place Kokee State Park on the island of Kaua'i. Four of my students attended this retreat hosted by Noel and given by Ed, and they invited me to attend it with them. During a longer break, I spent some time alone walking along a path when I discovered a lovely blossom called White Ginger, whose large flowers emit a strong fragrance very similar to Honeysuckle.

This sparked a memory of several years ago when I was asked by a fellow sister to drive her and one of our nursing home residents to visit her son who had been ill. When we arrived, I noticed a lovely vase of honeysuckle sitting on the kitchen counter. Surprised to see it in bloom, I inquired about it. Jim had told me he picked it in the back yard to surprise his wife who was away, because she loved the scent. That one statement ripped my heart, for I, too, loved honeysuckle, but had no



The white flower in the center of the photo is the White Ginger that TCC Teacher Sr. Antonia Cooper discovered on a solitary walk in Kokee State Park during the TCC retreat on Kauai in June.

Photo: Sr. Antonia Cooper

one in my life to surprise me with a vase of them.

That evening and into the following day I was feeling quite sorry for myself and very alone. Mid afternoon I decided to go outside in our beautiful, airy park to do my *T'ai Chi Chih* practice. Halfway into the practice, I noticed a gentle breeze and before long, the scent of honeysuckle surrounding me.

At once I remembered that it grew along our Motherhouse property...not only a vase, but climbing fences, with its sweet fragrance filling the air! The TCC form brought me back to my CENTER.

Kauai Retreat

continued from page 17

"I thought she was ignoring us!" exclaimed Alba Cordasco of New Jersey, and student of Sr. Antonia. We all laughed. "I WAS!" Sr. Antonia retorted. We all laughed harder.

Ed pointed out that she was teaching something to her students by showing them that she, too, is still a student with more to learn.

Ed's main theme in teaching this retreat was FLOW. His teaching was helped along by outside forces. Wild chickens — beautifully feathered in

all color combinations — are protected animals in Kokee State Park. Our retreat was blessed with the frequent call of one particular rooster whose plaintive cry sounded exactly like, "From the CENNNN-ter!" He had a way of calling out just before or after Ed made a particularly salient point, or, as we began a fresh practice. It became the running joke during the long weekend! After awhile, we anticipated his hilarious reminder. Someone stated that hearing the rooster would startle him back into focus as he realized his mind had begun to wander. It was not unlike the stories of Japanese zendos where the zen master cracks the meditating student on the back with a stick when

his/her mind begins to wander!

All attendees were required to have completed at least a beginning class before coming so that there would not be folks struggling just to follow along. Instead, the teaching could be at a level that would apply to all. The *feeling* of flow was a main emphasis by Ed and by late morning of the second full day, he commented out loud on how much the group had improved. "Every single person is moving better," he said. The group flowed together by that point, and it was a very tangible difference from the first practice on Thursday afternoon.

continued on page 31



T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement in Guatemala: A Dream Come True

By Terry Gay Puckett

Imagine this. Morning sunlight sparkles on a cobalt blue lake, and two volcanoes rise up on the far shore. Fluffy clouds drift around them, and a trail of smoke floats up from Fuego, recently active. Teachers and students are having *T'ai Chi Chih* practice on a helicopter pad at the edge of the shore. Acres of tropical flowers surround them and a gentle breeze wafts through the group. The only sound is the lapping of waves, and a bird's song, chirping "Welcome to Lake Atitlan!"

This was my recent dream, and it came true. At teacher training in Albuquerque, November 2002, my presentation began with a visualization similar to the description above. In January 2003, I actually took a group of people to Panajachel, Guatemala, to Hotel Atitlan on Lake Atitlan to draw, paint and do *T'ai Chi Chih* Joy Thru Movement.

This vision had been in my mind since the summer of 2002. These thoughts helped me decide to initiate plans to become an accredited teacher. In the fall I sent my application, and started practicing with other San Antonio instructors to prepare for teacher training. Then in October, John Korte of Explore Guatemala called and invited me to lead a group of artists on a trip to Guatemala at the Hotel Atitlan. I was surprised and excited to have this opportunity. From prior experience traveling and teaching in Guatemala, the lake was definitely my favorite spot. I explained that I hoped to be accredited in TCC Joy Thru Movement soon, and would like to include that into the trip plans. He was enthusiastic, and the die was cast.

Thirteen people from Texas, California and Maryland signed up for the trip. Some were artists, others were dedicated shoppers, and seven of them were game to try *T'ai Chi Chih* practice at some point in the trip. Fortunately, Stella Jaidar decided to make the eight day trip. She is an accredited TCC teacher, and a fiber artist. We were on site each morning to instruct and lead the prac-



TCC Teacher Terry Gay Puckett (second from right) and fellow TCC Teacher Stella Jaidar (second from left) lead students in practice of *Pulling in the Energy* alongside Lake Atitlan in Guatemala during an educational tour in January. Photo provided by Terry Gay Puckett

tice for those who would get up and be there by 7:30 a.m. Ulli Kalt, a San Antonio TCC student, was there almost every morning. Glenda Maynard, a brand new student, joined in and learned all 19 movements and one pose. The others were occasional attendees.

One unforgettable moment: we had just finished our first practice. A helicopter buzzed over the volcanoes, only to see us standing on the landing pad. We quickly scattered into the flower garden. The pilot landed on the spot where we had been only moments before. Five Japanese businessmen deplaned, finding nothing strange at all about what we were doing, and walked through the garden and up the hill for breakfast.

We had practices at other exotic spots in Guatemala. Early one morning we were on the jungle's edge by Lake Petén Itzá in Flores, before we boarded our bus to go to the ruins at Tikal. Another morning we practiced on a rooftop patio at the Hotel Santo Domingo in Antigua, looking out over bougainvillea and domes of nearby churches. I felt transported with the flow of the moment and the mystical vibrations, and had to think often of the soles of my feet to keep from levitating with happiness.

continued on page 31



I Became Accredited! What's Next?

By Pat Flynn

I am a newly accredited *T'ai Chi Chih* instructor. Am I relieved that accreditation is over? No! I am amazed! During accreditation, I was going through what I have coined a "Lymes flash." At the time, I didn't know it was happening. It was different and less forceful from previous Lymes disease episodes. Could this difference be because of my TCC practice? Who really knows! The fact remains I went to accreditation despite my mental and emotional health being anything but desirable and the joint and muscle pain that was negligible compared to previous Lymes flashes. I hadn't realized I was holding so much tension. Needless to say, I am still dumbstruck that I became accredited. Ed, I honor and respect your deep insight and unending dedication to TCC Joy thru Movement. Without it, you could not have seen through a body such as mine. I came home from accreditation and was soon diagnosed with clinical Lymes symptoms. There was nothing to do but lie low for awhile and start active treatment. It gave me plenty of time to reflect on what being a TCC teacher means.

Now, it's a different story! I am letting the CHI do the work for me. A friend suggested I teach a course at her home. She wanted to take a course in how to do TCC practice seated because the regular standing TCC course ended up being too much for her. My parents have taken several courses and were interested in trying the seated variety. All three understood that I have little training in teaching it seated, but were willing to give it a try. A neighbor couple was interested in taking a TCC class. I called them and they were ecstatic because the times fit into their schedule. Kristen, a student of TCC teacher Margie Erickson, and an aspiring teacher, has come when she can and has been a wonderful complement to the class. This is the entire class and we are all learning something new!

During the first class, Kristen and I were able to identify some individual discrepancies. To begin with, one student is three months pregnant. The exercise physiologist came out in Kristen and she suggested to her to widen her stance slightly as she came closer to term. A woman's hips naturally widen during pregnancy. Both husband and wife are learning the TCC form standing and seated and hope it will help with the pregnancy.

The husband is what Kristen calls a ball walker. When walking, the ball of his foot hits the floor before the heel. Consequently, when yinning and yanging, the heel lifts instead of the toes on his front foot. Kristen suggested he do plenty of Rocking Motions to help lengthen and relax his calf muscles. I can't wait till the next class because of what Athene Mantle wrote in the January *VFJ*. I am going to suggest that he bring his heel out instead of his toe in to help correct his front foot alignment. It will be a long struggle for him to correct this. At least, he now understands there are corrective measures he can take that can possibly alleviate his chronic back problems that are caused by his gait.

My mom had a stroke two years ago. She has trouble processing complex information to make her body do what is wanted. Although she has taken several TCC courses, her form still remains that of a very novice beginner. I took the "freeze-frame" approach with her and it seems to be working. With Rocking Motion, this is what I said and did. "From the resting pose, bring your left foot sideways. Now comfortably straighten your legs." As she did this, her spine stayed upright. "Now watch my feet." I lifted the toes and balls of my feet ever so slightly and quickly placed them back on the ground. "Now Mom, I want you to try that," and using my thumb and index finger I showed her how much to lift her foot and said, "Only lift your toes this much." Her spine still stayed relatively upright. "Okay, now bring your knees forward. Okay, good! Now comfortably straighten your knees. Now bring your heels off the ground just a very little bit and back down." We did this several times, slowly increasing the pace. Although the movement is a bit choppy, she is now solid on her feet and there is very little, if any, leaning. Mom says she now likes to do Rocking Motion, that it feels comfortable.

Dad is in his element! After doing *T'ai Chi Ch'uan* for about five years, he thinks the TCC form is a piece of cake. I think Mom would have been as fluid had it not been for the stroke. He actually prefers the TCC form and along with Mom, uses Justin's tape regularly.

My friend, Pat, is a severe diabetic with feet problems and also has a fused spine caused by an automobile accident. We have found that, because of her fused

continued on page 31



T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement: My Personal Experience

By Monica Simorangkir
Student of Sharon Sirkis

When I decided to register for *T'ai Chi Chih* class, I did it merely to satisfy the academic requirements for graduation. I had no idea how beneficial it could be for my health and, as a matter of fact, my life. It did not take long for me to realize how valuable the *T'ai Chi Chih* discipline is.

On the first day of class many people labeled themselves as 'skeptical,' and even though I did not raise my hand, I was one of them. Although I had heard of many great things about *T'ai Chi Chih* Joy Thru Movement and I did not doubt that most of them, if not all, were true, there was one big setback: I believed that all those great things would fail to work for me. The main reason to assume that *T'ai Chi Chih* practice would do very little for me was because it requires major concentration, something that I did not possess. Therefore, I decided to keep quiet, follow the instructions, and earn my academic credits. No frills, no strings attached. Not long after I would be proven wrong.

The first noticeable change I noticed in myself as we were finishing the first class was that my hands were warm. This is incredible since my hands are known to be cold at all times, even during summer. My doctor believes that this is due to my anxiety disorder, which leads to my next point.

I have had an anxiety disorder for almost two years. Symptoms of this disorder are sleeplessness (also known as insomnia), nausea, irregular heartbeats, cold hands, breathlessness, etc. Unfortunately, I have most of these symptoms, and to correct them, I was prescribed to take heavy medication. However, my doctor has agreed to let

me take the medication only when the symptoms are unbearable instead of taking it on a daily basis, because it made me very groggy. Concerned about my health, my father (the new age expert), advised me to resort to the 'eastern healing methods.' Being so-called-westernized, I refused to opt for these traditional ways. So you can imagine how relieved he was when I told him about my decision to take *T'ai Chi Chih* class. He probably knew that I would soon turn into a believer.

The most remarkable change I have noticed in my health ever since I took *T'ai Chi Chih* class is that I have started to get more sleep. Surprisingly, after one of my classes, I felt very sleepy. Therefore, as soon as I got home, I went straight to my room to take a nap. Who would have thought that this nap would last 16 hours straight! I found it to be very pleasant since I usually only get four hours of sleep every night due to insomnia. I woke up feeling refreshed and energized, something that I have longed for for a long time. I mentioned this to my doctor in one of my routine check-ups and, sure enough, he recommended me to keep practicing the *T'ai Chi Chih* movements.

Needless to say, my anxiety attacks have become less frequent, and I even believe that one day it will be cured with the help of *T'ai Chi Chih* practice. I am glad to finally find a substitute for oral medication, which has not only interrupted my daily tasks but has also made me feel like I was not the same person anymore. With *T'ai Chi Chih* practice I can be myself again, in a most natural way. I sure will keep practicing *T'ai Chi Chih* Joy Thru Movement, and next time I call my father I will allow him to tell me "I told you so."



T'ai Chi Chih students comment on benefits of regular practice

[Editor's Note: TCC Teacher Sally McLaughlin, now living in California, submitted the following student stories culled from classes she taught in the Northern Illinois area before she moved west.]

I have been taking T'ai Chi Chih instruction for about six months. I have found this very beneficial in many ways. My energy level has improved. It has greatly helped my posture. I had no idea bent knees were better than straight knees! My coordination has improved. I am slowly getting my hands, feet and breathing in rhythm, therefore shutting out other world cares. I feel my greatest benefit has been when I do my T'ai Chi Chih practice outside and feel at one with the Universe and at peace with the world. I am most fortunate, in having such a good instructor, both giving good clear concise instruction, understanding and emotional support.

- Zena (cancer patient)

I have been asked to write a few words on what T'ai Chi Chih practice has brought to my life. I find that it has brought improved balance physically; a new focus mentally; greater energy spiritually. I have just begun — I have a long way to go. The journey is rewarding due to my teacher's ability to capture the teachable moments and maximize the positive strengths each student has within them.

- Nancy

T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement has been a great benefit to me in a variety of ways. It has helped me

physically to increase my knee strength and to improve my balance. I have had knee problems since childhood and recently had little strength in either knee to be able to go up or down stairs. The T'ai Chi Chih movements have helped me strengthen my knees and have given me the confidence to exercise

I started T'ai Chi Chih classes just months after retiring from a very active teaching career. The classes came at a perfect time in my life to help me with the emotional, mental and psychological changes occurring when I went from teaching to retirement.

more. With the help of my instructor, I have become more familiar with my own body and its needs. With her help and encouragement, I am continually learning and developing ways to build up my strength.

I started T'ai Chi Chih classes just months after retiring from a very active teaching career. The classes came at a perfect time in my life to help me with the emotional, mental and psychological changes occurring when I went from teaching to retirement. They have helped relieve stress and have had a very calming effect on my Type A personality. It has also helped me to relax and get adequate sleep.

I will be eternally grateful that our local fitness center offered classes. It is perfect for someone with limited physical ability like myself. The T'ai Chi Chih classes and the instructor have had a profound effect on my life. I now know the 20 movements well enough to be able to do them anywhere I happen to be. It was very special doing my practice while observing the many moods of the beautiful Lake Superior shore. I will continue to do T'ai Chi Chih practice for the rest of my life.

- Carol



What TCC Class Has Meant for Me

By Lisa Renee France
Student of Sharon Sirkis

A few months ago I was thumbing through the summer catalog looking for a class that would fit into my busy schedule. I came across a *T'ai Chi Chih* class, not knowing anything about it other than the fact it would put me one credit closer to completing my CPA requirements. I also knew there would be no books to buy and no final exams to study for.

I have to say that I expected to gain little from this class except one credit and maybe a few techniques for relaxation. I attended the classes, learned the moves and listened to my professor talk about several principles of the *T'ai Chi Chih* discipline. Night after night I left class to go back to work. As I would drive back to the city I would think, could she be serious? I mean if your personality is more like a sturdy oak than a bamboo, who cares, it is just the way I am.

Well, about two weeks ago I got really sick, I was actually admitted to the hospital. I remember lying in my hospital bed when it all began to make sense. I kept thinking if and when I get out of here I am going to change my way of thinking and the way that I live my life. I guess I got an early wake up call, I began to realize that all we have is today and yesterday, we do not know if we have tomorrow until we rise from our beds the next morning.

I have always been a workaholic, taking on more than can be accomplished in any one eight hour day, thereby meaning I am normally at the office after most people have left for the evening. Plus, I am always trying to help my friends with their problems. After all this, I barely have any time for myself. One of the most important things I have learned from *T'ai Chi Chih* class is to sometimes drop the ball instead of piling more on my already full plate. Whenever I feel that my plate is getting too full I begin to think about the move, Around the Platter Variation, and I begin to determine what I can clear from my plate to lessen the stress load and have more time for myself. One of the first things I dropped from my plate was returning to work after class. I began to realize that I needed to take care of myself first. After

all, if I do not, then who will? I also do not want to have any regrets later in life about not being able to do something because I was always working.

I am also trying to be more like the flexible bamboo rather than the sturdy oak. I have always wanted things done my way and on my schedule. When things did not go my way, I would begin to get stressed out and

One of the most important things I have learned from T'ai Chi Chih class is to sometimes drop the ball instead of piling more on my already full plate.

things always seemed to get worse before they got any better. Being a flexible bamboo does seem to alleviate some of my stress, and believe it or not things seem to get done more effectively and more efficiently. Up

until recently I always tried to do everything myself, thinking that it would take more time to explain to someone how to do it than to actually do it myself. However, after being sick and not being able to do everything I used to be able to do, I was forced to let people help me or have things that were not done when the deadlines came.

One of the last really important lessons that I learned is that nothing in life is hard, but that one is not accustomed to it. This was the one principle that was the hardest for me to accept, I thought, of course things are hard, everyone knows that. But once again, I finally figured out what this meant. The first thing that I applied this to was learning to ride a bike. I remember how hard I thought it was and was ready to give up on it, but with some practice and a lot of patience I learned to ride my bike. I then applied it to everyday life. Things do not always go the way that we would want them to, but that does not mean that life is hard. It just means that we need to have a little patience and then we will find the true meanings of our lives and actions, whether they may be big or small. After all, life is a great big lesson that we learn along the way.

Well, here it is a few months after I signed up for *T'ai Chi Chih* class and the class is almost over. I guess I have to admit that I was totally wrong about what I would gain from this class. I definitely gained a lot more than one credit. I learned a new way of thinking, and through the moves I have been able to regain control over my once stressed out existence.



Student shares story with teacher

I am writing to tell you a story about how I received great comfort from my *T'ai Chi Chih* training.

[Two years ago] my husband and I were in Virginia and in trying to return home to California, our reservations were mixed up and we were put on a flight at the last minute to California.

Because we were so late and the flight was completely full, we had to take whatever seats were available. I am a large lady and find airline seats to be cramped on any given day. But today was even worse. I got a middle seat between two very good size men.

These men must have thought they were entitled to the shoulder and arm space and I sat there with my arms squished in front of my body. I was so cramped and pinned-in that I literally could not

eat when food was served nor could I even hold a glass of water to my face. Now this was a five and a half hour flight. Tears were streaming down my cheeks. There was no place to go. I felt like a prisoner and I sat there SCREAMING INSIDE MY MIND! I was at my very last wit's end and I could contain myself no more! I was praying to God to help me cope and just to be able to bear this until we landed.

Then my *T'ai Chi Chih* teacher's voice came into my mind. Virginia Cepeda is a wonderful teacher and she teaches many people with limited mobility, like at some of the Senior Centers. I remember her telling us that some of her students had minimum mobility but they were able to participate to whatever degree they could. Some could only participate mentally for part of the movements. I certainly tested that theory that day.

I closed my eyes and set myself into the rocking motion mentally, and that's when I started to realize I was calming down and even started to relax. I focused totally on my movements and did them all in my head — but my muscles were reaping the benefit! I think I fooled them into thinking they were moving.

Make no mistake, it was a very long flight and I was still very cramped but I found my saving grace in the meditative and focused teachings of *T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement*.

Thank you Virginia for teaching me and giving me such a wonderful gift and an outlet to a most intolerable situation.

Your humble pupil,

Diana Vrba

Student of Virginia Lee Cepeda

Student finds balance greatly improved with practice

This letter is for all you *T'ai Chi Chih* students out there who struggle with dizziness and balance problems. My name is Anne Hollek and about [three years] ago I had a tumor removed that had settled on a balance nerve in my brain and was getting way too comfortable having parties in my head...I kept getting vertigo (a balance/spinning disorder) and was hoping that once I had the tumor removed, the dizziness would disappear. To make a long story short, it didn't and the Doctors were at a loss telling me I would always be balance impaired, never be able to balance putting one foot in front of the other and never ride a bicycle.

I decided to try the *T'ai Chi Chih* form when I saw it advertised at the College of Lake County. The instructor, Donna McElhose, took the extra time and invited me to her house to show me how to compensate for some

of the movements I was unable to do at the time before the class actually started. I've been taking *T'ai Chi Chih* class about nine months now and am an intermediate student. My balance has improved tremendously, I can pass the drunk test because I am finally able to walk one foot in front of the other and the other day, I got on my bicycle and rode it around our subdivision. So, the moral of this story isthis works! Stick to it! Do what you can and practice a little while every day. I would also suggest purchasing a *T'ai Chi Chih* video to help develop and reinforce the movements learned in class. You'll be amazed at how much calmer you feel and how your balance has improved. If anyone would like to discuss this further, my email address is ahollek@hotmail.com. The best of luck to all of you.

Anne Hollek

Student of Donna McElhose



Readers Respond

continued from page 3

enters and maintains all information in the VFJ database, but I got curious with your situation and did a little research.

I checked in the 2003 Teacher's Directory and saw your name printed there in the active member section. Well, this stumped me because the data for that was taken from the VFJ database at the same time that the labels were produced for both of those January mailings — in other words, if you appeared in there, there should have been labels generated for you, and you should have been mailed the issue and Directory. Ed has a copy of the database out here in Hawaii for the occasional research question (and to produce the labels for the quarterly mailings) and we looked your record up and therein found the explanation.

Doug had entered in a comment "Temp Away 01/2003" in the comments section of your record. What that means is that you WERE sent the issue and Directory in January, but you must have had in place some kind of a special request with your post office when it arrived. For further information on their procedures, you'll have to contact them. In cases like yours, we get those pieces returned to us with a yellow post office sticker slapped across the front of the envelope reading: "Temporarily Away." Unfortunately, we have to pay First Class shipping charges before the post office will release them to us (for the cost of mailing them back to us).

In years past, we used to mail the pieces out again immediately, often to have them returned to us once more. We finally concluded that we cannot know when a person will return from a trip away, and the burden needs to be on them to contact us when they return. Once that happens, we resend the issue and/or Directory, once more paying First Class shipping charges. We do not pass these charges on to members at this time, but, rather, absorb them, unless the member chooses to reimburse us.

It is an unfortunate situation for all concerned. Many members are shocked to find out their mail has been returned, and have wondered what other mail they may not have received. We are glad you contacted us so that we can now get your issue and Directory to you.

I also want to address your concern about receiving the October, 2002 issue.

It is our standard procedure to send out a copy of the latest issue (if any remain from the most recent printing) to anyone who renews after a lapse in membership, or if he/she is a new subscriber. We do this up until the month or so before the next issue is published, so, if your renewal

was received in November, the October issue was the most recent, and still quite timely. We have found that members usually want this, especially if the membership expired the quarter before — this way they get "caught up" on receiving the issues. However, so you know in the future (should this happen again), if you would rather wait until the following issue, you can just write a note on the renewal form, and it will gladly be accommodated — in your case, something like ("Please re-start me with the Jan. 2003 issue, rather than the Oct. 2002.")

We appreciate your support of and membership in The Vital Force Association. Doug will mail out your Jan. issue and Directory as soon as he can get to it. Welcome back!

NJ Intensive

continued from page 11

and more respectful of the profound depth of *T'ai Chi Chih* practice that can only be realized and enjoyed by one who practices regularly, and who knows that as much time as is necessary, IS necessary! (The author of this article would like to add here that only one referring teacher was present with her student for this course. Both the teacher and student commented very positively on the experience, and how important and helpful it was to BOTH be there together).

For myself, it was as always a joy and a challenge to act as course host. However, as other teachers also expressed, it was so good to be able to work on my own movements, as well as being conscious of the need to assist others. And, I had a very basic, but most important realization. I both could clearly feel, and was willing to admit to myself, that my lower body is "holding on" to tension when I do *T'ai Chi Chih* movements! Being willing to "empty the cup" first, as Pam Towne said it, allowed me this awareness. Now I feel that I can more readily continue to let go and be open to new growth and progress.

Another student put it exactly as I felt, when leaving this first ever course:

I am better equipped to see and begin to feel from the center out. I feel like a bud just going into bloom. (...smiling and thanks...)

Linda Joy

Washington, DC

Student of Karen Roewade-Houser



Kauai Retreat

continued from page 23

Paul Vercelletto of New Jersey, husband and student of Teacher Viktoria Vercelletto (who also attended), noted, "This was the most concentrated immersion into the practice I've had and I found it very useful, productive & educational. While my expectations were very well fulfilled, I was happily surprised by the amount of time spent in practice or refinement. I almost wanted to have more time in there but this is probably due to the minimal amount of my time spent in practice prior to this. . . [I] would gladly welcome an extra day. . . ."

One activity we did was something Ed and I call the "Healing Circle" where we stood in a circle and repeatedly performed the *Six Healing Sounds* facing into the circle. We took turns in pairs, sitting and receiving in the center as the remainder of the group performed the *Six Healing Sounds*. At the end, Ed sat in one of the two chairs, and one was left empty "for Justin," he said, after we had performed the movement in his direction. Next, I asked everyone who would like to imagine any friends, family, loved ones or people needing healing as walking into the empty circle to receive the healing from the group. We took a moment to do this before moving. Afterwards, I told the group that I should have waited longer because throughout the entire movement, I kept seeing more and more of my loved ones entering the circle! Another person commented that she put her estranged brother in the circle, which brought tears to her eyes. This exercise is a great one for refining the practice of the movement, while receiving healing for ourselves and, hopefully, sending it to others, as well. Sr. Antonia stated afterwards that, with every repetition, the movement became softer.

Sr. Antonia noted that her favorite part of the retreat was "time with the community — whether it was sharing the delicious meals in conversation, or in experiencing TCC practice in silence or during refinement sessions. I very much enjoyed the guided hike."

Other Attendee Comments:

Loved the outdoors (protected though) — a healing experience to practice TCC [movements] so very close with nature — love it! I was delighted to be here and let go of my other life stuff for awhile.

Donna McElhose

Noel made the retreat the best I have ever gone to. Kauai is magical as is Kokee / Camp Sloggett. All the suggestions for places to stay [before and after the retreat] were very helpful.

Nancy Jo Bleier

The healing circle was terrific — both giving, receiving and imagining. . . . Thank you! It's a delight seeing you (Noel) and Ed interact — you have a great balance and complementary skills and energies. You honor one another.

RuthE Mandel

Guatemalan trip

continued from page 24

I plan to return to Guatemala. If you would like to combine TCC practice with great food, fantastic scenery, outstanding shopping and a chance to see excellent examples of pre-Columbian, folk and Spanish Colonial art, as well as meet interesting new people, consider joining me in an Explore Guatemala Adventure. . . . I encourage sketching, but one need not be an artist to join in on the fun. It is enough just to enjoy *T'ai Chi Chih* practice in one of the most breathtakingly beautiful spots in the world.

[Editor's Note: To contact Terry, phone her at (210) 826-8210 or e-mail her at tpuckett@accd.edu.]

I Became Accredited!

continued from page 25

spine, the hip roll is too painful when the TCC movements are performed in a seated position. When she stands to do the movements, this also has its drawbacks. Many times it is impossible for her to stand squarely and solidly on her feet. We are doing the best we can but to date, there have been no "A-haaas." If there are any TCC'ers out there who have had an "A-haaa" on something like this, please write in to the *VFJ* and share your experiences. I, for one, would surely be interested.

The biggest thing I learned is let it all flow from the T'an T'ien! By doing that, the entire teaching experience has become quite enjoyable!



Karmic Komments

from Good Karma Publishing, Inc.
P.O. Box 511, Ft. Yates, ND 58538
Jean Katus, Publisher

Continuation - Complementarity of Materials

In the last issue of *The Vital Force*, information was presented on the complementarity of the Justin Stone photo-textbook and 2000 filming of the videotape. To extend the “basic set” of materials to three, there are some points about the 1994 filming of the video that are useful to teachers and students when considering the use of both videotapes as adjuncts to the text. A continuity between the instruction and practice segments exists because the entire video is done by Justin, with comments in the practice section. Some students, particularly seniors, have remarked that they appreciate the extra verbal reminders from the originator during the practice and that they feel more secure and confident by hearing the reinforcing comments about what they learned in the instruction part and/or in their classes. Other observations from teachers about the '94 practice session are:

- it is easier to follow Justin alone, rather than one's attention becoming diluted and not as focused in attempting to watch four teachers (as in the 2000 filming) while the camera pans from one to the other;
- the different camera angles and close-ups of different parts of Justin's body, as well as full-body shots, allow the viewer to attend to the important points Justin brings out;
- most of the front-to-back movements show Justin from a side view, the camera aimed at the right side of his body when his left foot is forward, at the left side when his right foot is forward;
- the side-to-side movements are generally mirrored, with Justin clearly stating that when his right heel steps to the side, the viewer's left steps to the side.

Especially for serious students who are interested in seeking accreditation, many teachers recommend that the aspirant study both videos. While they each present similar material, there is a richness in seeing and hearing *different* key points emphasized in the two presentations, like receiving teachings of Justin's which resemble each other but come from two separate talks at different times.

Important Conference Information

As with all conferences, we like to provide books and tapes as close in quantity as possible to what are actually going to sell—and even moreso this year because of the location of the conference—so we needn't have the added expense of bringing unsold materials back across the border. Therefore, we would appreciate teachers phoning (our toll-free number now works from Canada), faxing, or emailing us **before August 1st** to let us know what pieces and quantities you want reserved for you. Remember, you save *shipping costs* by picking up teaching supplies at the conference. We will send, postage-free, materials we run out of. To avoid Good Karma needing to mail too many items across the border after the event, we ask that Canadian teachers make their purchases as early as possible during the conference. The expense is less



mailing back orders to U.S. teachers than to teachers in Canada.

We will receive payment for conference purchases in **1)** cash, Canadian or U.S. (no large bills please), **2)** credit cards (Visa, MasterCard, Discover), and **3)** checks drawn on a U.S. bank made out in U.S. funds. We cannot exchange Canadian coins at the border; thus, we ask that purchases made with Canadian cash be in bills only and to the nearest dollar.

Catalog

We made great efforts for the new catalog to be more student user-friendly. However, our intention is to continue encouraging teachers to have GKP materials on hand at classes, while providing students with a resource they can take home for later ordering if they wish. It has been gratifying to provide quantities of catalogs to those teachers who have requested them for their students. We continue inviting interested teachers to contact us about sending catalogs, postage-free, for handing out to students.

On Trademark Compliancy

The video sleeve of the 2000 filming now incorporates the appropriate trademark information. Look at the description on the back to see examples of phraseology for using noun(s) following the *T'ai Chi Chih* term.

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SUBMISSIONS:

The Vital Force invites letters, articles, news briefs, poetry, original artwork and photography. Written submissions should be typed. All submissions must indicate the full name and complete address of the person submitting them to be considered for publication.

The Vital Force has a text scanner which allows us to process typed submissions much more efficiently. Unfortunately, hand-written submissions must still be typed in manually and are prone to human error. Mail or e-mail your submissions. (See "Contact Information" on opposite page.)

Students, please indicate who your *T'ai Chi Chih* teacher is with your submission.

Issue Submission deadlines:

January Issue: **October 10th of prior year**

July Issue: **May 10th**

April Issue: **February 10th**

October Issue: **August 10th**

Note: It may be possible to submit timely news for publication later than the deadline, and it is usually possible to submit items for listing in the "Calendar of Events" up until press time — contact **The Vital Force**.

EDITING POLICY:

The editing policy of **The Vital Force** is to leave written submissions as intact as possible in order to preserve the original voice of the writer. Therefore, **editing will be minimal, unless explicitly requested otherwise by the writer, or unless the meaning is unclear.** The editing term "sic" will NOT be used to point out errors. Due to space limitations, submissions may have to be shortened, although it is hoped this will be rare.

Submissions using "T'ai Chi Chih" and "TCC" as nouns are converted to adjectives before publication. This is required by U.S. Trademark law for the former, and done for consistency in usage to the latter (since "TCC" = "T'ai Chi Chih" in meaning). Other than those changes, when an addition or substitution for a word or words in the original text has been made, brackets: [] will be used to enclose the change, rather than parentheses, which some writers like using. If an omission is made of more than a word or two due to unrelated content (in a letter, for instance) or space limitations, it will be shown by the following version of ellipsis: . . . This is so as not to be confused when the following: is used by a writer to show a lapse in time, a long pause or change in topic.

MEMBERSHIPS:

The Vital Force is published quarterly and bulk-mailed to Association members in the U.S. during the first or second weeks of January, April, July and October. Generally, the mailing time is 2 - 4 weeks. U.S. First Class and international delivery can be ordered for an extra fee and post on the same schedule noted above. (See Page 2 for details).

TCC TEACHERS' DIRECTORY:

The *T'ai Chi Chih* Teachers' Directory is for referral and communication purposes among accredited *T'ai Chi Chih* teachers. **It is not to be used or sold as a mailing list.** Updates are published on insert pages in each issue of **The Vital Force**. Send your changes to the address on the opposite page.

WHEN MOVING:

Please allow 8 weeks notice and provide complete old and new addresses. Because **The Vital Force** has "return service requested" with the U.S. Post Office, an undeliverable issue or Teachers' Directory is returned to us with a charge for the First Class cost to return it (approximately \$1.50 - \$3.50, depending on the weight). Then, if we mail out a new one, it goes First Class (because a bulk mailing requires 200 pieces), resulting in further expense of \$1.50 - \$3.50. Please help us avoid this unnecessary and wasteful expense—send in your change of address information early!



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For all Membership Services questions, including: new or renewing memberships, updates or sign-ups for Website Teacher Referral List, updates for Teacher's Directory, ordering back issues:

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THE VITAL FORCE *Journal of the T'ai Chi Chih*® Community

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Membership includes Teachers' Directory _____ year(s) @ \$30.00 / yr = \$ _____

Do you want your name, phone number and e-mail address (if applicable) included on the T'ai Chi Chih community website (www.taichichih.org) _____ year(s) @ \$5 / yr = \$ _____

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The Lighter Side...

1. The 2003 Sedona Retreat was so relaxing! Living in this other “world” for a few days began a new cycle in my personal life and in my *T'ai Chi Chih* practice. Enjoying the company of those new to *T'ai Chi Chih Joy Thru Movement* and those familiar with the moves was a wonderful experience. During our stay, we focused on flowing like a river, grounding our energy, and shifting our weight from one foot to the other. We learned about the vortexes — energy centers that are located around Sedona. Just thinking about the time spent brings a smile to my face.

This was my first Sedona retreat. One of my students, Kristin, also attended. One afternoon Kristin, Ellen, and I decided to go to one of the local state parks and view the “Red Rocks.” We took pictures and walked on some of the trails. Before we left, Kristin wanted to explore a small island in the creek. The only way to get there was to cross a log.

Kristin was going to walk across but decided to move across by sitting and straddling the log.

She started across and we heard, “I think I am going into the water.”

I watched her gracefully roll off the log and into the water. She got out of the water, laughing, and said, “That was very refreshing.”

We could not stop laughing. We shared our dry clothes and watched Kristin pour water out of her boots.

On our return to the retreat center we kept laughing and started relating her experience to *T'ai Chi Chih* practice:

- * Kristin truly felt the flow of the water (chi).
- * Mother Earth pulled her in — a real grounding experience.
- * Kristin needs to learn to do the *T'ai Chi Chih* movements in a seated position.
- * She flowed with softness and continuity.

* The experience energized her — like a *T'ai Chi Chih* practice session.

— Margery Erickson

2. I had gone on a retreat with some friends and offered some *T'ai Chi Chih* instruction. We ended up with an impromptu class. I demonstrated and led a few of the moves and asked them if they had any questions.

One woman piped up, “What are those finger movements? You didn’t show us that!”

I said, “It’s not something I do on purpose — it just happens” and before I could explain that it’s one way the chi expresses itself — a confirming sign that the chi is circulating, she got a serious look on her face and said, “Oh, a neuromuscular disorder.”

— Debbie Cole

3. When I encouraged the college *T'ai Chi Chih* class to **focus on the feel of the move**, one student later revealed to me that after the first class she felt agitated and angry, and that there was a lot of noise in her head.

By the end of the course, she was ultimately able to let go. When asked about the effects of final practice one day, she excitedly said, “I don’t feel so angry anymore, and it’s also nice to hear some silence in my head!”

— Sharon Sirkis

4. In an introductory session, I gave the definitions for “Chih” and “T’ai Chi.” One of the students said he thought Supreme Ultimate sounded like a fancy dish you’d order in a gourmet restaurant.

— Jean Katus

[Editor’s Note: If you have a funny story to tell regarding your *T'ai Chi Chih* practice or teaching, write it up and send it in for “The Lighter Side...”]

*Come, dance with me
Said the moon to the sea,
Our rhythm will be so strong!
An ebb, then a flow
is the way we will go,
And all life must follow along.*

*We just play our parts
As we follow our hearts.
The Lives like a web intertwine.
So come, dance with me
Said the moon to the sea,
Join your energies to mine.*

*As time travels by
Some will grow, others die
The balance of life shall remain.
So come, dance with me
Said the moon to the sea,
We will link to continue the chain.*

*Just as dark follows light
Every wrong, every right
Will always be found hand in hand.
Please, come dance with me
Said the moon to the sea
As we etch all of like in the sand.*

- Clare Bradley
Student of Donna McElhose