Thread on TCCList about the Health and Martial Arts Festival and Symposium held at Mensch Mill, May 18-21, 2011

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1a. CJ's Tai Chi retreat
Posted by: "tclist@hawrysch.com" tclist@hawrysch.com zolotar78
Sun May 22, 2011 9:10 pm (PDT)

Just returned from three days of internal arts fun in
rural Pennsylvania. It was my first time out into the
public Tai Chi world in about 18 years, and the first
occasion of meeting people from this mailing list.

Things have certainly changed over the past 2 decades.
I was totally blown away by the sheer expertise shown
and the depth of insight into Tai Chi-related matters.
Tai Chi in North America has clearly matured to levels
not lesser than the "original" arts practiced in China.

Finally meeting CJ Rhoads, the festival organizer, was
a great pleasure. Even under extraordinary, unexpected
pressure she kept everything together and running very
smoothly. Great thanks to her for that. She also has a
wicked neutralizing push hands, as I found out all too
briefly.

Call me a sycophant, but Lee Scheele is hands-down the
best push hands teacher I have ever met (he did not do
other kinds of instruction in my presence). His skills
in Tai Chi in general are amply evident too. I am very
glad to have met him and held some lengthy discussions
with him on matters both technical and poetic. The rum
he brought along was pretty excellent too.

Steven Higgins is a walking encyclopedia of Taijiquan
(other than Yang Middle Frame, which he seems to know
almost nothing about) as well as a source of striking
analytic insights into everything from novel subtexts
in the plays Aeschylus to the politics of viticulture.
I picked up new teaching techniques from him, several
original discernments regarding taiji history, and of
course more factual assets than anyone should rightly
have. A truly remarkable man and an excellent player.

And then there was the delightful Patrick Reece. This
is a man who does things right, especially in the Tai
Chi undertaking. If his present course holds, he will
go far in the internal arts. I can find no fault with
either his practice or his approach -- and I *always*
find fault (OK, let's see... he should find a teacher
to instruct him IN PERSON -- but that has come before
several times. I'm certain it will happen eventually.)

Meeting many other people at the festival was totally
eye-opening for me as well, particularly the polymath
and very accomplished Tai Chi exponent Jonathan Krehm,

but also several others. Again, Tai Chi in N. America
has *NO* reason to take a back seat the kind imported
from Asia anymore. This is powerfully demonstrated in
gathering of this kind (as well as otherwise) and may
be partly so because of them. Many thanks again to CJ
and everyone else who continues make this possible.

George Hawrysch

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Posted by: "Mark Rasmus" rasmustaichi@gmail.com mark.rasmus
Sun May 22, 2011 10:01 pm (PDT)

Sounds like you had fun. I am envious....
Mark
chikungretreat.com

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Posted by: "edgar2y" edgar.rieger@gmail.com edgar2y
Mon May 23, 2011 6:52 am (PDT)

Thanks for the great report, George!
Edgar
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Posted by: "STEVE HIGGINS" stevehiggins@rogers.com
Mon May 23, 2011 7:05 am (PDT)

Hi George and all,

I agree with all this, including the fact that I know nothing about the Yang
Middle Frame; it's all a bluff!

Jonathan is an old buddy of mine, and a senior student of GM Eddie Wu. It was
great to get together with him, and I am hoping that he and Julian Chu may show
up on this list (which CJ gave a good plug for, one evening).

I had an awful lot of fun.
I was just knocked over by the bottled ambrosia Lee calls 'rum'.
I had a great re-introduction (after 20 years!) to Le Ho Ba Fa (Lok Hup) from
George H., who can do things with his internal organs that do not seem humanly
possible!
I really appreciated meeting Joanne Chen and Julian Chu from DC again, and
meeting Julian's senior student James, who is the kind of very knowlegeable and
fighty guy we need more of! And it was great to see old friends like Marty
Kennedy, John Loupos, Frances Gander and Jan Gyomber again, as well as meet
Maureen Ferry, Paul Cote, Spencer Gee and many others!
I had lovely pushing with no-hands and really want to thank Lee, George and
Julian for their help in this.

CJ is working hard at presenting a wonderful opportunity that I wish more could
take advantage of. She did so this year under great stress:

* Another east-coast promoter scheduled an event in the same time block,

despite having been earlier informed that the TEO would be having its annual conference at that time.

* Her dear friend and co-director, David Elston-Phillips, was hospitalized on the first day of the conference and passed away on the third day. So her role as director was touched by personal grief.I really wish to take this opportunity to thank CJ for her love and dedication in helping us all to grow!

Steve H.

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Posted by: "matt stampe" ho_man72@yahoo.com ho_man72
Mon May 23, 2011 8:24 am (PDT)
[Attachment(s) from matt stampe included below]

Sounds like it was good, I'll have to plan appropriately next go round. I had to be at our school with guest Pro fighter seminar.
Matt

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Posted by: "Dave Barbour" dbarbour@pacifier.com db_of_blm
Mon May 23, 2011 10:58 am (PDT)

OK, those reports are tempting me to the wrong side of the Continental divide. I haven't visited Penn. in decades, but for all that fun I wish I could.

Now if I could just get that funding thing under control...

Dave Barbour

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Posted by: "patrick reece" paralece@yahoo.com paralece
Mon May 23, 2011 11:24 am (PDT)

George,
Thank you for the kind words and most of all thank you forever for the generousity you showed me through your time and patience this weekend. I really can't say enough how grateful I am to have had the oppurtunity to learn from you as well as be witness to the amazing skill you displayed. I can only second what Steve said already... it was mind blowing to see what a person can do with parts of their body that aren't supposed move on command, and certainly not move in the manner in which you moved them, it really was inspiring and introduced thoughts of far away goals. I don't have the same ability to articulate my thoughts and feelings that you have showed through your lectures, so I only hope you can understand that your availability meant a lot to me.

And that same gratitude goes to Lee and Steve as well. For anyone who is a beginner reading this.... you HAVE to go to this event next year! For me, going from a year of standing in my bedroom trying to take on taiji principles and concepts to driving half a day to a group of people with high level skill and a combined knowledge that couldn't be found in one place anywhere else was indescribable. When I first met Lee and Steve I wanted to make it a point to make a good impression but not seem too excited in hopes that if I did it right I could maybe get a little of their spare time over the weekend to show me some things I was missing. I had planned on shaking their hands firmly and looking them in the eyes and then leaving them be to tend their business and not bug them to death because I was sure that with all the great taiji players around their time would have been better spent comparing notes with the others who are more at their level.

Within less than 30 seconds of shaking both their hands Lee took one step back and stuck his arm out to push with me. I've never done this before so I just stuck my arm to his and within an even shorter time I was contorted and falling backwards. Steve immediately came over and grabbed my waist and began explaining how my weight was high and at the same time was adjusting my tailbone and hips. This went on for a little while longer and all the while not only were they adjusting me but they were also comparing methods with each other.

The entire weekend was this way. I rarely even had to ask any of them to come and help, they did it automatically. I met George just before his first lecture began as I was the person who was to introduce him. As soon as the lecture was over and people began to disperse, he and Lee and Steve stayed and had me begin a form and each took turns pointing out different things to me. Once Lee had finished demonstrating the way commencement should be executed by having me grab and hold down his wrists (attempt to hold them down) and tossing me backward while explaining the process at the same time, George leaned in to my ear and said "Listen to everything this man has to say to you, you won't get any better information from anyone anywhere". What was so funny was that each of them individually had said basically the same phrase to me about the other at some point over the weekend. Each night all the high level guys would get together for a
drink and sit around a table discussing taiji as well as everything else ranging from good rum to Greek mythology. They always invited me to sit in and join them (I just listened). Needless to say the level of the discussions were way over my capacity but Steve would often lean over and begin explaining what the jist of the conversation was with a little background. Steve is a super nice guy, one of the nicest actually and he seems to know something about everything that comes up complete with background and everything. He's completely open and seems to find joy in helping beginners. Lee would often remind me that it wasn't as important to "get" everything I was hearing as much as it was important that I heard it and knew that it was out there. On Saturday Julian Chu and his student James Mao joined us and I sat down to listen. I told Lee to excuse me because I was going up to the barn to practice some form for a second then I would be back
and he said "NO, you're NOT going to go practice form. You're going to sit right here and drink this rum and grab all of these jewells of information that you're never going to have another oppurtunity to get." So I kept my seat. Lee is extremely funny and fun to be around as well as willing to tell a beginner what is and isn't correct in what he is doing (mostly isn't correct). It was a great pleasure to meet Jonathan Krehm and not only was he so kind as to continually push with me to explain what was going on, he also sent me an email that was waiting for me when I got back to Virginia asking for my address so that he could send me some material to use at home.

I'm sorry to have gone on and on but this weekend was a big deal for me. My practice jumped exponentially because of it and so did my understanding of the concepts and their relation to my own body. It was one of the best experiences I've had and I say that without exaggeration. I have to extend all of my gratitude to CJ for giving me the oppurtunity to be a part of it. She allowed me come and volunteer so that I could afford the event as well as gave me other oppurtunities to eliminate money becoming an issue. She's really something and it was amazing watching her jet about the place taking care of everything all at once at 100 mph, while at the same time having to deal with changes in plans and the death of a personal friend. I was very impressed. So again, if you are a beginner you NEED to come next year it will change everything for the better.
Patrick

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Posted by: "patrick reece" paralece@yahoo.com paralece
Mon May 23, 2011 11:42 am (PDT)

PS - John Loupos is the man. He's a super cool guy and I bought one of his DVD's. I was going to buy the beginner dvd but he said "no, I've watched you, you've got all that, you need this one", it made me feel really good. His wife is very nice also and was constantly giving me compliments.

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Posted by: "Lee Scheele" Lee@supply.com leescheele
Mon May 23, 2011 12:48 pm (PDT)

It is indeed a treat to find a gathering where you can go to informative workshops all day and then stay up into the wee hours enjoying the company of excellent players and spirits. Thanks again CJ.

I thoroughly enjoyed George's thought provoking workshops and after hours sharing. At one point I was showing Patrick where to place his hand to feel George opening his Mingmen while going into a correct stance, which led me to touch his body as well – I don't know how the heck George was doing it, but whatever was happening in his Mingmen was among the most truly amazing demonstrations of internal activity I've ever encountered.

Steve became a friend at the last gathering two years ago and we had even more fun together this time. As you may have guessed, we had great fun teasing him because he see's Yang Middle Frame in everything – but only because it is ;-) The final evening he did a wonderful demonstration of part of that Form. One of the women there told me the next morning that it made her cry, something she'd never done before at a demonstration, because it was the best exhibition of real internal power coming through in a Form that she had ever seen.

Patrick's youthful enthusiasm was a delight for us all and he is an amazingly quick learner, however, he is in a bit of trouble. He was supposed to take home some half empty bottles of the special ch'i development tonics used at our nightly prayer meetings and vigils – but then forgot them ;-)

Got together with a bunch of old friends and made some new ones. A great little t'ai chi vacation.

Best regards,

Lee Scheele

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Posted by: "patrick reece" paralece@yahoo.com paralece
Mon May 23, 2011 5:33 pm (PDT)

"He was supposed to take home some half empty bottles of the special ch'i development tonics used at our nightly prayer meetings and vigils – but then forgot them ;-) "....

Oh yeah! In fact, I was on my way to get them when CJ stopped me to ask if I could help pack some things up and clear out some of the facilities. By the time we had finished I had forgotten what I was doing in the first place.
Patrick

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Posted by: "Gretchen" davissongretchen@yahoo.com davissongretchen
Mon May 23, 2011 1:41 pm (PDT)

I'd like to second or third or whatever the thanks to everyone who posted on their time at the gathering C.J. presented. It sounds like it was fun and really informational--sure wish I could have been there. Thanks again.

gretchen
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