



SIERRA NEVADA INTERNAL ARTS

Vertical Axis Tai Chi • Spinal Energy Pa Kua • Energy Body Qigong

Volume 1, No. 9
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Charter Member American Qigong Association

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Harvesting an Orchestra

THE DE THOUARS FAMILY GATHERING VII



THE 7TH DE THOUARS FAMILY GATHERING HAD SO MANY TEACHERS FROM ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY WHO HAD FRIENDSHIPS WITH WILLEM OF MANY YEARS THAT IT PROVED THE POINT THAT WILLEM'S TRAVELS ALONE ARE AN AMAZING MARTIAL ACCOMPLISHMENT.

How can one man in his late sixties have the stamina to go to all these places almost every weekend, not to mention the mind-bending physical and psychological performances he puts on when he gets to California, or Norway, New York or Mexico.

If someone is foolish enough to think Willem is only an external martial artist, let him try to follow Willem around the world for a year, much less being on the receiving end of the bluntest training blade—ask Keith Moffet about that (who, like Chuck Stahmann, has had the stamina to allow Uncle to demonstrate on him for several decades.)

The Family Gathering is in many ways harvest time for Willem. He travels around the world sowing seeds of compassion, open-mindedness, family tolerance and loyalty, not to mention the speed, power and graceful movement of a being surrendered to the primal energy.

At the de Thouars Family Gatherings he can watch the maturation of this aspect of his life's work as all these teachers, amazing in their own right, offer up knowledge altered and consciously refined by interaction with Willem.





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Many of the players I talked with all felt this was the most amazing of all the gatherings. It was like a great orchestra assembled and guided by a great mind. At this performance there were themes that were played by a number of the teachers without, apparently, any conscious knowledge of each other's intentions.

The Power of Sound & Rhythm

The power of sound was surely one of the most important themes we took home. Whether it was Eric Ling proving the power of the hiss in protecting the joints in his sometimes startlingly accelerated White Crane chi kung (on the lawn of Wayne Welch's house). As well as hearing this sound in his lower abdomen for self-healing, he proved that sound alone could move mass—like our bodies.

Meanwhile Janet Gee was teaching the same sound to support the spirit as the animal energy of the tiger, as well as supporting these low movements whether for combat or healing. She feels animal awareness invigorates any martial style and supports the psyche under assault in the jungle of modern times.

Animal awareness also was reemphasized at this gathering whether it was Alexei Ovtchinnikov teaching spider movement to work low, coming in and out of twist step clear to the ground, or Uncle's monkey-self embodied by Philip Sialas and his monkey work making the ground his friend.

I think of Alexei and Janet at Dr. André Knust-Graichen's workshop spiraling around each other with animal perfection.

Meanwhile André was adding rhythm to his pattern work which proved that forms should be more open-ended for stamina. André year after year tries to make us understand the power of the half beat.

Stamina was critical if you intended to remain on the floor for the entire weekend. That has always been a defining theme when attending one of Uncle's seminars. He proves it an essential tool of survival.

Skeletal Awareness

Long arms—or skeletal awareness—was another theme, whether at Ron Carlson's seminar or in Erik Ling's crane work. The temptation for eternal beginners like myself when doing silat pattern work is to let the arms shorten rather than using the torque of the big axis of bone awareness, even when working close. George Kelokos had to draw my attention to this.

And there is the seed for another theme, the encouragement by all for each person's individual take on things. I remember Rick Hernandez encouraging me to keep propelling from the feet to hopefully find an aspect of his power and explosiveness in pa kua.

Another aspect of Rick's work is that it, like Uncle's, gets its acceleration from the energy manifested by his opponent. Bear Roberts looks for this in doing kun tao with what he calls "void energy." And just as Janet and Alexei always end up on the ground in twist step—selow—I remember Uncle having us prove to ourselves that a person has more gravitational power in selow than in a cross-legged position.

Keith Moffett and Chuck Stahmann's presentation was the mechanics and applications from twist step's movement. Keith's base point is that in selow one is already in motion upward, while still at rest, just like tai chi's emphasis on complete single leg weightedness is the perfection of the admonition to be at rest as though in motion.

The theme of stamina was exemplified by all those teachers who attended every other seminar as well as teaching their own. And just as Uncle is the example of stamina, proving that aerobic capability is part of the solution to longevity so is it necessary not to leave that capability on the training floor.

Trapping hands with completely relaxed palms promotes fantastic and safe sanchin power.

To paraphrase Stewart Lauper, if your training is too soft you'll find yourself on the sidelines watching at one of these events. If it is too hard, you'll either blow out or find yourself behind the beat from useless strength.

Heartfelt Fighting.

Stewart's senior instructors David Ayres and Bill Ciberay prove this by effortless motion even when in the middle of real fighting. Their accomplishment, though the secret of finding it remains a mystery, is of joyous expression, which as crazy as it seems, in their case, is fighting!

Stewart has taken Uncle's admonition to fight as though dancing to an extreme. Because they seem to be operating from the heart center even when fighting, it seems to spread by some kind of instant osmosis. And you find yourself battling them in this joyous relaxed state.

My training partner in California of 25 years, Lenzie Williams, to whom I defer, on seeing tape of the same expressive fighting at "Masters on the Mountain 10" said it was clear to him that this aspect of Uncle's teaching is spiritual. Maybe he's right.

But then maybe it's just because as Joe Bronson—the effective and improbably compassionate M.C.—said, martial artists are crazy. When Marcelo Raimero laid a good chomp on me and I squawked, Keith, from the midst of his battle, said that's how he first met Marcello. (I still





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want to get Marcello and Conrad Bui on tape as they practice for lion dance complaining about each other's weight—a great Jackie Chan intro.)

Origin of Sanchin

And when with Uncle, there is always research, as in an advanced anthropology class, of this or that cultural expression of movement. Uncle has always said that the common source of strength training in martial arts, isometrics or dynamic tension, is usually practiced with too much force, thereby leading to internal damage.

Uncle says about those who punch and kick with full power for too many years, at best it destroys the joints. At worst, it makes you crazy—or kills you. So Uncle, who uses what we call pressurization in his forms to develop power, made Eric Ling's "pressurized" white crane available to us as the correct ancestor of sanchin (i.e., isometric power training in the Japanese and Okinawan martial arts). Eric pressurizes the lower dantien and releases through the free relaxed movement of the crane critically propelled by the correct sound. Eric's form even has the exact same stepping pattern of what came through Okinawa as sanchin.

And perhaps another antecedent would be wing chun's trapping hand. Eric said tai chi and wing chun are the important parts of his white crane. Bounded by the traditional loop of rope—only with pressure—trapping hands with completely relaxed palms promotes fantastic and safe sanchin power.

Stevan Plinck continued Paul de Thouars' legacy in presenting bukti neg era, his evolution of serak. Even with a cast on his leg he gave a hands-on presentation quite wonderfully

broken down of this combat-proven art (brutal). The same has to be said of the wild Chicago contingent: Randy Seigal's hapkido group, who proved to be crazed in exactly the same way all the "regulars" are. And without a doubt will now be part of this humongous extended family.

For Willem's brother, Victor, I think all that needs to be said is to pass on his quote: "Do a movement soft and slow a thousand times and fast and strong will take care of itself." Jose Moratalla, the Tarrago brothers and Richard Clear presented the gathering with such a huge turnout that there was a shift in the group's center of gravity towards Florida (where next year's gathering is scheduled to be.) The various Florida contingents brought in the largest number of young players to continue Uncle's "family" to grow. It was wonderful, as Martin Funk said, to see all these players of all ages literally embracing each other.

Thanks Uncle for continuing this great experiment despite all odds.

– S.E.

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