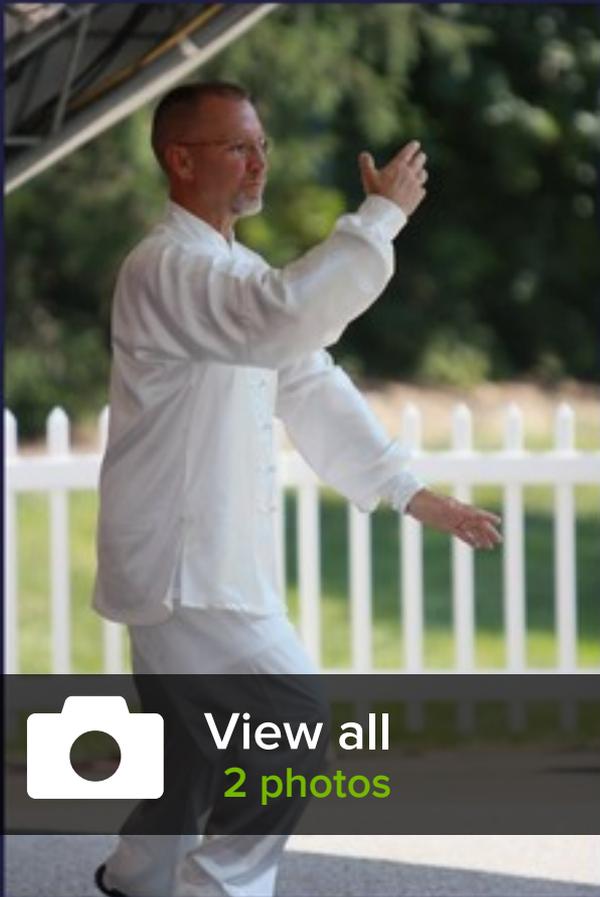


Dog walking and Tai Chi

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Tai Chi instructor Butch Wilcox of St. Louis demonstrates side stepping with Cloud Hands.

Violet Li

My dog is almost 16 years old or 110 dog years. She no longer has good control of bowel movements and urinates frequently so we walk her almost every two hours to let her relieve herself. Sometimes it takes more than 30 minutes. Additionally, she enjoys the time with us so she does not want to come in even after she is finished. I also cherish the limited time that I will have with her. It seems these days we walk more frequently and longer each time.



Violet Li

We used to run together when she was young and oftentimes she pulled me forward going uphill. Now it takes her twice as long as I do to make one step. Sometimes, we strolled on the concrete pavement way past midnight. Lights in the neighborhood went out one by one. I was born with lead feet and felt embarrassed and guilty for the pounding noise from my footsteps. One night, it dawned on me that this was the perfect time to practice [Tai Chi](#).

According to [Dr. Ge Wu](#) of Vermont University and [Dr. Shin Lin](#) of UC-Irvine, Tai Chi has been clinically proven better than walking in term of building leg muscles. Dr. [James Mortimer](#) of University of South Florida showed Tai Chi practice is better than walking for brain health.

At the beginning, I did Twisted Steps to move forwards except I put my arms in the back with a dog leash in one hand. I started with a high stance making sure that one foot was solid before stepping out the other to clearly express Yin and Yang. I remembered my teacher [Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei's](#) instruction of keeping the feet relaxed and to not grab the ground with toes like eagle claws. This way, I rooted myself well. I incorporated breathing with walking. Gradually, I lowered my stance. I also added fast walk with low stance in the practice. Even though the temperature was in low 40's, my entire body felt warm. Soon, my forehead started to bead from perspiration. Later, I practiced Repulse Monkey for backward stepping and cloud hand for sidestepping – all without arm movements. Sometimes, I practiced Standing Post while the dog was taking care of her business. I sure had a good workout.

One Tai Chi principle for walking is walking as quiet as a cat. The way to do it is that you firmly root in one foot, bend the knee, relax the Kaos and keep the upper body upright, and then smoothly and gently step out with the other foot. Unless walking backwards or cross a foot behind, you use the

inside of the heel to touch the ground softly first –once the entire foot has landed on the ground and then gradually transfer body weight to it. With concentration and mindfulness, my footsteps were no longer audible.

The real challenge in executing a great sidestepping is scrapping the ground; that means one has to be able to slide a foot out without actually putting any weight on it. Imagine yourself walking in pitch-darkness, you extend one foot out to probe and feel what's in the surroundings before setting your foot down. It takes a great degree of attentiveness not to mention strong leg muscles and control.

One big No-No in Tai Chi practicing is bobbing your body up and down. Some people straighten the bent knee once the advancing foot is solid; then they bend down to step out again. **Many practice this way without even realize the mistake.** To some this seems unavoidable because their bent legs are sore. People should not practice Tai Chi at a low stance until their leg muscles become stronger. They should start at a high stance and gradually lower it. The accomplishment sometimes is measured by inches throughout years of practice. You can compare how you are doing now versus a year or two years ago. Once I heard a practitioner say that she saw in Youtube that masters demonstrate at a low stance so she wanted to be low. But she failed to notice that masters always keep the same low stance without moving body up and down. There is a saying in Tai Chi Quan that how low you go depends on how strong your legs are.

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Tai Chi Examiner

