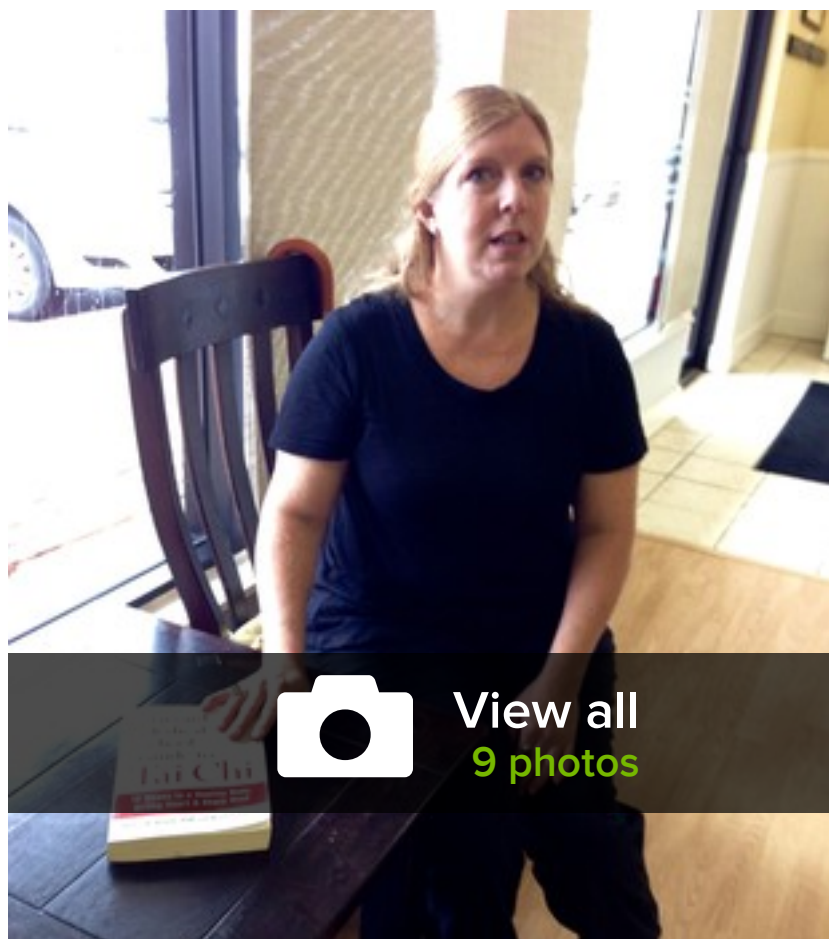


Shawn and Heather are saving us big money through Tai Chi & Qigong

July 8, 2015

7:10 PM MST

Heather Tisdel is a St. Louis mother of two kids aged 8 and 12. She has a cheerful personality and talks with wisdom, enthusiasm, and energy. I first met her at this year's World [Tai Chi & Qigong Day](#) celebration in St. Louis on Saturday April 25. She was using a cane and was driven there by a friend. On June 19, I met her again in her therapist's office and she was excited to announce that she received permission to drive. She loved her newfound freedom and driving felt like flying. Her eyes sparkled as she spoke.



View all
9 photos

Violet Li



Violet Li

Around 2005, out of blue, Heather was ill and was diagnosed with an [autoimmune disorder](#). She endured excruciating pain and severe fatigue, and was frequently bedridden. She got better in 2006. She tried to eat healthy and stay active. She was functional enough to handle a job and family. In 2008 the disease resurfaced with ferocity. Her legs tingled all the time and she could hardly walk. Pain and fatigue were worse than ever. Her life turned into misery and she had to depend on others for daily needs. As hard as it was, Heather said that she learned to trust others and be humble. Her health taught her young children to be caring, which she was grateful for. She showed me a scrapbook of notes, prescription names/dosage, and treatments. On one page, there were labels of eight different prescriptions. Most of these oral medicines cause nausea, acid reflux, and drowsiness. Heather stated that drowsiness was hard to deal with because she was already fatigued from her disorder.

Nevertheless, the side effects from those medicines were nothing in comparison to the Immunoglobulin Infusion Treatments (IVIg) that she had to get. She was getting one IVIg treatment every four weeks. IVIg treatments exacerbated her nausea and fatigue, in addition to giving her headache and abnormal blood pressure. In seven years, she has gained much weight due to her lack of mobility.

In high school, Heather accidentally stumbled upon [Dao De Jing \(or Tao Te Ching\)](#), a book written by Lao Zi in China 2,600 years ago. The philosophy of *Dao De Jing* is the foundation of Taoism and it has gained popularity in the West in recent decades. Heather was intrigued and fascinated by its holistic view of the universe and life. During her time at home, she looked further into Taoism. Tai Chi (Taiji) and Qigong have their philosophical root in Taoism; Heather discovered Tai Chi and Qigong's healing power through her reading. She wondered if there was a physical therapist who knew Tai Chi in St.

Louis.

Shawn Tucker is one of the leading physical therapists (PT's) in the Greater St. Louis area. Majoring in health sciences, Shawn graduated from Georgia State University and worked as senior staff member for the University of Chicago Hospitals in Chicago and Barnes Jewish Christian (BJC) Healthcare Systems in St. Louis, and served as physical therapist for the U.S. Olympic Sailing Team. Shawn is a regular guest teacher at the Washington University (in St. Louis) School of Physical Therapy and co-author of several research studies on physical therapy and exercise for people living with chronic disease. Additionally, Shawn is an advanced Tai Chi practitioner and Tai Chi instructor. In 2007, Shawn was certified by Sifu [Justin Meehan](#) of St. Louis to conduct therapeutic Tai Chi instruction.

June 20, 2014 was a pivotal day for Heather. She was driven to [Brentwood Center of Health](#) by helper Debra Carter. Debra helped her out of the car and into a wheelchair. Normally, a PT (physical therapist) would ask questions first. In this case, she asked Shawn what he thought about Dao De Jing, Tai Chi, and Qigong. They shared a similar philosophy. Shawn decided to design a treatment plan totally based on Tai Chi and Qigong principles and forgo the regular western PT treatments. Shawn described that the beginning treatment was very simple and easy to follow so Heather would not feel intimidated or afraid to practice at home. They had two sessions each week and started with belly breathing exercise and [meditation](#). As she became stronger, he added various sitting Tai Chi and Qigong movements to further invigorate her Qi (or life energy). Later, he integrated standing postures one by one. The training program has been adaptive and movements can be done either sitting, standing, or lying down depending on Heather's condition. Shawn praised Heather as a model patient because she practices twice daily at home persistently. At his recommendation, she read Dr. Peter Wayne's [Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi](#) from cover to cover with highlights and notes. Within a year, Heather could walk and drive. Shawn reduced her session to once a week. Suggested by Shawn, Heather is now taking formal Chen Style Hun Yuan Tai Chi classes with [Sifu Herb Parran](#) to further her Tai Chi journey or road to health.

Heather is not able to work. Medicaid pays for all her treatments and prescriptions. Now she only takes two or three oral medicines. The dosage and frequency have also been reduced. Sometimes when she gets a pain attack, she uses the tools she learned from Shawn without resorting to pills. Her IVIg treatments have been decreased to once every seven weeks and her body is more capable of handling the side effects. It costs approximately \$30,000 for each IVIG treatment. Medicaid is now saving \$165,000 each year on Heather's IVIg treatments alone, a huge saving on taxpayer money. Heather has dreams of returning to work this fall and being independent of IVIg. Nevertheless, her biggest dream is that more people can discover the incredible healing power of Tai Chi and Qigong.

SUGGESTED LINKS

➤ **Everyone should read “The Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi”**

- Tai Chi saved my life more than once
- A new hope for Parkinson's Disease patients: Tai Chi
- Tai Chi helps Fibromyalgia patients
- Qigong for veterans



Violet Li

Tai Chi Examiner