

SPORTS / RECREATION / COMBAT SPORTS

Shifu Wollering on legendary Tai Chi Grandmaster Jou Tsung-Hwa

August 29, 2010

10:32 AM MST



Grandmaster Jou in Tai Chi Farm. Mater Jou was going into "White Crane Spreads Wings" Chen Xinjia.
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Grandmaster Jou Tsung-Hwa's "[The Dao of Taijiquan: Way to Rejuvenation \(Tai Chi\)](#)" is like a bible for Tai Chi practitioners all over the world. It is still in print after its first Release in 1981. [Shifu \(Sifu\) Loretta Wollering](#) was a lead editor for the last edition and a disciple of Grandmaster Jou. The edited interview below with Shifu Wollering talks about her Tai Chi journey with Grandmaster Jou which provides a precious window for us to get a glance of his passion for Tai Chi, interesting personal stories, profound teaching method, and caring personality. The interview is divided into two parts. Part 1 is as below and [Part 2](#) will be published on Sept 1, 2010. Shifu Loretta also provided memorable photos of Grandmaster Jou and the legendary Tai Chi Farm.

Part 1

Violet: I heard that Tai Chi helped you with the health problems. Can you share the stories with us?

Loretta: I was 19 in college (Rutgers University; New Brunswick, NJ) and had a knee injury from [martial arts](#) practice. I walked with a cane. I had heard that Tai Chi had worked miracles for helping some people with health problems and injury, and I knew that Tai Chi was highly regarded by doctors of Chinese medicine, and that it was an art based on the martial arts. I saw a small announcement that there was a Tai Chi study group holding a class at the college gymnasium. I went and was the only student with a cane. I did the best I could to adapt the postures to my situation. It held my interest, so I continued. I moved back to Vernon NJ to spend the summer with my family. I looked in the phone book and came across a very small listing for "Tai Chi Farm" in nearby Warwick, NY. I met Grandmaster Jou Tsung Hwa. What he shared with me about Tai Chi completely "blew me out of the water." I became totally fascinated. After one year under his tutelage, my knee healed 100%. Additionally, my problems with clinical depression improved, and my situations with acne and psoriasis improved. It was phenomenal.

However, into my last year of graduate school (1994 Stevens Inst of Tech.; Hoboken, NJ), I started slacking off on my Tai Chi practice due to my job and full-time study. While I still practiced, I practiced with much less mental effort and much less focus on the internal Tai Chi principles. Then I developed severe [colitis](#) which doctors believed was turning into the first stages of [Crohn's](#) Disease. I missed 2 weeks of school and was bedridden. Master Jou brought me to Chinatown, NYC to get some herbs to halt the problem and pain, and then he sat me down and gave me a talk. He insisted that I get a normal eating and sleeping pattern into my life and that I do Tai Chi consistently, and massage my abdomen every morning. I followed his advice, and instead of finding all the reasons why I couldn't practice Tai Chi, I concentrated on finding reason why I MUST practice Tai Chi and do it mindfully! Like a miracle again, my health improved quickly and dramatically. I felt less stress, I tested better in school, and my digestive disorder rapidly improved. To this day, I have no signs of colitis or Crohn's disease. This year I'm forty years old, and I feel even better and am healthier than when I was 20. This, I know, is all because of a mindful, internal practice of Tai Chi.

Violet: Which style did Master Jou teach?

Loretta: Before I met Master Jou, I passed by his school - a renovated large farm property - many times. There was a large Tai Chi diagram (yin/yang symbol) on it, but he was quiet and non-commercial that I never heard about a Tai Chi Grandmaster living or teaching there. His classes were simple, but intensive. Master Jou knew I was a college student at the time, and therefore did not have much money to spare. He offered me to do some volunteer work around Tai Chi Farm for free classes and workshops. He taught the three most classical forms of Tai Chi: [Chen](#), [Yang](#) and [Wu-Hao](#) styles. He believed that students should learn the forms in the order that they were developed in history. Chen is the oldest created by [Chen Wang Ting](#), documented codified form of Tai Chi. It is therefore the source of all Tai Chi forms that exist today. Its large and expressive postures and use of [silk reeling energy](#)

(**chan si jin**) help to condition and rebuild the body, while providing a basis for martial study as well. Then, as **Yang Lu Chan** - the progenitor of the Yang Style - learned first from the Chen Family, Master Jou taught the traditional Yang Long Form. Its postures are still very large, but the internal energies are more hidden. Lastly, he taught the Wu-Hao form which **Wu Yu Xiang** learned from both the Chen and Yang families and created the style. This Tai Chi style is very compact, with hidden internal energies. The strength all comes from structure. Its footwork is also more sophisticated, and somewhat like that of xingyiquan. After learning these solo forms, Master Jou taught the Yang **San Shou** 2-person sparring set. It has aspects and footwork from all these forms, though its flavor is more like that of Yang form. Its applications use lots of principles from push hands and da lu. Master Jou felt that push hands and da lu could be learned along with the Tai Chi forms as soon as the student was able to control his own movement and internal principles - usually around the time of practicing Yang Form. Weapons forms and other forms could then also be studied at this final point. Master Jou was also a firm believer in the practice of Daoist meditation - both for energy transformation and martial arts structural work. In reality, I saw him practice very little form - he mostly practiced on principles with various basics exercises (*ji ben gong*), meditation, and Qigong.

Violet: How did Master Jou impacted you and your life?

Loretta: After several months of me attending classes at and working on Tai Chi Farm, he asked me to be his apprentice. I agreed. I underwent a little ceremony, called "baishi." We knelt down in front of a scroll of Zhang San Feng - the Patron Saint creator of the art of Tai Chi - and presented incense while reciting oaths to carry on Master Jou's style of practicing Tai Chi based on the Tai Chi Classics written so many centuries ago. I promised to follow this philosophy and way of practicing Tai Chi while always keeping an open mind and being respectful of other martial arts and energy practices. He then offered me a Chinese style dinner and presented me with several books. In the summers, I lived at Tai Chi Farm. It was a large place with lots of cabins, practice-room buildings and 2 small apartments. I also lived there when I graduated. I got to see and hear a lot from Master Jou - his personal life, his history, the food he ate, his habits and other fascinating info. I accompanied him as an assistant instructor to many workshops, including overseas in Europe, Mexico and then China. I met his cousin, nephews, etc. He also introduced me to the best places to eat in Chinatown, NY. It was an amazing time in my life. I also served as the content editor on the last edition of his best-selling book, "The Dao of Taijiquan." Shortly after this edition was finally in print, he died in an automobile accident, evening of August 3, 1998. **He was 81.**

Violet: Can you please share some interesting stories about Master Jou with the readers?

Loretta: Because I spent 8 years knowing Master Jou and living and working at his school, I could fill an entire book with stories of him. I don't even know where to start! Gosh, what would you like to know??? What I learned most from him was how to think positively and differently. He was a very strong proponent of Daoist philosophy and thinking out of the box. He was a maverick in that he didn't care

what other people thought of him and his alternative approaches to Tai Chi study. He would always say, "OK, you have your way and I have my way." He just didn't care to argue about being "right" or "wrong." Yet, he also wasn't afraid to have his own strong opinion on things.

He loved animals. He would always put food out for hungry animals, and he had pet geese, ducks, chickens, stray cats, and even a goat, which I trained. He loved nature very much. His favorite flowers were peonies. He also liked Middle Eastern belly-dance music because of the rhythm - he said it could be good for martial arts practice. He also loved old movies - the black and white classics. And westerns! He secretly liked the Yankees baseball team. Sometimes, during the Zhang San Feng Festival event he had at the Tai Chi Farm, he was nowhere to be found. I'd find him hiding out in his cabin, with the blinds drawn, as he'd be stealing a few minutes watching baseball games or watching westerns!

Another interesting story was commented to me by a Tai Chi Farm student named Steve. He remembers that a bunch of students were practicing while Master Jou was raking leaves nearby. He wanted to rake the leaves off the roof of his cabin, and he simply jumped up, four feet straight up, to stand on the outdoor oil tank so that he could reach the roof. And at this time, he was in his late 70's!!!

Master Jou would also love joking around that he was a "senior citizen" when he was in his 70's and 80's. No one believed him, as he looked like a healthy person in his 50's. Heck, he could still sit in full lotus position for several hours at age 81! He would always go into Burger King if one was around, because at that time, they offered free coffee to senior citizens. So, anytime there was a Burger King, he wanted his free coffee. One time, a nearby Burger King got tired of his constant requests for free coffee, thinking he was a fraud - so they asked for his ID to prove that he was really a senior citizen! I joke that he got "carded" in Burger King! He would then giggle and run off with his "free coffee."



Violet Li

Tai Chi Examiner