



LIVES WE LEAD, PETER CHAN, our Tai Chi teacher, Compiled by Judith Coulter

Peter has been teaching Tai Chi at GSAC for fifteen years. He is a terrific teacher and very patient with us even when we forget how to tell our left foot from our right!

Peter Wai-Ming Chan was born in 1935 in Hong Kong. Peter already had older two sisters and a brother; there would be six other siblings born after him.

The allied defenders of Hong Kong were greatly outnumbered by the invading Japanese forces in 1941 and surrendered on Christmas Day. Peter's father had predicted the outcome and had sent his family to their original village of origin on the Chinese mainland, thinking they would be safer there. Sadly, while in their ancestral village in Kwangtung province, Peter was kidnapped. Although he would eventually be returned to his parents after eight months, this ordeal was understandably terrifying for a young child. After the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, Peter's family returned to live in Hong Kong. There he was able to complete the equivalent of our Canadian High School education. He wanted to go abroad to the United Kingdom or Canada to attend university. However his parents did not want him to leave them. Instead of university, Peter went to work

as a civil servant for the Hong Kong government. In 1956 he married Elizabeth Yin Har Chan (née Fung) in a Roman Catholic ceremony. They would eventually have five children--three daughters and two sons.

Peter was always interested in Tai Chi as he was the fourth generation descendant disciple of the Wu style. For seven years he devotedly took intensive training from the Master--three times a week, for three hours each session. He then got his own recognized Master credentials.

One of Peter's sisters had immigrated to Canada in 1971. Peter and Elizabeth followed in 1974, as they believed their five children would have better educational and financial prospects in Canada. Once here Peter had no idea how to go about getting a well-paying professional position. To support his family he took the first job he could find in a factory. He eventually got a promotion but his salary was still very meager. In the meantime one of his brothers had also immigrated. His brother was keen to have Peter join him in the opening of a Chinese restaurant. The two brothers worked sixteen-hour days at their restaurant on Carling Avenue until they became fed up with the long hours. They sold the restaurant and Peter then went to work as a waiter.

After Peter's father died in 1972, his mother moved to Australia where she was needed to babysit one of her daughter's children. In 1983 she became very ill. At a family conference it was decided that Peter and Elizabeth would move to Australia to look after his mother. (Their children were grown by then and remained in Canada.) They lived in Australia for three years until his mother's death, at which time they returned to Canada.

In retirement, Peter teaches various classes of Tai Chi. He also loves music and conducts Chinese opera karaoke in his "spare time". As well, he is very involved in activities in the Chinese Roman Catholic Church. Sadly, Peter's Elizabeth died in 2011 after a long illness.

The medical profession now recognizes that Tai chi has many health benefits, especially for "older adults". It promotes physical and psychological well-being, increases cardiovascular health, and strengthens bones. It increases flexibility and balance, reduces stress, and is thought to decrease pain even better than many NSAIDs. So please join us and learn about intriguingly-named movements such as the Seven Stars Posture, Repulse Monkey and Grasp Bird's Tail.