

Celebrating the Peaceful Dragon School's 20 Years in Ann Arbor

By Master Wasantha Young, Director

The land holds sacred messages that are transmitted through plants, animals, livelihood, people and community. It also reflects how we experience our well-being and personal growth. True to the notion that what we need to be healthy is usually within our grasp or in our immediate environment, the Peaceful Dragon School of Tai Chi Ch'uan and Chi Kung has been a part of the Ann Arbor community for 20 years. Focused on health and well-being, the Peaceful Dragon School offers a comprehensive program in the healing arts of tai chi, chi kung (also spelled qi gong), and meditation.

The Peaceful Dragon School is located in the basement of an unassuming office building but, upon entering, its safe atmosphere and peaceful, open-minded environment is palpable. Those seeking complementary health-promoting art forms and other self-care practices will find the teachers have an air of presence and calm and use a variety of learning styles, including humor.

I began my study of tai chi in 1968 at Grandmaster William C.C. Chen's school in New York.

Grandmaster Chen initiated his tai chi studies in Taiwan during 1949 as a live-in understudy of Professor Cheng Man-ching. Professor was a student of Yang Chang-fu. The Yang style is the lineage that I brought with me when I arrived in Ann Arbor in 1988 and opened my school in 1990. Often I am asked, "Why Ann Arbor?"

Ann Arbor has been a wonderful place for me to grow — not only as a human being, but as an instructor as well. When I left New York City, where I grew up and was trained in tai chi, I was in my early 20's. In Taos, NM, I lived for six months without electricity, running water, or locks on the front door (I had four in NY). I learned to cook on a wood-burning stove, surviving on the bare minimum — serious culture shock! It was just the elements, open sky, and myself. My mind was plagued with the internal and external "chatter" that I brought with me from NY.

William LeSassier (1948-2003), owner of the Christos School of Natural Health and Healing,

where I taught in Taos, told me that a good midpoint between the cultures of NY and Taos would be Boulder, CO. When winter came to Taos and people started to talk about chain-sawing wood, I headed for Boulder and Trungpa Rinpoche's Buddhist community and school, the Naropa Institute. Taos had been about finding myself and Boulder became the place I began to know myself, teaching small classes and studying my mind through the teachings of Trungpa.

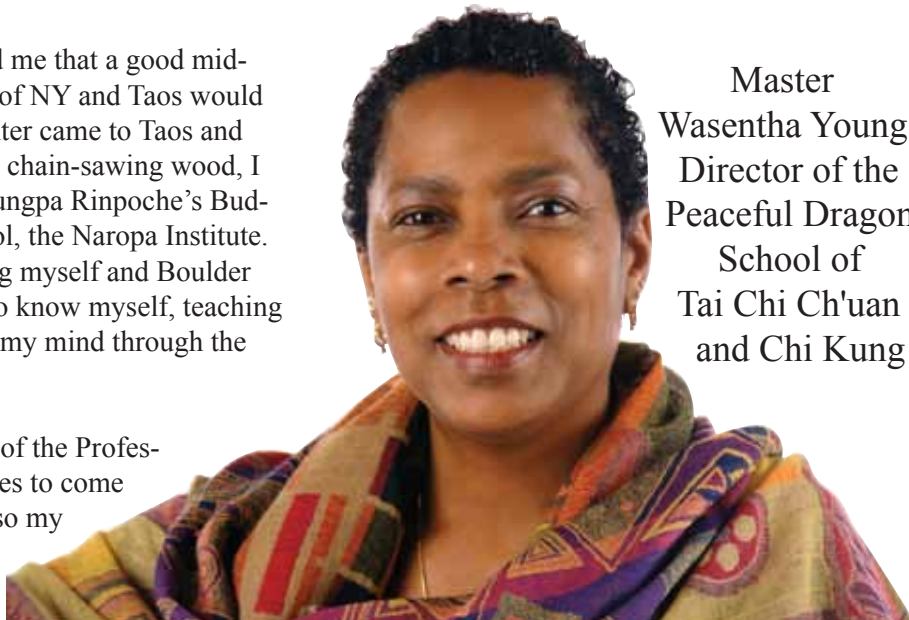
Trungpa also invited some of the Professor's first American disciples to come to Naropa to teach tai chi, so my learning of tai chi continued. I delved deeper into Taoist philosophy through my study with Ga Fu Feng, an eminent teacher and translator of the Tao Te Ching.

In about 1982 I returned to NM, this time settling in Santa Fe. There, the lessons of creativity in living and art took shape. I learned how to bring nature, presence of mind, and

were not; so I figured, why not try living in Ann Arbor?

In 1994, I went to Berkeley, CA to study at the Institute of Acupresure for a couple of years. The school carried on in my absence, subletting by the hour in the former Dance Gallery Studio (now site of the current YMCA), with the assistance of Jim Carey, Norman Cox, and Beth Wiggert. When I returned to Ann Arbor, the Peaceful Dragon moved to Pauline Blvd. near Stadium, sharing space with a hard-style martial arts teacher. About a year later, it became solely the Peaceful Dragon School, and it has remained in the same location since then.

Master Wasantha Young, Director of the Peaceful Dragon School of Tai Chi Ch'uan and Chi Kung



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Students and Teachers of the Peaceful Dragon School grouped around Master Wasantha Young.

"I am committed to holding fast in providing Ann Arbor with this haven. We are still here, downstairs in the place I call the 'sacred cave,' and we plan to celebrate."

tai chi as a health art form together in my teaching.

So, why bring the Peaceful Dragon School from Santa Fe to Ann Arbor? An acquaintance (now friend) of mine named Gae Winn, an Ann Arbor pagan, told me that Ann Arbor could use a female tai chi instructor. I was having trouble surviving in Santa Fe because of the economic gap between those who were financially well off and those who

During this time, the school has touched well over a thousand lives. Considering the size of the Ann Arbor community, this is substantial. Many of the school's patrons have been individual Ann Arborites, but the school has also served the University of Michigan and small businesses alike.

To date, Ann Arbor has afforded me the opportunity to grow in love and in the art of consciously

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giving to the health of the community in which I live. I honor and am grateful for what the land and the nature of life around me have given. Here I have learned how to love all of who I have become.

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Sharing that notion — of loving oneself deeply — with others journeying on the path toward becoming divine creatures is an honor.

Some years are better financially than others. Because of the current economic situation, today we are hanging on by the Dragon’s nails. The school does not make much of a profit these days; if I am lucky, it makes \$500 in a month. Nonetheless, I am committed to holding fast in providing Ann Arbor with this haven. We are still here, downstairs in the place I call the “sacred cave,” and we plan to celebrate.

On September 25, the Peaceful Dragon School will be observing its 20th year in Ann Arbor. Grandmaster Chen is coming to teach



Master Wasentha Young and Grandmaster William C.C. Chen

“On September 25th, Grandmaster Chen is coming to teach a seminar open to all styles of tai chi practitioners, followed by a celebration at Rudolf Steiner High School, and a dinner at Gourmet Gardens.”

a seminar open to all styles of tai chi practitioners, followed by a celebration at Rudolf Steiner High School, and a dinner at Gourmet Gardens. On Sunday, September 26, the Peaceful Dragon School will invite seminar attendees for free, open, and collegial sharing and reviewing the material that Grandmaster Chen presented.

For more information or to register for the seminar, call 734-741-0695 or email info@peacefuldragonschool.com.

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Film (continued)

ONE PEACE: Celebration of the UN International Day of Peace Film Showing • Sept. 21, 6-9 p.m. • Come and see Barbara Marx Hubbard’s film *Visions of a Universal Humanity* and Neal Rogin’s film *The Awakening Universe*. \$5 suggested donation. Call Colleen Mills at 425-0079; cmills0079@yahoo.com or onepeace.us.

Films and Discussion at Jewel Heart • Fridays, 7 p.m. • Bring your friends and enjoy a free film and discussion about dharma and the film. Concessions are available. Call 994-3387; programs@jewelheart.org or jewelheart.org.

Sept. 24 • “Departures” with Rory Russell

Oct. 29 • “The Legend of Bagger Vance” with John Schramm

Nov. 19 and Dec. 17 • Film to be announced

Flower Essences

Flower Power! An Introduction to the Flower Essences of Dr. Bach with Bronwen Gates at WCC • Sept. 30, 6-8:55 p.m. • Restore emotional balance and heal the body, mind, and spirit. Come enter the world of flower essences by learning about those of the renowned Dr. Edward Bach of England. You will go home with your own personal flower essence combination. \$39. Call Phillip or Christine at 677-5060; lifelong-learning@wcc.net or wccnet.edu/lifelong-learning.

Fundraisers

The Zen Buddhist Temple’s Famous Annual Great Green Recycling Yard Sale • Sept. 4-6: Saturday, 9-5 p.m.; Sunday, Noon-5 p.m.; Monday, 9-5 p.m. • Once again, we will focus primarily on furniture - couches, love seats, chairs, desks, chests of drawers, and tables, as well as books and other household items. Our members clean and repair all items. This exciting event always draws hundreds of environmentally-caring people and bargain hunters. While we concentrate on the sturdily useful, you never know what exciting bit of treasure you may find. Call 761-6520; annarbor@zenbuddhisttemple.org.

Lighthouse Center’s 3rd Annual Walk for Peace at Hudson-Mills Park • Sept. 25: Gather at 9:30 a.m. and Walk at 10 a.m. • A three-mile walk to support the Lighthouse Center, who makes monthly donations to others in need, including Partners in Health for Haiti and Sasha Farms in Manchester. Flyer and pledge form available online. Call Nirali Becky Kleinschmidt at 734-649-1234; lighthousecenterinc.org.

Games

Secrets to Better Scrabble with Michael Betzold • Oct. 13, 7 p.m. at Crazy Wisdom Community Room • For casual Scrabble players, learn the strategy experts use to play the game for more fun and more points. You don’t have to be a word freak to compete! Free. Call 277-7748; mbetzold@comcast.net or makebingos.com.

Green Living

Green Cleaning Friendly for Pets, People, and the Planet with Bronwen Gates at WCC • Oct. 7, 6-8:55 p.m. • Learn how easy and economical it is to clean your home using non-toxic essential oils that contain natural antibacterial, antiviral, and space clearing properties. Take home several samples you make in class and have fun doing it! \$39. Call Phillip or Christine at 677-5060; lifelong-learning@wccnet.edu or wccnet.edu/lifelong-learning.

Grief & Grieving

Life Happens... What We Do with it Determines Our Potential for Joy! with Tamara Sutton • First and Third Tuesdays of each month, 7 p.m. • The impact of “loss” can be devastating and crippling. The death of someone you love launches you into a new and unexpected path. You will never be the same again; you’re not meant to be. Healing only occurs when we are willing to look for the miracles within. I invite you to participate in this new life and turn the greatest challenge of your life into the greatest opportunity. \$30 per class. Call 517-896-3173; tamara@tamarasutton.com or TamaraSutton.com.

Herbs, Plants & the Garden

Herbs from Your Own Backyard! with Karen Caruso • Sept. 14, 6:30-8 p.m. • Herbs are all around us. Come join us for an informative and fun class about what valuable herbs may be growing in your own backyard or in your neck of the woods. We will cover how to identify, grow, harvest, and prepare and use herbs to benefit your health and wellness. \$18. Call Pat at 734-416-5200; info@bodyworkshealingcenter.com.

History

Life in the Middle Ages with Barony of Cynnabar of the Society for Creative Anachronism • Sundays, Noon-4 p.m. • Learn about the singing, dancing, clothing, arts and sciences, fencing, and martial arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Free. Contact chatelaine@cynnabar.org or cynnabar.org.