

## Practitioner Profile ~

# A Visit with Master Wasentha Young, Founder and Master Instructor of the Peaceful Dragon School of T'ai Chi Ch'uan and Chi Kung (Qigong)

By Lani Kwon Meilgaard  
Photography by Linda Lawson

Peaceful Dragon School's Master Wasentha Young has been a committed *t'ai chi ch'uan* practitioner for 40 years, and she is a highly respected master instructor in *t'ai chi* and *chi kung (qigong)*. Her Peaceful Dragon School is well-established in the Ann Arbor region for its leading role in teaching T'ai Chi and Chi Kung, and its related classes in the movement and healing arts.

What comes across when you meet, know and work with Wasentha Young is that she down-to-earth, kind and skillful.

I had taken a summer class with her over six years ago, and her patient, loving teaching-style encouraged me, as I learned to move with more awareness and presence. She herself began her studies with Grandmaster William C.C. Chen in 1968. Over the years, she has studied with several prominent teachers under Professor Cheng Man-ching, and she has been an instructor since 1974. Master Young opened Peaceful Dragon School in Ann Arbor in 1990, providing basic and advanced *t'ai chi ch'uan* and *chi kung* classes, as well as teacher certifications. She has also recently introduced several exciting, new classes and workshops for adults and children, many of which began over the past year and will be continuing this summer at the school and other locations.

We met on a windy evening in January, just after a Nia class led by instructor Robin Okun of Mindful Movement ([www.mindfulmovement4u.com](http://www.mindfulmovement4u.com)) was finishing up at the school. She supports and mentors other practitioners who are starting up their businesses. I walked into the rather nondescript building on Pauline, which has an extraordinary energy with so many body/mind/spirit practitioners who have offices there. I made my way down the stairs, just as several people were exiting the studio. At the entryway shoes were piled to one side, and several colorful flyers announcing upcoming classes and workshops were on display. Peaceful Dragon School's logo of a yin/yang symbol with Chinese-style mountains, pine trees, clouds and a stylized sun and moon, serving as



**Wasentha Young**

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poetry and meditation. In fact, in addition to teaching, like many creative people who practice martial arts, Wasentha also writes poetry, paints and has begun learning to create mosaics, inspired by her recent travels to Spain and Greece.

Yet her commitment to and concern for our community is indisputable. "One of my greatest concerns is for the youth," she explained, when talking about her new collaborative effort with Rec & Ed ([www.aareced.com](http://www.aareced.com)) for children. She occasionally has offered classes for youth at the University of New Mexico and when she first arrived in Ann Arbor. She is now offering a Chi-Do™ Harmony of Energy for Youth this summer. "I've been studying the Mind/Body connection for over forty years now," she said, and is finding that at much younger ages than ever before, many children are developing stress-related and other health and social problems that mirror the experience of many adults, leading to harmful impacts on their health and our community. She is concerned about how out of touch children are with their own thoughts, emotions and bodies and how important it is to help them to become aware, reconnect and harmonize. "It's important to me that I share with them some alternative ways for youth to monitor and dissolve some of their unhealthy stress, to help bring them into balance and feel some sense of harmony."

Another new class she began offering last year is designed specifically for women, entitled "Women Working Out: Strengthening Exercises for the Mind, Body and Spirit." About this new offering, she said, "I would like to state that I believe that rightfully women should be able to experience the prowess of the human body in a fun and safe way." These classes incorporate "a non-aggressive training environment, 'soft style' basic kicks and punches, reflex training and a diverse aerobic workout." She explained this intention of the class is to evoke empowerment. "The confidence of consciously

understanding physical boundaries, how to use vulnerability as a source of strength and the power of using the body as a whole in delivering and evading force is a very humanly dignified state of being."

She also offers off-site stress reduction workshops called "Stress Out" to organizations, institutions, corporations and other groups. "I've been requested a number of times to do stress reduction classes for institutions and religious organizations." She clarified, "I really like to involve the environment of the culture of the people and what they're doing during a retreat. I go in and I look at the work culture or membership culture, if it's a church, and look at what they need." By drawing on her diverse training and expertise, she then tailors a mindful exercise and relaxation program for each group in order to suit those needs.

In addition to her martial arts training, Master Young has received formal training in Taoist and Buddhist Meditation and earned certifications in Acupressure from the Institute of Acupressure in Berkeley, California, as well as in Wellness Counseling in Mind/Body Consciousness from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, California. In fact she is currently completing a Master's degree with the latter institute. Her training and background have combined to give her a fresh perspective in her field, and in 2003 Master Young created a modern form of *t'ai chi* called the "Cane Form." This practice includes thirty moves with delightfully inventive, multicultural names that she came up with along with a student fond of word games, such as: "Gardener Throws the Seeds," "The Salmon Slaps the Water with Its Tail," "Coyote Tosses in Its Sleep," "Cracking the Gourds of Love" and "Back to the Beginning," to name just a few. She started teaching this new form just last year, and she described it in the following way: "Each one of the forms in traditional *t'ai chi ch'uan* represents the five elements: earth, metal, water, wood and fire.

What came to me was the cane and what happens with fire. It consumes it and things fall apart. What cane represents to us is the aging process, and I combined many of the forms I know." She added, smiling, "Although I have a unrelenting respect for tradition, that does not mean

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the contrasting dots, graced many of these.

The studio, as I entered, was carpeted, and there were several elegant paintings of famous landscapes in China by Kevin Maloney hanging on the walls. There was the lovely scent of sandalwood incense and a warm glow from several paper lanterns, creating a peaceful ambiance. Master Young showed me to her office, a cozy room to the right of the entrance. She had managed to fit in two chairs, her desk, computer, printer, files and a bookshelf, which held several books and DVDs on Ta'i Chi, of course, including several of her own, but also books on art,

Many of the Peaceful Dragon School's Spring-Summer Classes are listed in the Tai Chi, Acupressure, Meditation and Children/Young Adults sections of the Crazy Wisdom Calendar, which starts on page 20.

that one should not create."

In regard to teaching, both traditional and contemporary forms, Master Young concluded, "I can think of no better way for me to serve." She described the concept of beginner's mind, which is familiar to many other martial arts forms and meditation practices, "One of the things I learned whenever I start my form is I start from square one, and I apply that same notion to my teaching, and if it's always square one, it's always exciting and fun. I point students toward awareness or attention to movement."

Thank you Master Wasentha Young for your time, energy and caring service that you provide to our community!

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