



european school  
of t'ai chi

# T'ai Chi newsletter

April 2004

## A ride on the wild side of mercy

*The story of a terminally-ill nine year old is a lesson in how to live in grace and light—by Father Joseph Maier of the Mercy Centre.*

Up until two months ago, a few mornings each week, just before his kindergarten class, Master Note, a nine-year old boy in our case, rode his imaginary broomstick horse around our Mercy Centre compound.

Note always rode behind his partner, Master Galong, who has a faster make-believe Vehicle, an imaginary motorcycle. Sometimes Galong has trouble starting his chopper. Master Note told him that choppers are hard to start in cold weather. Note is extra smart and school bores him. He is small for his age. You can blame Aids for that. Got it from his mom at birth who got it from his dad, both of whom died when Note was three. Says he remembers his mom who cared for him as long as she could.

Note's life, lived in that deep part of his soul where nobody else can go, seems to be filled with light and beauty. He loves to draw and, except for the occasional fire-breathing dragon (a monster many kids seem to draw in times of death and sorrow), Note's sketchbook is a kaleidoscope of joyful colours and happy imagery.

Note is small for his nine years, frail and fragile, but he has lots of street savvy. He also knows the morning racing circuit with Galong is imaginary. Galong, at age 35 with a form of Down's Syndrome, isn't as sure. He likes to believe it's real and who are we to tell him it isn't?

Note rides behind Galong because he worries about him. When Galong is in his make-believe world, he rides his chopper with

reckless abandon. Sometimes the chopper breaks down in the middle of the street, which especially worries Note, who knows Galong has little use for real traffic in his make-believe landscape.

A few months back Note went through a bad patch when his Aids kicked up and we almost lost him. Spent three weeks in the hospital for communicable diseases. He's okay now, but weaker, so he won't be riding behind Galong for a while. Galong was upset and cried until Note told him that his horse wasn't well.

Like most of our children, Note came to us by a circuitous route. After his parents died in Bangkok, his grandmother raised him in Rayong until she, too, died; at which point he moved to his aunt's home in Bangkok, where his health deteriorated and he was hospitalised. When he recovered his aunt brought him to Mercy Centre. That was almost two years ago.

Living in different homes in our care, Note and Galong first met when we took them both to the hospital for a check-up. Galong was frightened and Note, who had plenty of experience with hospitals, calmed him down. A lasting friendship began.

We don't know much about Galong's history. We first found him sleeping in front of a sleazy backstreet bar. He would open the door for customer and blow a whistle to wave down a taxi when needed. Apparently he didn't like his job because, without knowing us at all, he asked if he could live with us. That was it.

He had no earthly possessions, no documentation, and he didn't know his name, his family, or where he's from. The traffickers like them that way, with no identity, so if they disappear, nobody cares.

Somebody here conveniently named him Galong, which means 'little bird which has lost its way' in Thai, and he took to it right away.

That was seven years ago and he's graduated from our kindergarten each year. It gives purpose and order to his life. He loves school and helps the other children. Also, physically he's not too much bigger than his young classmates, so he's not too intimidating.

These days, while Note is still weak, we've asked Galong not to ride his chopper before school, but sometimes he does, and we have to look the other way

After the bell rings at the end of the school day, Galong likes to help the teacher clean up the classroom. Then it's karaoke time. He changes his school uniform for street clothes, picks up a make-believe microphone, and belts out pop tunes in his raspy voice, but only for about an hour. He's strict about that. Note told him that if he sings more than five or six songs, he'll hurt his voice, and Galong believes him.

Note is a friend to all, especially the vulnerable ones. Recently he's persuaded Galong to join him at art class three days a week. It's a ritual now. Galong waits in kindergarten class for Note to call them (he's the only one among them who can tell the time). Galong puts on his necktie for art class. It's that important. He has poor hand-eye coordination, so it was fascinating to see his first self-portrait in pencil (under Note's guidance) - a reasonable likeness, kind of. In any case, Galong was proud of it.

The public hospitals enter most of the children with Aids in their free medical campaign. You have to be poor: we qualify for that. But we must pay for some expensive drugs that are not covered in the hospital

budget, and ultimately the doctors select which children are eligible. While the free medicine greatly helps many of our 40 children with Aids, eventually the kids go through a bad patch that sends them spiralling.

Meanwhile Note takes his daily cocktail of drugs. He's not feeling well most days. He can't digest his food properly and he has a blood disorder along with Aids. So it's three days well and four days sick, as they say in Thai. But right now, as I write this, he is well. And every sunrise is a new day - a gift.

The new issue of the day is tattoos. Somewhere Galong saw a photograph of a guy on a motorcycle with a tattoo, and now Galong has decided he must have one. Note likes the idea. In fact, it took him two weeks to explain to Galong the story of Winnie the Pooh and how wonderful it would be to have a glue-on tattoo of Pooh. Galong only wanted to know if Pooh would ever ride a chopper. Note wasn't quite sure. He tended to think not.

Note continues drawing. Perhaps his most moving piece is the one of the birthday party with the family he never had. It's among the few drawings Note won't explain to anyone. It seems that the lady sitting at the head of the table is mom, and there are presents for everyone and a bit of cake with candles and probably brothers and sisters he never had sitting around the table. It's a joyful picture. But it's his secret.

When Note dies, as die he will, we will look after Galong as best we can, perhaps not as good as Note, but certainly better than the bar where we found him. And we'll do our best, too, to assure Note of our care for Galong. The boy worries about such things.

*Father Joseph H Maier, founder and director of The Human Development Foundation in Klong Toey, Bangkok, wrote this article for the Bangkok Post in October 2003.*

## More news from the Mercy Centre

Tew, Father Joe and the Mercy Centre send many thanks for the £500 that the Tai Chi School sent in June, along with some generous contributions from individuals in our group.

All the money we sent was doubled by the Thai Farmers Bank who had made an agreement with the Mercy Centre that during the month of June 2003 any contributions to the Centre would be matched.

Jeanne Hallacy, the director of the film 'Med-Dah' (about the children and the work of the Mercy Centre), showed her film at the 2003 Ojai Film Festival in California. It won the Jury's Prize and the audience found it a very moving experience.

The Human Development Foundation and the Mercy Centre are working towards an AIDS Summit in July 2004.

## Mentoring: The Tao of Giving and Receiving Wisdom

By Chungliang Al Huang & Jerry Lynch  
Harper Collins ISBN 006251251X (April '04)

Mentoring has become one of the great educational buzzwords of the last decade; there being much debate about its glaring absence from many of our social structures and communities, and this absence being used to explain all sorts of social and environmental woes that blight the world.

This delightful and important little book makes a refreshing and empowering contribution to the writings already available on the subject, as well as sending the idea of mentoring way beyond the confines of the adult/teenager teaching relationships we conceive it to be mainly involving.

Written by the exceptional T'ai Chi teacher Chungliang Al Huang (one of the first Chinese to bring T'ai Chi to California in the 1960s), in collaboration with sports coach Jerry Lynch; the idea of mentoring is quietly re-positioned as an entirely mutual and collaborative process in which both partners take it in turns to teach and then to learn from each other.

The central image used is that of the 'push-hands' exercise, known to anyone who has taken part in a T'ai Chi class: one partner gives their energy, whilst the other receives. Then, at the point when both partners would lose balance if the giver continued to move forward, the roles are exchanged, so that the receiver now becomes the giver and the movement begins to flow in the opposite direction. In order to achieve complete harmony in the mentoring process, the writers emphasise that all mentoring relationships should follow this push-hands pattern: so that, for instance, even if we have a mentoring relationship with a young child, we should try and give them as much opportunity to teach us what they know as we would spend time teaching them.

Central to the book itself is an exploration of 32 of the great Taoist virtues: 16 "Yang" virtues of the Heart, which we can cultivate to give as much as we would wish to the mentoring relationship; and 16 "Yin" virtues of the Soul, which we can cultivate to receive as much as we would like. For those who appre-

ciate Chinese calligraphy, each virtue is accompanied by a page devoted to its Chinese character, expressed in fascinating and energetic style.

The entire book is written with a simplicity and sparsity of style that belies the depth of the teaching it contains. Since I bought the book, I have found myself turning again and again to its pages for insight and inspiration. Much of the delight for me comes from a sense that, being Chinese himself, Chungliang is able to communicate much of the essence of Taoist principles and wisdom that sometimes gets very lost in Western interpretations.

Above all, it becomes a book that is a surprisingly useful guide to helping us with any relationship we might be involved in: from close relationships with family and friends, through to work colleagues or even chance conversations with strangers.

You may be lucky and find the book in a bookshop, but the best bet is to use Amazon on the Internet. It is being republished in April, but a copy can be pre-ordered if you wish. The book *Tao Mentoring* is an earlier version of the same book, and can still be ordered if you can't wait until April. Enjoy!

Keith Gull

太極拳

*T'ai Chi, calligraphy by Glyn Jones*

### **Sensing the elements**

18 April 2004 at The Abbey with Louanne Richards and Sue Webber.

### **Spring retreat**

Hopefully with Tew. 21-23 May 2004 at Springhead.

### **International retreat**

With Juanolo, 21-25 July 2004 at Springhead.

### **T'ai Chi & special needs**

15-17 October 2004 at The Abbey with Linda Chase Broda and Brian Cookman.

### **T'ai Chi classes**

Sodge Adams, Hampstead,

Val Androutsopoulou, Corfu,

Helen Baker, Havant,

Jos Hadfield, Farnham,

Glyn Jones, Machywlleth,

Ian Lillicrap, Battersea,

Sue McAlpine, Richmond,

Georgina McLaurin, Isle of Man,

Caroline Merry, Oxford,

Rory Norton, Sussex,

Louanne Richards, Oxford,

Chris Sadler, Inverness,

Ali Sandeman, Havant,

Richard Siviak, York,

Kamal Thapen, Balham,

Tracey Underhill, Islington,

Sue Webber, Egham,

Julia Webster, Farnham,

Susie Wood, Farnham,

### **Video on T'ai Chi now available**

The UK has produced a video on behalf of all the members of the European School, including Spain, Greece, France and Switzerland. Whilst the video does feature several forms and has a special needs section the primary aim was to convey the spirit of T'ai Chi. Here are the words from the cover:

#### ***Walking gently on the earth***

T'ai Chi is an inner (yin) martial art.

It is also a way of developing awareness of energy (chi) - both in nature and within ourselves.

Through movement, touch and the breath it is possible to reach inner stillness and to connect with the energy that underlies all life.

As a result of this connection, the influence of T'ai Chi can have a healing effect on many different levels.

This video portrays the poetry of T'ai Chi and explores its meaning in relation to nature and everyday life, as practised by the European School of T'ai Chi Ch'uan.

### **Chi Kung with Donald Wong**

Donald Wong is keen to preserve the skills of the many masters he has worked with and the workshop he took in December really showed the power of cultivating and working with chi.

The focus was very much on internal aspects of T'ai Chi. The exercises reminded us of the incredible simplicity of chi and helped us to re-connect with the chi in ourselves and in the outer world, particularly through mindful use of the breath. The workshop was full of down to earth advice, with practical applications on how to create a sense of fullness and space in our everyday lives so that we can raise our energy levels and help to heal others.

*With thanks to Sue Wood and Jos Hadfield*