

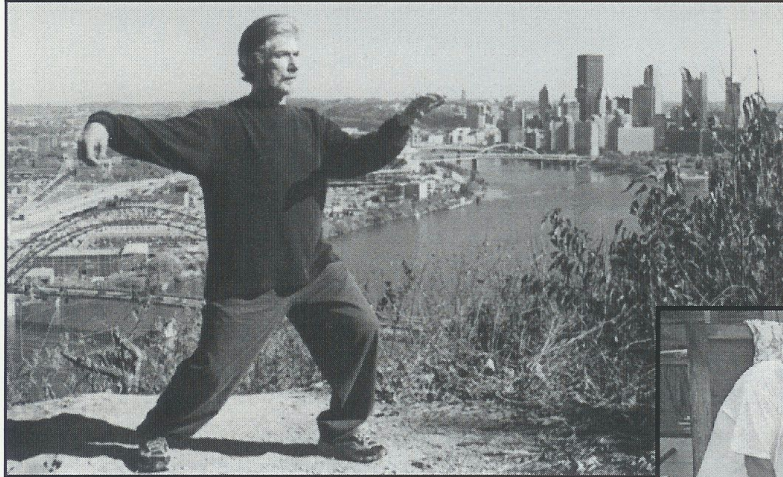
Dedicated
to the
Pittsburgh
Area's
Baby
Boomers

December 2000

Boomers

T'ai chi ch'uan ...a way of

*reuniting
body,
mind and
spirit*



■ Stan Swartz

by Mary Anne McCormack

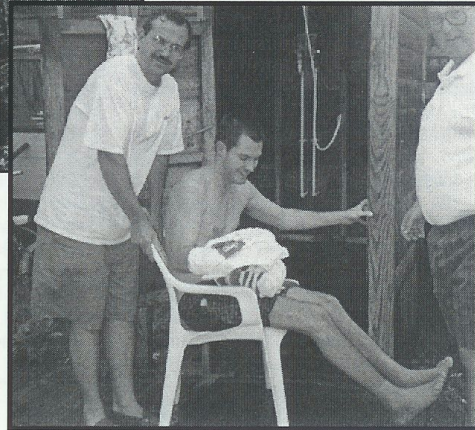
In 1997, Eric Laurenson, sculptor and physics teacher, fell one and a half stories and crushed his feet. Surgeons used steel plates and pins in his heels, but Laurenson couldn't walk for three months. Then a friend recommended t'ai chi and Laurenson began to attend classes.

"I could hardly walk, and I was wearing steel-toed work boots with prosthetic inserts," Laurenson said. "It was very painful, but I learned I had to let go of the pain stored in my muscles. After a few months, when I could tell I was regaining motion in my ankles, I started going to classes three to four times a week. After six months, I was able to walk in a dress shoe. Within a year, the change was remarkable. My surgeon was amazed how much my motion had gotten back to normal. Now, over three years later, I walk without a limp. I can run, and I recently played

soccer again with no problem," he said.

T'ai chi ch'uan is an ancient Chinese method of relaxation and mental, spiritual and physical development. It consists of a series of 37 soft, gentle movements, one flowing into another. It is designed to promote inner peace through continuous movement in harmony with the universe, and good health and well being through very specific principles of mind/body and breath awareness. T'ai chi emphasizes quality of movement, not quantity, and incorporating its principles into daily living.

T'ai chi is always done standing up with the knees bent in a semi-squat, while supporting body weight on one leg at a time. Because weight is constantly shifted from one leg to another, t'ai chi strength-



■ Eric Laurenson

ens and tones muscles, combats fatigue and improves circulation. It is particularly helpful for people who cannot perform more vigorous exercise because of age, illness or physical disabilities.

Stan Swartz has been teaching t'ai chi ch'uan for 24 years. While working on a psychology internship in 1973, Swartz discovered that t'ai chi helped him relax. In 1981, after studying with four senior students of Grand Master Cheng Man-ch'ing, Swartz returned to Pittsburgh and

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*...a way of
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began teaching here.

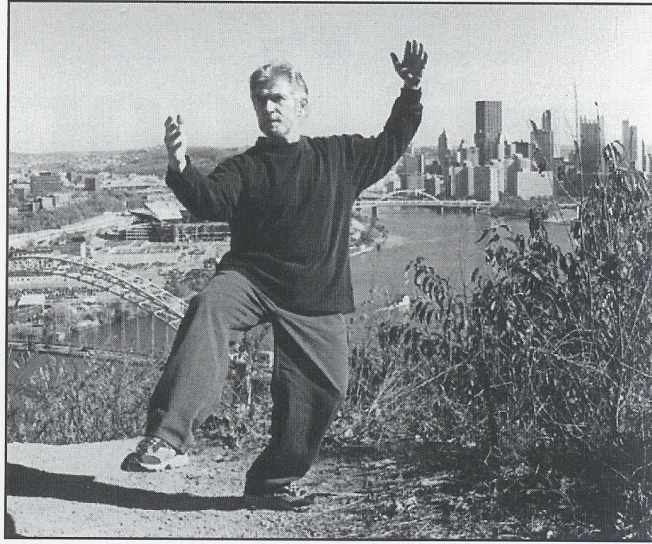
"I was going to be a clinical psychologist," Swartz said. "My interest in tai chi stems from an interest in how the mind works. Through a very complex series of movements, one learns to relax and focus the mind in the tan tien (the body's physical and psychological center). Concentrating on movement, posture and breathing anchors your mind in the present, producing a calming effect and sharpening perceptions," he said.

"Our generation has tried just about everything, and sometimes our lives still are not working," Swartz said. "In their forties, people start looking toward the internal, instead of making themselves look better with more money, bigger cars and bigger houses that don't make any difference in their happiness," he said.

"That's why T'ai chi is perfect for the boomers generation," Swartz said. "It requires a certain amount of age and maturity to be willing to say that what you have done is not working and there is something lacking in your life. T'ai chi lets you improve your body and health, while turning your life experience into wisdom and helping you develop a sense of enlightenment," he said.

Medical studies have shown that t'ai chi also helps the elderly improve their sense of balance and reduce the risk of falls, by strengthening leg muscles and using the hips and feet for support.

Ursula Vins, 68, has an auto immune disease called chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy (CIDP), which starts as a numbness in the feet and leads to muscle tightness and loss of balance. Always active, Vins found her-



self stumbling or holding on when she walked. T'ai chi made a great difference in her ability to live normally with her disease.

"I walk so much better," Vins said. "I don't have a balance problem and I can walk without holding on. I still have some tightness, but no pain. I know if I didn't do t'ai chi, I would definitely be worse," she said.

"One of my aims is to do the golden rooster, where you stand on one leg," Vins said. "When I started out, I couldn't balance on two legs. Now I can almost balance on one. T'ai chi is invigorating, relaxing and wonderful for the mind. It has saved my life, because it saved my sanity."

"T'ai chi, is all about balance, patience, relaxation and staying centered," Laurenson said. "I began to realize how much pain in my body I just took for granted, and it made me uncomfortable. The change has been really dramatic in my case."

Swartz teaches classes seven days a week. New sessions, including beginners classes, will be starting in January at the North Hills, South Hills, Regent Square, Monroeville and downtown locations. To allow personal attention, class sizes are limited to about fifteen students. Call Stan Swartz at 412-421-8580 for more information.



T'ai Chi
Stan Swartz
(412) 421-8580

Call for specific class dates, times and locations.

Regent Square * South Hills * Downtown
Monroeville * North Hills * Greensburg