



# Wudang<sub>10/17</sub>

A MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER



## From Sifu Paul

The autumnal equinox has come and gone, and we are officially enjoying the fall season. Although the studio has been in our current location since 1993, this issue of Wudang marks our one-year anniversary as Twin Cities T'ai Chi with a new mission, curriculum, and leadership. Please come and help us celebrate at our Autumn Vision meeting the first Saturday in October. See details elsewhere in this issue.

Also in this issue: A special birthday celebration, a new and simple marketing idea for the studio, a must-read true story about the power of T'ai Chi by studio member Steve Silver, and more.

Have a peaceful and relaxing autumn.

## Autumn Vision Values Meeting

We will hold our community Vision Values meeting on Saturday, October 7, 3:00–5:30, at the studio. All members are welcome and encouraged to come. There will be potluck food and beverages. Sign-up sheets for food and attendance (for chairs) are posted at the studio. Let's get-together and enjoy some food and social time, catch up with old friends, meet our new members, and create the kind of studio we want to have.

If you are able to help with the event, please see me at the studio or send an email, and I will let you know how you can help. If you have any photos, videos, memorabilia, memories, or testimonials from the past year that you would be willing to share, please email us with the details or let Paul know at the studio or just bring them to the meeting.



## Jailhouse Tai Chi

by Steve Silver

My father's side of the family came from Romania at the end of the 1800s and early 1900s. Little was known of their circumstances and less was known of how they arrived. There was little in the way of documentation—photos and the like. My father's parents died long before I was born, and little was transmitted to him or his siblings. We have speculated that much of this may be due to the traumas suffered by our family and the Jewish people in general during these times. It was a community form of PTSD. As an example, prior to WWII, there were some 350,000 Jews in Romania, many of them from communities that had been there for centuries. After the war, there were only 3,000 or so left.

My grandfather fought in WWI in the American army after he had left Romania at the age

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Steve Silver does some real jailhouse Tai Chi in Romania

*Continued on page 3*



## Sang Yat Fai Lok!

On September 14, Southern Praying Mantis Kung Fu Grandmaster Gin Foon Mark turned 90 years old. A birthday celebration was held three days later at the Teppanyaki Grill in Fridley, MN. There were family, friends, and some of Master Mark's many students in attendance to help him commemorate his ninth decade and 85TH year of practicing martial arts.

Congratulations, Master Mark! We wish you many more!



## Grab Some Cards

The studio is looking forward to increasing its membership in the coming year. A simple and effective way for members to help out with this is to commit to handing out 5 to 10 of our business cards to friends, family, coworkers, people you just meet, or anyone you think might be interested in benefiting from our classes. There are cards available at the studio to hand out. Thank you.

## In Case of iPad

The studio would like to have an iPad for taking credit card transactions at the studio. Currently we have a phone that is small and difficult to use. If you've recently upgraded your iPad or just have one you'd like to donate, it would be appreciated and put to good use.

## Matching Grant Summary

The studio extends deep gratitude to all of you who contributed to our education fund matching grant campaign. We raised \$1,300 over the \$3,000 needed to secure the matching funds. Congratulations, and thank you!

## October by Now

October is here, signaling the pinnacle of autumn color here in Minnesota. It also begins the final quarter of 2017 and prompts a reminder that it's time to pay studio dues. Thank you for your payment and your membership.

## Contact Us

For timely updates, follow Twin Cities T'ai Chi Ch'uan on **Facebook**.

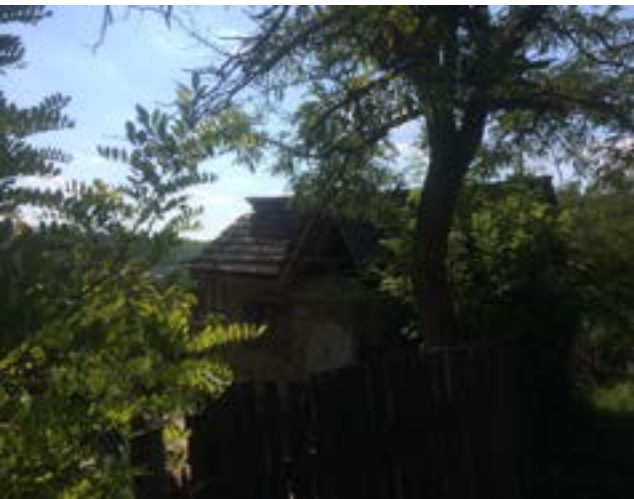
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Steve Silver and  
Grandmaster Gin Foon  
Mark at Master Mark's  
90th birthday party



of 10 to emigrate to America. My father and his brother similarly were combat veterans of WWII. My father was severely wounded in action, and his brother was a witness at the Nuremberg trials. They spoke little of their childhoods (their mother had died of cancer when they were children, and they grew up extremely impoverished) and knew little of their parents' histories. They never talked about their combat experiences. The only thing my father ever really said about the army was that it was the first time he ever got to go camping and have three regular meals a day. Otherwise, not a word of the scars that marked his body, let alone the obvious psychological scars most combat veterans experience.

Our mother's family came much earlier in nearly an intact fashion, and more was known and thus was less mysterious.

Several years ago my son, Ezra, began to look into our history.

His grandfather (with whom Ezra was extremely close) was now quite aged, and what little he remembered of his childhood was fading. His siblings had died and left little in the way of hard evidence behind. Thus began a rather extraordinary effort on Ezra's part to trace our story.

Several years ago, after visiting Israel, Ezra made his way to Romania. The following details will have relevance later in the story, but suffice it to say he missed his flight to Bucharest.

Quick-thinking lad that he is, he asked if there was another flight leaving soon to Bucharest or near there. He was advised that there were plenty of open seats on a flight to Kiev, and he would not need to buy a new ticket. He quickly took advantage of this and, upon landing in Kiev, found himself in the middle of the revolution of 2014. A lovely selfie he sent me shows him with riot police, demonstrators and tear gas all over the place.

His time in Romania was an interesting experience in many ways. Ezra's plans and hopes to find information were often met with bureaucratic inertia, latent anti-Semitism and the fact that there were no survivors to tell their stories. Even so, he was able to locate several poorly marked cemeteries in severe disrepair as well as to narrow down the town he thought our family had come from. However, he simply ran out of time and had to leave.

Over the intervening years, he began to collect material from state archives here in America, including records from Ellis Island, draft records and shipping manifests from who knows where. We began formulating a plan to meet this summer in Romania after his year of study in Israel.

*"We then took a train to a small town north of Bucharest, rented a car and began our search for cemeteries and synagogues and the like."*

Another detail that will have relevance later but is reasonable to share now is that his most recent travels had taken him to Moscow, Istanbul and Tanzania. As such, his passport was filled with visa stamps from quite a number of countries, including Israel, that sometimes have problematic relations with each other.

So, now the stage is set somewhat for the story to come. Our cousin Cory flew to Amsterdam to meet me, and then we flew on to meet Ezra in Bucharest. Based on Ezra's prior experiences, we knew that we would

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A typical structure in  
the Silver family's  
Romanian hometown



have to make our way through some of the same obstacles he had, which included not just what I discussed above but also fake rabbis, “tourist” agents who promised (for exorbitant advance fees) to take us where we wanted to go.

We began by visiting the national archives in Bucharest. The previous time when he visited the local archives, he was told to go to the national archive. Now, they were telling us that we were to go to the local archives. We insisted that they make contact with the archives office in the area we were interested in. Ezra had tried this before from the local archives but to no avail.

They agreed to electronically transmit documents that Ezra had gathered over the years to the local archives.

We then took a train to a small town north of Bucharest, rented a car and began our search for cemeteries and synagogues and the like. And little by little, we managed to find these places based on Ezra’s research. Often we had to hop fences or sneak under barbed wire to look around, as there were no current or reliable maps available—or, as in the case of one synagogue, it was for some odd reason left standing behind a new hotel that had been built without any signage to indicate its whereabouts.

*“... near the structure were a number of men ... carrying AK-47s ...”*

We did manage to sneak into several cemeteries that we had found. One of the things we did was to say the Kaddish. The Kaddish is a prayer said, amongst other times, around the cycle of death; we saw too many slaughter sites to believe that anyone had survived to say Kaddish for them. These were powerful moments that often left us in tears. Then I would do some Qigong and the long form of Tai Chi. The sense of profound depth of feeling we experienced is simply beyond my capacity to describe. It was sad, it was depress-



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A cemetery in which  
members of the Silver  
family might be  
buried

ing, it was exhilarating, and for my part, the Qigong and Tai Chi were prime movers in all of this.

But, yet, not a living Jew to be found.

So, on our second day in Barlad, we began our search for the last cemetery in that town that Ezra thought to be there. We hopped in the rental car and began to explore the area in which we thought we would find the cemetery. Cory was driving, and Ezra and I were hopping out of the car at various intervals to look at weed-strewn lots and overgrown fields. We finally entered on a road that had rather expensive and nice housing on one side of the street with a wooded area directly across that street. There was the ever-present barbed wire but no signs to indicate who the property belonged to or what it was. A couple passers-by simply shrugged “no” when asked if they knew of a Jewish burial ground in the area.

In other words, it looked as promising as any of the other places we had investigated. Ezra and I jumped out of the car and began to walk the perimeter. Even with binoculars, little could be seen.

Soon enough, Ezra slipped under the fence and was quickly deep into the brush. We walked somewhat in parallel, calling out to

each other, asking if anything could be seen. Suddenly, I did see a structure. And on and near the structure were a number of men. Dressed in combat fatigues. Carrying AK-47s. I yelled out to Ezra to get out of Dodge, so to speak, as it now appeared that we were on some form of military property. He called back, saying he had already met the soldiers and was being arrested.

I must admit that since we've never had DNA confirmation that he is my real son, the thought occurred to me to take off like a bat out of hell. After all, I wasn't the one technically trespassing, although it turned out that scanning a military base with binoculars was not exactly an approved activity. I still had my passport and wallet. But I've grown to kind of like the kid, so I went to a place the soldiers indicated in broken English and with various hand signs.

*"What occurred was astounding:  
I could not be moved."*

So, we were arrested and taken to headquarters at the military base. They had already begun interrogating Ezra in a rather aggressive but not violent fashion. They were clearly upset, and Ezra appeared quite downcast. They then began to question me, and it was clear they were trying to trip us up with trick questions, like accusing me of being in Moscow, etc., and Ezra in Nepal and Israel and Jordan. They decided to hand us over to the state police, so we all just kind of stood around looking at each other. I started making small talk with one of the soldiers who spoke good English. Certainly better than my Romanian. It was a fun talk, but the commanding officer was still glaring at us.

So, we went to the police station, and they separated us into three different cells. I was asked to empty my pockets completely—passport, cash and all. Then I was left with only a guard watching me. I happened to be wearing one of our Tai Chi shirts and pants that are good for hiking, Tai Chi and, according to the REI website, jumping fences into cemeteries.

I was a little bored, so I asked the guard if I could do some Tai Chi and Qigong. He didn't really understand, so I used the word "exercise." He nodded that it would be okay. So, I began doing our usual warm-up, some Qigong, bone work and some ocean and crane breathing. It felt just like being in the studio with all of you.

When it became time to do the long form, I noticed that a couple of other cops and soldiers were standing watching me. I stopped and said hello, and they said hello back. They opened the cell and came in. One said to me, "I do jujitsu. What are you doing?" I told him I was meditating. He then just said "Continue," so I did the form. By this time, there were well over twelve soldiers and policemen watching me, and two were even taking pictures.

When I was done, they asked if there were martial arts applications of what I was doing. I replied that this is so, but I was practicing meditation. In any event, they asked if I could show them an application, and for some reason I could only think of our rooting exercises. I explained it as best I could, and then, one by one, each soldier and policeman tested my Ward-Off rooting energy.

What occurred was astounding: I could not be moved, and I talked throughout the whole time. For those of you who don't know me, that is not my real level of skill. (I am speaking of my rooting energy, not my ability to speak all the time.) The commanding officer (the rather hard guy we first dealt with)





approached and said he thought what he had seen looked so peaceful. And he had a hard time understanding how such gentle movements had yielded the same energy to the point that I could not be uprooted. I was in such a pleasant state that I told him I didn't know either, but I did not really care. What was important was the sense of peace and serenity that I felt.

Over the next several hours, we talked and laughed while I kept doing different areas of my studies. At one point, they asked me if I would want some water. I said yes, and the next thing I know, I'm drinking soda with a lime. Later the commanding officer came over and asked me why I was wearing two rings on my hand. I told him the story of my wife, and then he suddenly hugged me and apologized for his tough questions earlier.

I was then offered coffee and pastries and just generally had a good time. We did lots of Qigong with standing meditation and crane and ocean breathing. And at different times the guards would join in and follow along. It was amazing. For me, this was a profound example of the transformative energy of the chi.

Eventually, they decided that they were done for the day. I was taken to a room by my guards and found Cory and Ezra waiting.

The plan was to take us back to our local lodgings and place us under house arrest. I felt

so good that I didn't really appreciate the looks on their faces. They asked me why I looked so happy. So, I started to tell them about what had happened and how I had just done several hours of Tai Chi and how nice these guys were and what a fantastic experience this had been. They looked even more dysphoric.

On rare occasions, my head is capable of rational thought and is more than just a hat rack. So, I decided to withhold the information about the water, the hugs and the coffee and pastries.

Instead, I asked them how they were doing, and they were both just miserable. After we were placed on house arrest, we went to the lodging restaurant. It was there that they told me that they had gotten no water or anything. They both had undergone vigorous interrogations. Again, without physical violence but lots of ugly language. Cory and Ezra had both taken very aggressive stances and started matching strong language with equally powerful language.

Oddly, while I was sorry that they had had such a rough time, I had a hard time not smiling and talking about what a great day it had been. The chi just seemed to be flowing. And I certainly didn't tell them that I was looking forward to going back and seeing those guys, getting the matter settled and moving on. They barely touched their food, and I was so hungry I ate voraciously, including finishing their meals.

*"It was real jailhouse Tai Chi, something that not even Sifu Paul can claim."*

The next morning, I woke up after a great night of sleep and did my morning practice. Ezra and Cory still looked miserable (they had not slept well at all), and I ended up eating their breakfasts as well as my own.

At the station, we were again separated. And again I begin doing the form. And again the guards joined in and brought coffee and food

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Steve encourages his  
cousin Cory to scale  
a cemetery wall





with them. We just took up where we'd left off the day before. I really felt as if I had made some new friends.

We were questioned separately again. My interrogator basically talked about what kind of music he listened to and other things.

He then gave some advice—tips on how to continue our search. The charges were dropped, and we simply had to sign statements agreeing not to enter into any more military bases. We did this and were sent on our way.

Ezra and Cory rushed out of the station, and I stayed back, talking and hugging and shaking hands with the soldiers and police.

It was simply one of the most amazing experiences I've ever had. It was real jailhouse Tai Chi, something that not even Sifu Paul can claim.

We hopped in the car, and off we went. Needless to say, within hours, we were back to jumping over fences into other cemeteries and sneaking into old synagogues. We always looked for soldiers first.

We eventually made our way to the local archives and asked to see the local archivist. We waited, and then a woman appeared with a package. Inside the package was a volume of birth certificates written with exquisite penmanship on paper that was very fragile.

We gently paged through it, and there before our scarcely believing eyes was the birth

certificate of our grandfather, as well as the birth certificates of other members of our family. And they were all from the town that Ezra's research had indicated was their town. There were tears and hugs all around. To celebrate, I went out to do some Tai Chi in the city square, and soon scores of people were stopping and watching, but I hardly noticed them.

Later that day in the same town, we visited a memorial site where some 13,000 Jews were killed in a single day. How many of them may have been family that hadn't gotten out is not known.

Again we said the Kaddish, and again I did the long form. And again people stopped and asked questions—and, remarkably, asked for forgiveness.

We then made our way to the town our family had come from, and in many ways it appeared to have changed little since my family left there over one hundred years ago. There were no paved roads, and we walked up and down the dusty paths, dreaming and imagining that we may well have been walking the same paths used by our forebears.

Before leaving, I did one more long form and felt a sense of peace and serenity and such a surge of chi as I've rarely ever felt.

To close, I wish to simply say that I truly believe that the chi was a transformative element in our experience there. I also wish to thank Sifu Paul and all of you who have been so kind and patient in helping me study this beautiful, spiritual and generous art.

Shalom, Steve "Jailhouse Tai Chi" Silver ☯



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Father and son enjoy  
a "cab" ride following  
their release

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Ezra Silver with the  
archivist and a copy  
of an old family birth  
certificate