

Music for your body.

An interview with Laura Stone in the IJssel Tribune, July 3, 2020.

Text: Merle Oude Nijhuis Photos: Marcel de Graaf

This weekend it will be 48 years ago: "It was the fourth of 1972. From the bicycle path along Lake Michigan I saw an older man doing T'ai Chi under a tree. I stopped, walked up to him and asked him, "Will you teach me this? The man sent me to Buckingham Fountain in Chicago. That's where I met Robert Cheng, the older man's teacher who became my first teacher. I never saw the man under the tree again after this meeting."

In those years, Chicago was a gathering place for hippies and all kinds of alternative lifestyles and philosophies. Laura grew up just outside the city. "As a teenager, I was looking for something. I wanted more peace and quiet and life in Chicago was busy and competitive with people talking hard and fast. I didn't feel connected to my body either."

Two years before the meeting her first teacher, she had already come into contact with T'ai Chi. "When I was seventeen, I went with a group of teenagers from my high school to the Graduate School of Education in Amherst, Massachusetts, an alternative, experimental school. One day my photography teacher who also did Yoga, showed me a book about T'ai Chi. That made such a deep impression! I remember exactly what I was wearing."

But in 1972 she made T'ai Chi her own. "As soon as I saw it, I knew. I went to Robert Cheng three to five times a week. T'ai Chi was really good for me: it gave me peace not only physically but mentally as well. And for me it was kind of dance; I was touched by the interaction, by the beautiful movements. I had no idea at that time that it was also a form of self-defense."

Laura went on to study piano and composition at the Indiana University School of Music. "I was looking for someone to continue learning T'ai Chi. There were 35,000 students, but there was no one teaching. Two weeks later, my name was on a poster, as a T'ai Chi teacher. I'd only been practicing for 15 months and... So of course I asked my teacher, "May I teach T'ai Chi?" He said, "If you're honest about what you know and what you don't know."

Laura's story moves through 48 years in the rhythm of her piano playing, along the magical forms of calligraphy, to the poetic movements she showed us in her studio. Through countless special encounters, wise lessons in cities across continents and around the world.

What Laura now practices and passes on comes from the lessons she's received since 1979 from Grandmaster William C.C. Chen. "He has given me a special way of embodying movement, relaxation and interaction. And he made the T'ai Chi applications, "boxing" and "push hands. accessible to me. I really experience those applications as the gift of T'ai Chi for us: contact, connection, moving in harmony or in dissonance, depending on the circumstances. Always awake and relaxed. Always in control. Also under pressure.

The basic training is the 'form'. It is just like music, practicing alone to get your "chops", to connect your heart with making music and then playing with others to bring this interplay to life."

An interplay with love brought her to the Netherlands. "I met my husband Fred at a workshop. After we trained together in New York, we spent two weeks together in my house in the woods of Bloomington. And we decided to get married. We were looking for a place to start a new life and that became Deventer..."

Big Sister, Grandmaster Laura, teaches T'ai Chi Ch'uan ('most exalted fist') from her studio on the Gibsonstraat, Deventer. This traditional Chinese art of movement is meditation in motion; an exercise for physical, emotional and mental health. Through relaxation, attention and harmony with gravity practitioners come into natural and powerful contact with the earth. The slow and rhythmic movements invite the joints and muscles to soften and release. Gently. Blood and air circulation as well as balance are thereby

improved. But also other forms such as the partner exercises (form applications, push hands, T'ai Chi Boxing, Long Form and Sword Form can be learned in The Studio.

This Saturday students and teachers from The Studio will meet to mark the the end of the 2019-2020 lesson year in the Worpplantsoen (Worp Park).

Exactly 48 years after Laura started T'ai Chi. This gathering begins at 10:30 am in the fresh air. So on Saturday perhaps as you're biking along the park, you'll see a beautiful older woman doing T'ai Chi under a tree.

Then go to her and ask her, "Will you teach me?"

For more information about T'ai Chi and The Studio: [@thestudiotai chi](#)

The story of Laura is so beautiful and spreads over so many years, that we unfortunately haven't been able to tell the whole story. But it's definitely worth it to read. On her website: www.thestudiotai chi.nl you can find her personal story and so much more...

Translated with DeepL Translator (free version) and editing by Laura Stone