

STUDENT PROFILE: LARRY DEMARCO

By WTS Staff

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Larry DeMarco was working for one of the largest distributors of musical equipment in the United States when he determined that stress was starting to take its toll and something needed to be done. In the position of running the marketing department, Larry had overall responsibility for all the advertising, websites, public relations, artist relations, in-store merchandising, trade shows, etc. He tells us that he had to find a way of dealing with the stress that he had not tried previously. In looking at what was available, he found that T'ai Chi seemed to meet his search for something that had an impact both physically and mentally. This reminds us of the language Laoshi uses for Water Tiger Services: ... need something that doesn't look, feel, smell, or taste like anything else that's out there ...

Although Larry holds a first-degree brown belt in Okinawan Isshinryu Karate, he had no previous experience with the internal arts when he did an internet search for T'ai Chi programs on Long Island and found Water Tiger. He observed a class and liked what he saw. He says, "Water Tiger's T'ai Chi is very spiritual and provides meditative, self-centering and health benefits." Larry tells us that such is a contrast to his three years with karate in his late-teens and early-20s. It was simply about learning to inflict harm. He says that he didn't leave because of the art's aggressiveness, "I'd gone as far as I wanted to go."

In crossing the threshold on South Ocean, Larry's goal, though lofty, can be simply stated, "Achieve greater peace." When asked how the journey is unfolding, Larry answers, "T'ai Chi has helped me s-l-o-w down. It helps me let go of things. It takes the edge off my Type-A personality." And he quickly adds, "It's what keeps me coming back."



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He admits that his view of stress reduction has evolved since he first stepped on the mat in August of 2006. His previous view was that stress was like a diseased organ. It could be easily removed and, once removed, it would be gone forever. Larry explains the change, "I now realize that reducing stress is an ongoing process." He tells us that his goal now is to continue reducing stress and cultivating a greater sense of inner peace.

Considering his search for peace, we find it interesting that one of his initial attractions to the art of T'ai Chi was that he heard it was taught with more of an emphasis on its martial aspects. He admits that he initially found Laoshi's more blended approach went against his expectations. Those expectations have changed. He explains, "I do not attend the school to learn a martial art or to become more adept at self-defense. I attend the school because it provides me with physical, mental, and spiritual benefits."

Laoshi tells us that Larry has, however, expressed a desire to join the Sunday evening T'ai Chi as a Martial Art class when the possibility is open to him. Generally, the class opens

to a student once they become comfortable with the Water Tiger School introductory form Grasp Sparrow's Tail to the Four Cardinal Directions. Laoshi hints that the Martial Class will be a topic at their next review. Larry's first complete pass through the form unfolded just before the end of 2007 and he tells us that his current short-term goal is to polish the rough edges off the form.

It seems that polishing rough edges is actually one of Larry's favorite things when it comes to time on and off the mat. "I like learning and making progress in small increments," he says. "I also like not being tied to a timetable of performance expectations or goals; and, recognizing that progress is not always a straight line." He also throws in the fact that he **really** (his emphasis) enjoys the final posture, Rock Back & Forth to Remove Stagnation, from Water Tiger's T'ai Chi Qigong Breathing Set.

Aside from maintaining a regular practice schedule, Larry has also found the philosophy of T'ai Chi permeating his everyday life. Through parables, discussions on and off the mat, etc., part of Laoshi's blended approach includes a component of Taoist philosophy. That aspect of the Water Tiger experience peaked Larry's interest and he is taking the time to deepen his understanding of the philosophy underlying the art we study. From Larry's perspective, "Our modern American society revolves around creating needs that can never be satisfied. Children, as young as two and three years old, can recognize brands." He concludes, "There simply has to be something else – something more."

Larry is also addressing the search for something more than the use of size and strength in Push Hands. His exploration includes, "Listen. Observe. Ask."

Part of his search has included a series of workshops in I Liq Ch'uan (Mental Physical Fist) with Sifu Sam F. S. Chin. The art is based on T'ai Chi principles. He tells us that he especially enjoys the I Liq Ch'uan two-person play of Sticky Hands and Spinning Hands. He also says that he has found the 18+ hours he's spent over the past few months to be very helpful, "It has enhanced my awareness of posture, balance, and root, which has benefited me in my study of T'ai Chi at Water Tiger School."

As Water Tiger School and Sifu Sam Chin has helped him, Larry is helping others. He is currently teaching at Five Towns College in Dix Hills. According to Larry, it's a combination of rewards and challenges. He explains that the rewards come from "cutting through the chasm that can separate generations" and reaching a student; and the challenges lead to a desire to "run from the room screaming expletives."

And so goes the experience for Larry and all his fellow students at Water Tiger. There are times when it feels as if we are crossing chasms ... and there are times that we feel like running off the mat screaming expletives.



Larry (center) is searching for something more than the use of size and strength in Push Hands.

