

STUDENT PROFILE: PAT MIZZI

By WTS Staff

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Pat Mizzi of Sayville just cannot seem to get enough of the martial arts. She holds the rank of Shodan or first-level black-belt in JiuJitsu, and spends a great deal of time on the mat at 29 South Ocean. She is there not only during the Friday and Tuesday T'ai Chi classes, but also during classes offered by Suffolk Aikikai.

She tells us that her contact with the arts began in 1997 when she walked in the door of a classical JiuJitsu school. According to Pat, she was hooked by the fifth lesson. In her words, "I may have been enthusiastic but I was a fairly slow learner." She continues, "Luckily, my initial teacher, Rick Mescallado, was both patient and talented." Pat is also pleased to report that she found the other students supportive and that she discovered persistent practice works.

She received her Shodan rank in December 2002. As many in the martial arts discover, Pat realized that it was time for the real work to begin. "I had a basic command of my physical abilities and a solid working knowledge of some of the ways that people could be moved, stopped, thrown, etc.," she tells us. Along with this command and knowledge was awareness, "I knew that there was more to know and was eager to find it."

Pat says that she also knew that she didn't have the strength or speed to truly excel in the more external elements of JiuJitsu and, regardless, that she didn't "have sufficient willingness to kick or punch someone's 'lights out.'" She knew it was time to explore the internal arts.

It was a combination of these factors, timeliness, and her mother, that brought her to T'ai Chi and Aikido.

Before coming to Water Tiger School, Pat had some previous experience with T'ai Chi Ruler, which is an aspect of the art played with a special tool. The *chih* (ruler) is held between the palms on the *Lao Gong* points while the movements are performed. She tells us that her T'ai Chi Ruler practice was of great assistance during her personal celebration for the Millennium. Although we might argue with her calling it a celebration, she ran in the October 2000 Dublin Marathon. She says the Ruler's *Cloud Hands* helped her complete her training, "Whenever I had to stop and catch my breath I waved those clouds and felt refreshed."

Her experience with T'ai Chi Ruler helped establish T'ai Chi Ch'uan on Pat's radar. She explains she was attracted to the solo aspect of T'ai Chi, "All the other forms of martial arts that I was involved with really needed a partner." This was not enough, however, to create the final push. That was done by her mother, Sibyl. At about the same time she was thinking that her mother might benefit from a T'ai Chi class, her mother asked her if she could find one for her. Within two weeks and unaware of the search, an acquaintance showed up at Pat's door with a flyer for *T'ai Chi in the Park*. She recalls, "So I went, liked what I saw, and found that there was a convenient class." Subsequently, both daughter and mother joined the Friday Water Tiger class in June 2003.

Because of her cross-enrollment between the Friday afternoon *T'ai Chi & Qigong for Older Adults Class* and the Tuesday morning *Beginning & Intermediate T'ai Chi Class*, Pat plays a number of T'ai Chi and Qigong forms. The T'ai Chi list includes *Wave, Part & Grasp to the Four Cardinal Directions, Grasp Sparrow's Tail, and Dragon Strikes*. She has recently begun *The 13 Postures*. The Qigong list includes the *Standing Eight Pieces of Brocade, the Primary and Intermediate Fragrance Qigong sets, T'ai Chi Qigong Warming-Up, and Awakening the Qi*.



Pat Mizzi (L) just cannot seem to get enough of the martial arts.

Although the range of her experience at Water Tiger is broad, it is the breadth of her overall martial experience that we find fascinating. According to Laoshi, "I am always glad to hear from Pat how her T'ai Chi and Qigong play has had a positive influence on her Aikido or her JiuJitsu; or how her Aikido and JiuJitsu have had a positive influence on her T'ai Chi."

Pat provides some details:

In Aikido, one knows that one is supposed to be relaxed and moving the energy from the center. One gets so caught up in the moves and the partner work that it's hard to remember those principles. In T'ai Chi, it becomes possible to achieve the principles more often. Aikido and JiuJitsu benefit T'ai Chi because all those stances are the way they are for reasons. When a student has a visceral understanding of the consequences of a stance or move it's easier to remember. When I turn up in JiuJitsu classes these days people tend to fall down really easily when I apply the techniques I have been learning and practicing in T'ai Chi and Aikido.

Her time in the studio has also provided surprises for her. As Laoshi often cites that it may take five or ten years to "feel" the Qi and 15 to 20 years to "believe" that it is Qi that we are feeling, Pat is continually startled that she is noticing, feeling, cultivating, and / or using Qi. She is also pleased to report that she has long known that meditation was a **good thing** (her emphasis — we agree). But, she admits, that it has been her time at Water Tiger that has truly taught her not only the mechanics of meditation, but the true value as well. She says, "I like it and I miss it when I don't do it."

Although there may still be some challenges with seeking quick solutions and instant gratification, Pat tells us that she is able to "sit on [her] impatience" by reminding herself that all the things that have brought her happiness have unfolded with time. She happily shares that she has discovered that relaxing and letting the Qi flow is "useful in choral singing, driving cars, lifting kids and groceries, as well as making the T'ai Chi forms look beautiful and the Aikido forms effective." She continues, "I am less likely to stress under pressure and more likely to see a way out of the difficulty. I get angry a little less often and sweat the small stuff less. My reflexes are much faster than they used to be and there aren't too many other women of my age and size who can fall and roll — forwards or backwards — without a second thought."

As she rolls through life, Pat keeps a constant eye on the goal of sharing her positive experiences with others. She tells us that she often recommends T'ai Chi and Qigong to her fellow Aikido and JiuJitsu artists, as well as friends and family members. We remember a secondary mother / daughter teaming at an installment of Water Tiger's *T'ai Chi Sunday* 2005 series in Sayville when Pat's youngest daughter, Josephine MacMenamin, joined her in the grove at *The Common Ground*. Although the experience did not yield the same long-term result as the Pat and Sibyl combination, we are quite happy that Pat continues to sing the praises of the arts that make Water Tiger possible.



A mother / daughter teaming at Water Tiger's *T'ai Chi Sunday* 2005 series with Pat and her youngest daughter, Josephine MacMenamin (nearest L).

