

## STUDENT PROFILE: SIBYL MIZZI

By WTS Staff

Originally Published September 2007

---

The exactness of Sibyl Mizzi's personal point-of-view is evident even as she talks about her approach to preparing for her profile. "I read all the previous pieces online and they were all the same" she says. "None of them told me anything about any of the people." She insists that the writing was "adequate," but that she would know more about someone if they walked up to her on the street, said "hello," and walked away. We hope we do better by her.

It seems of no surprise that Sibyl came to the art of T'ai Chi Ch'uan on nothing more than a dare. Some might recall the Mizzis' story from the profile of her daughter, Pat, in the December 2006 newsletter:

[The final push toward joining Water Tiger] was done by her mother, Sibyl. At about the same time [Pat] 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.

Sibyl adds her perspective to the tale by telling us that Pat has always encouraged her to join her in the martial arts. She admits her asking Pat to find a class was, more or less, a way to send her daughter on a wild goose chase and was quite surprised when Pat showed up at her door with the news. She was good to her word and joined her daughter on the mat. "I knew nothing about T'ai Chi or any martial art other than what I had seen in the movies," she says. "And I really wasn't very interested." She adds that she did however embrace the idea of getting some exercise.



**Sibyl Mizzi (R) came to Water Tiger School, more or less, on a dare with her daughter, Pat (C).**

She was not very taken by the Water Tiger environment and found her sense of competition created some frustration in the learning process. According to Sibyl, "I was totally amazed and somewhat annoyed at the ritual of the bows and by Laoshi's strict rules of not coming in late for class." As is the case with all Water Tiger classes, the Friday afternoon class is of mixed-level. It was this aspect of the class that led to the frustration. She explains, "I felt that I had to learn everything as quickly as possible because I had to catch up with the class." Since, as with everyone, the movement did not come easily or quickly for Sibyl, she also felt very awkward. With rituals, rules, and challenges, she didn't really enjoy the class and she dropped the program by the end of her first year on the mat.

Another contributing factor to Sibyl's decision to drop was her husband's failing health. Charles Mizzi died at the end of 2005. After a few months, Pat again approached her mother about T'ai Chi, and Sibyl agreed to give it a second try. She tells us that she came back to the program embracing the idea of improving and not of trying to catch up. She

says that she also returned with a deeper understanding of the historic foundation for the courtesies of timeliness and bowing and, though she does not agree with them, she has agreed to follow them.

Sibyl also agrees that T'ai Chi and Qigong have had a positive influence on her life. She believes that they have helped her to become more physically fit and more aware of her physical potential. In her words, "Most of my life I have concentrated on my mental development rather than any physical development; and I now find that I am able to do small physical things that I couldn't do earlier." She tells us that she thinks T'ai Chi has been very important in fostering her new found ability to recover if she takes a spill and to have more physical stamina. She was amazed this summer when she took her annual trek to Malta and was better able to handle the three flights of stairs in her condo. She explains, "This summer I left my apartment unafraid of having to come back to the stairs and I went out two or three times a day rather than the once a day as I had done in previous years."



Handling the stairs wasn't the only new thing about her trip to Malta this year. Sibyl says she was determined to find a T'ai Chi class. Her search was successful and she attended three classes in Valetta. "The forms were the same," she says, "but they expected us to learn a new posture every class." She says that added to the difficulty of a new posture every week was the fact the class was on the third floor of a 16<sup>th</sup> century building with no air conditioning. The day of her last class, the temperature in Valletta was 106°. She adds, "We have it easy."

**Sibyl was amazed this summer when she took her annual trek to Malta and was better able to handle the three flights of stairs in her condo.**

Sibyl doesn't necessarily see the actual form play at Water Tiger as being easy. She says that although she likes learning the forms, she finds cultivating the ability to do *Cloud Hands & Horses Mane to the Four Cardinal Directions* very challenging. But she now doesn't find the challenge as frustrating as she once did, "I enjoy doing it, I want to do it perfectly, and I'm willing to work on it until I get it right." She adds that she also looks forward to learning additional postures and forms in the future. Aside from connecting with form play, she has recently begun to develop an interest in possibly pursuing an understanding of Taoism. She says that she saw an announcement on PBS that Dr. Wayne W. Dwyer has a series soon to air that addresses Taoism. The program is "Change Your Thoughts – Change Your Life" and is based on Dr. Dwyer's recently published book by the same title. Sibyl tells us, "I respect him and if he's doing it, there must be something to it."

Since her return to Water Tiger in February of 2006, she has obviously also found that there must be something to the arts of T'ai Chi and Qigong. Bringing her thoughts to a close, Sibyl reveals that many of her friends have taken up classes in different programs and confesses, "T'ai Chi has become part of my life, I am very proud to be doing it, and I look forward to doing so for many years."

