

STUDENT PROFILE: NICK SUCARATO

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If there's something that can be called a backdoor way to find Water Tiger School, the way in which Nick Sucarato of Medford found us is probably it. He tells us that last summer he had noticed Suffolk Aikikai, where he had trained for a few months around a decade ago, had relocated to Medford. He was intrigued and found the dojo's website, where he saw SA's listing for Water Tiger School.

Even before this, his interest in T'ai Chi had been piqued. A motorcycle accident in April 2017 left him with lower back pain that initially kept him from adding to his 21 years of martial arts training. He had decided he needed to get back to something — with a little prodding by his cardiologist — and recognized he didn't want to go back to a sparring art if he couldn't give it his all. He saw T'ai Chi as a way to train in a martial art without all the external demands of his previous arts.

Nick's training in the martial arts began in 1994. To support his five-year-old daughter when he enrolled her at ATA Taekwondo in Shirley, and, to pursue an interest in the arts that had been cultivated by watching martial arts movies, he joined the program as well. His daughter grew disinterested after eight months; he stuck with it and continued his TKD training for seven years. By 2001, his experience led him to believe he'd be better served looking for an art that focused on a broader approach to self-defense, i.e., not only what to do physically, but also what to do to avoid having to get physical. He found such a program at the Tai-Zen Academy of Self-Defense in Selden and began training there in karate and ju-jitsu while still in the TKD program. He soon dropped TKD and stayed with Tai-Zen for seven years. He decided he needed a break in 2008; and, a year later, a friend convinced Nick to join him at the Shintai School of Self Defense, a sparring-heavy program located in the Farmingville residence of the instructor, Shihan Vinny Miraglia. He was there for close to another seven years — we see a seven-year pattern and we hope Nick lasts beyond 2025 at Water Tiger!

His first face-to-face contact with our program was not at his first time in the studio on September 20th last year. Nick had seen the listing for *T'ai Chi in the Park* on our website and stopped by the gathering on August 25th, while McElroy Laoshi was on holiday. He observed while Mark Williams and Michael Kandel led the morning's focus on the *Tiger Frolics* from the *Five Animal Frolics (Wu Qin Xi)*. When the three chatted, Mark demonstrated *Grasp Sparrow's Tail to the Four Cardinal Directions* and, according to Michael, gave an "excellent sales pitch". It



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must've been, as Nick reached out to Laoshi a few days later via email and joined us on the mat within a month!

As Nick talks about his experience at Water Tiger, it seems he's a little surprised that he's actually coming to enjoy the art. This surprise is rooted in his many years playing hard styles. He recognizes that there are always differences between the various arts and that each art requires emptying one's cup and returning to being a beginner. "It's an attitude many find challenging," says Laoshi. "Some even refuse; so, it's very good that Nick comes to us embracing the idea of starting with a clean slate."

Nick is, however, starting to place some marks on his slate as he experiences the calm and relaxation cultivated by the warm-ups, floor exercises, *Push Hands* play, and *Breathing Set*. He's hoping that his play will eventually help with his lower back pain and blood pressure regulation; but, he has already found that two other things on his checklist, balance and movement control, have already improved. As he's just shy of his first introduction to *Ward-Off*, he has yet to judge the martial side of T'ai Chi.



Nick (L) experiencing the calm and relaxation cultivated by playing *Symbiotic Push Hands*. His partner in this exchange is Mark Williams.

The play on the mat isn't the only thing Nick finds calming and relaxing, he also describes the class environment that way and observes: "Laoshi takes a lot of time explaining, demonstrating, and correcting. It also appears that he is taking notes on each student's progress."

One of the challenges Nick mentions in his own progress is actually rooted in what he sees is the beauty of the flowing movement in the art. The play of the senior students when he's on the mat can draw his focus from what he should be doing himself. So, it's not surprising to us he is looking forward to learning the forms. He also recognizes something that many who have training in previous arts fail to see: "I believe it will complement and enhance my former training."

We hope his full life outside the studio doesn't interfere with his goals. And, he is busy. We'll let him tell how busy he is:

I enjoy going to the gym — I've had a lifetime membership since the 70s. I ride motorcycles and belong to a riding group. I love Miatas and belong to the Big Apple Miata club. I'm married and have two daughters and three grandchildren — two boys and one girl. I enjoy life and love to have fun.

As we worked with Nick to put together the profile, he shared a bit of wisdom from a previous instructor that he still carries with him — and that we embrace fully. We'll close with it: "A person who doesn't want to fight should know it the best."

