

The US Summer Training, held at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, concluded on July 16 after a week characterized by what we have come to expect from Tai Chi Foundation residential events: a spirit of fun, goodwill and cooperation pervading the work of teaching and learning tai chi.

There's always an underlying seriousness of purpose at the trainings. Everyone is there to learn, to progress in their tai chi and embodiment of principle, to further their self-understanding. But the seriousness is not heavy. The lightheartedness of a loving community, happy to be together, happy to welcome newcomers and share this art that we love, prevails. It bubbles up as humor and laughter punctuate the classes.

Mealtimes resonate with fellowship and camaraderie as we talk and laugh together. It makes working hard fun and rewarding. Many of the newcomers to camp commented about the welcoming spirit and friendliness they experienced. Many said that they plan to attend again next year. One participant rued that we could not stay for another week!

We were lucky with the weather, which offered up perfect summer days with bright sun and low humidity. Had we stayed into that wished-for second week, we would have had hot sticky days in the 90s with high humidity. So we were glad for what we got!



The Smith College campus is lovely, green and shady. The horticulture/ botany department takes care of the campus trees, and magnificent specimens abound. For the tree-lovers among us, the enormous dawn redwood, ginkgo, copper beech and river birch within a short walk of the dorm were breathtaking. A nearby greenhouse full of exotic plants, a rock garden, a Japanese garden and a miniature conifer garden provided further viewing pleasure. Just a random walk around campus was a delight, as were the boutiques and coffee shops in nearby Northampton, a short walk from campus.



We had 63 participants, divided fairly evenly between apprentice teachers and staff, and those new or newer to tai chi study. Morning rounds outdoors and pre-breakfast push-hands practice began our days. Classes offered were B1, B2, Fundamentals,

Internalizing the Form and Sensing Hands, Advanced Sensing Hands practice, Hall of Happiness, daily meditation, Tai Chi Sword and fencing practice, and a qigong class for all levels. We also had a B1 Apprenticeship.

Teaching staff included Margaret Matsumoto, Margaret Olmsted, Greg Woodson, George Kormendi, Debby Swayne, Kate Mansfield, Bob Etherington, Vanessa Costigan, Lee Felton, Tina Curran, Anne Smyers, Vicki Shackford, Linda Bisberg, Anna Teeples and Clara Berman. It's truly a team effort to have nine different classes happening each day and running smoothly!

Welcome to our new apprentices Laura Harper from Nashville, Tennessee; Doug Hewell from Olympia, Washington; and a renewed welcome to John Parker from Chicago, Illinois! John chose to repeat the apprenticeship this summer after having first taken it right before the pandemic made in-person teaching untenable.

Our evenings were enriched by: a presentation on the five elements by Kate Mansfield, an anatomy talk and demonstration by Bob Etherington, a showing of the movie “The Professor’s Journey West” featuring many of Professor Cheng’s senior students from Shr-Jung in the 1970s remembering him and his teaching, a moving and informative talk by Edna Brandt on her experience using tai chi to recover from a health crisis, and a talent night showcasing comedy, magic tricks, music and theater by new and old participants alike. We wrapped up with a playful party on our final evening in Northampton.



However, Covid inserted itself into our experience and we adapted as best we could. We had required proof of vaccination and a PCR test from all participants, taken within 48 hours prior to leaving home for travel to camp. We wore masks in the classrooms and while in public indoor areas. After four days at camp we suggested that everyone take a test, and two people tested positive. Both left camp that day, as did three others who felt it in their best interest to also leave right away.

We were able to arrange for outdoor seating at mealtimes for the remainder of the week, enjoyed by many of our campers, to lessen the close contact with others both within and outside our group. Upon arriving home, we heard from three more people that they had tested positive. Fortunately, no-one has become seriously ill. This was the sobering reality of gathering while Covid still circulates amongst us. If we face a similar situation next year,

we will have learned from this year's experience how we can further safeguard ourselves and others.

Overall, we left with a renewed dedication to tai chi, light hearts, and anticipation of further enjoyment while doing tai chi together.



Photos by: Anne Smyers, Anna Teeples, Clara Berman, and Steve Shulman

Anne Smyers has been a student and an instructor with the School of Tai Chi Chuan, later to become the Tai Chi Foundation, since 1976. She lives in Reston, Virginia where she currently teaches older adults concerned about maintaining their balance and ease of movement. Her other interests are working as a fiber artist, and her new grandson, who is the most wonderful baby ever.