

## **My Journey with Patrick and Hawaiian Swimming**

by Vicki Shackford

I first met Patrick Watson in San Francisco in 1965 when I was 12 years old. He was head lifeguard at Garfield Pool, my neighborhood pool, and he became my swim coach from grades 7 through 12. Patrick was known by everyone as “Pat” in those days.

Our swim team met daily during the school year, and twice a day in the summer. Besides taking us to swim meets, Patrick taught us life-saving skills and Red Cross swim strokes (with lots of drills) and built our stamina (hundreds of pushups and sit-ups on the pool deck). When Patrick was away, Eddie Ukini (a native Hawaiian) coached us at other pools.

Patrick sent me to study with Charlie Sava, who was a coach for many Olympic swimmers, to get certified to teach swimming. Charlie was a strict teacher, and a little gruff. Patrick and Eddie Ukini were also strict, though Patrick was always supportive. I started teaching younger kids under the Red Cross swim program, and I also taught some private lessons through Patrick.

In the summer, Patrick would sometimes take our swim team to Fleishhacker Pool at the beach: a huge ocean-water pool, 50x300 meters in size. The water was heated to only 72 degrees F—cold! One of Patrick’s drills was to have the swim team run on the beach. He also had us do kicking and swimming drills down the long length of the pool. Fleishhacker Pool was where Eddie Ukini primarily worked, and he was one of the people who taught Hawaiian swimming to Patrick.

I remember Patrick doing endless Repulse Monkeys and Cloud Hands on the deck at Fleishhacker and Garfield Pools. The kids thought he was a bit crazy! Patrick would sometimes put me into a 70/30 tai chi position to hold, with no movement. At the end of practice, Patrick would sometimes pick up a kid and toss them into the water. He always asked, “Did you feel my hands?” (a high-level goal in tai chi sensing hands). The kids quickly learned the correct answer: “No, I did not feel your hands,”—and then added “Do it again!!”

Patrick had an opportunity to teach Hawaiian swimming to the tai chi school when Hampshire College, the site for the 1979 TCF summer training, had an indoor swimming pool on campus. Hawaiian swimming, like tai chi, stresses fully relaxing in the water and kicking from the whole body, with the addition of breathing.

I received a letter from John Shackford inviting me to the Hampshire training (three weeks long in those days!) to assist Patrick in teaching the early morning swim classes. When I arrived at the training, Patrick told me, "I am teaching Hawaiian swimming." This was the first time I had heard of it. Later I asked Patrick, "How come you never mentioned this before?" Patrick replied, "Because you were too competitive."

Patrick trained me in Hawaiian swimming at the end of each swim session at Hampshire. The rest of the day, I took my first tai chi classes. I really liked the feeling I got after doing tai chi, the same good feeling I have after swimming. At the end of that first summer training, I told Patrick I wanted to learn more tai chi and learn how to teach it, and I eventually became a tai chi teaching apprentice.

I helped Patrick teach Hawaiian swimming at every summer training after that first one. He focused on the legs to propel you forward instead of the arms, which was the conventional swim method at the time. He insisted on a strong kick. He had the advanced swimmers practice flutter kick in the vertical in deep water, and he also had them swim in circles to build stamina and endurance.

Since Patrick died, I have continued to develop Hawaiian swimming. I use many techniques to help students enjoy and be comfortable in the water. To enhance Patrick's focus on the legs and to make kicking more effective, I use noodles and short fins on feet. Fins really help children to learn, and they help all swimmers to feel the water and open their ankles, so they can kick in a relaxed manner. Another part of the essence of Hawaiian swimming that Patrick taught us is to roll in the water for breath and arm recovery. I teach my students to have good alignment in the water and to roll from the dantian. Comfortable breathing is vital, so breathing drills (blowing bubbles!) are a fun part of lessons.

To broaden my knowledge, I have studied with swim coach Terry Laughlin, founder of the "Total Immersion" swimming technique. In this technique, the overall goal is an effortless stroke, which makes swimming feel energizing and relaxing simultaneously.

Every summer, I train tai chi students and teachers in Europe and the US to help keep our Hawaiian swimming legacy alive. Swimming is a refreshing and fun part of the summer training curriculum.

For me, Hawaiian swimming and tai chi combine as one and have been very important factors in my life. They make me feel better about myself and life. They transformed me.