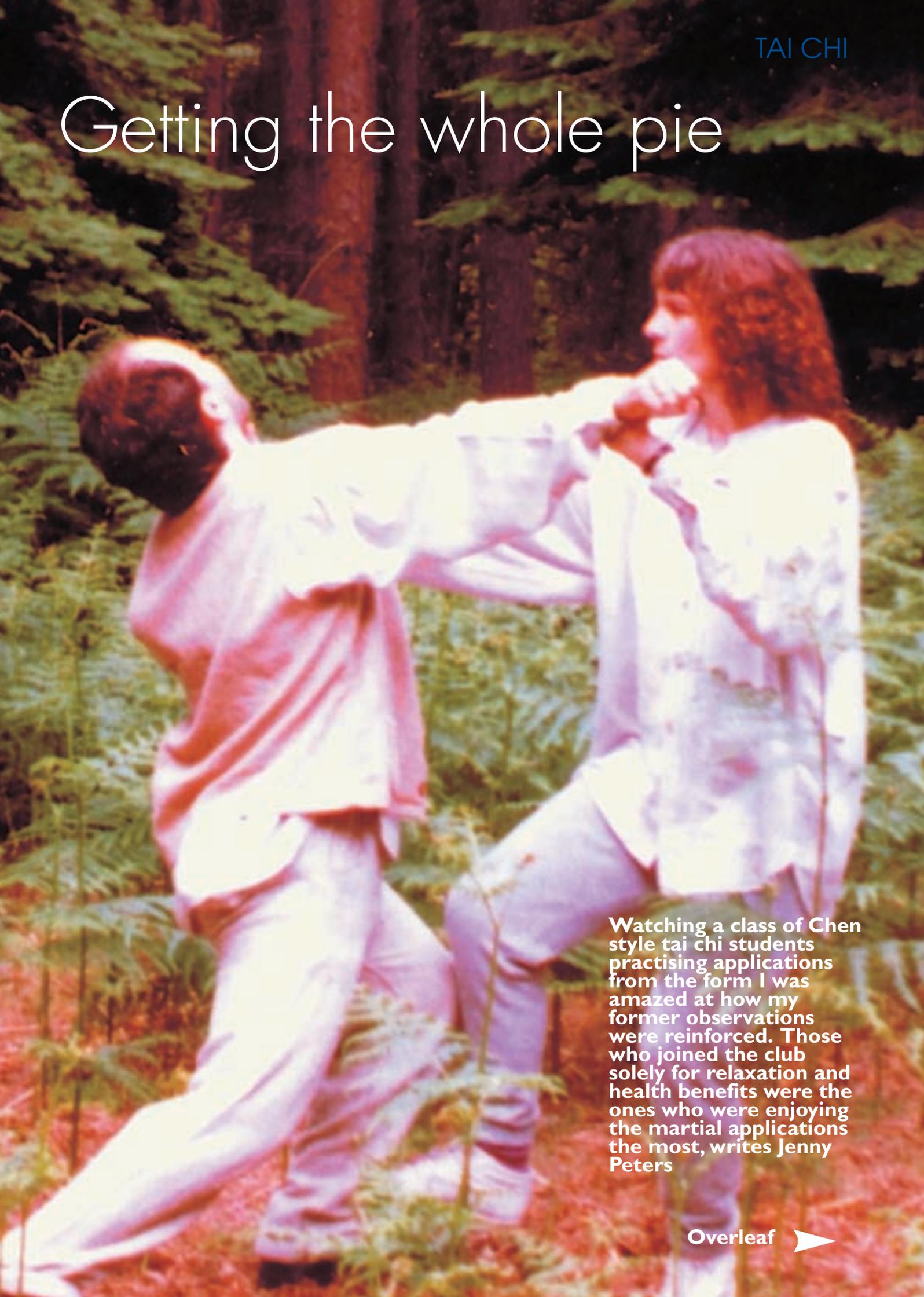


# Getting the whole pie

A photograph of a man and a woman in white Tai Chi uniforms practicing in a forest. The man is on the left, leaning forward with his arms extended towards the woman on the right. The woman is in a defensive or blocking posture. The background is a dense forest with tall trees and green foliage.

Watching a class of Chen style tai chi students practising applications from the form I was amazed at how my former observations were reinforced. Those who joined the club solely for relaxation and health benefits were the ones who were enjoying the martial applications the most, writes Jenny Peters



Jenny Peters

Why is this? Have they suddenly developed an aggressive streak? or is it, as I think, that whilst training with others, they have come to realise the principles of tai chi really work. What I mean is that the self-defence aspects are accessible to most people regardless of age, sex or brawn. Unlike many external martial arts, tai chi, if taught correctly by a reputable teacher, will not cause joint damage or broken bones and can even alleviate existing injuries. Due to its non competitive nature, the ever present ego can also stay intact. The practice of push hands is based around the golden rule of invest in loss and therefore even if you do decide to enter a competition, and don't win the gold medal, but take back the learned experience, are you not still a winner?

Moving to teach

There should be no pressure put on you to perform forms in front of the class, and no rainbow of belts to work your way through. If you decide to become a teacher yourself, with the permission of your own instructor, then that's a different matter and entirely of your own choice. This concept makes tai chi a very social thing where

students help one another and pass on their own personal pearls of wisdom. There is no rush, learn at your own pace and enjoy the experience.

Having said that, make no mistake, tai chi is not being taught properly, if it is not being taught as a complete art, both martial and meditative. There are self proclaimed sifu's who devalue the martial aspect and promote it purely as a healthy exercise. Could this be because stress relief and health promotion can be very profitable? Don't get me wrong, I am not opposed to this area of tai chi but if it is to be passed on in such a clipped fashion will this not eventually cause it in it's entirety to be lost? To truly teach and practise this art it must embody yin and yang, soft and hard; to teach one without the other is like having steak and kidney pie without the kidneys. Why call it tai chi chuan (supreme ultimate fist) why not call it qigong (breath exercise). A martial understanding is necessary to understand correct posture; you are being robbed, if you paid for a whole pie and only got half, wouldn't you demand a refund? Bear in mind you need the relaxation/meditation to develop internal power which in turn strengthens both your health and fighting skills (you need to master the fighting skills to stop people laughing at you when you're moving so slowly.)

Tai chi confidence

I myself looked at karate, aikido and wing chun, and yes all of them had something to offer. Unfortunately when push came to shove (no pun intended), if my opponent was bigger and stronger than me, in a true attack I felt I'd lose. Tai chi chuan was the one that gave me the confidence to believe, if I used the principles correctly and developed my natural sensitivity, I would at least stand a chance. I felt I could avoid serious injury and equal if not overpower my seemingly stronger attacker. This is what any martial art's self-defence aspect is all about, having faith that it will work for you.

At a seminar, held by master Nigel Sutton, on tai chi chuan for self-defence, the first portion was not spent learning techniques as you might expect, but working on the mind. We discussed and practised relaxation, meditation and the mental attitude necessary to develop the required state of mind.

The mental aspect of self-defence is the most important. Research over the last few years, in the criminal assault area, has shown time and time again that the person attacked usually has a victim's demeanor and body language.



I think we all have this within us – luckily, the majority of us keep it there, and outwardly remain confident when out and about. This does not mean we swagger around the streets or a night-club with the words “fancy your chance mate?” emblazoned on our chest, in fact, the majority of people never think about the danger they may be in but they are sub-consciously alert and keep good eye contact with anyone within their range; this is their first line of protection, and as a general rule, they do not attract the unwanted attention of a would-be attacker.

Body language

The victim's body language, in contrast, exudes nervousness, with low eye contact, unease and poor posture, all highlighting his or her vulnerability to the professional criminal, 'the easy mark'.

So your first and most important self-defence, is your mental attitude. The ability to stay relaxed mentally and physically is the basis of most martial arts and definitely tai chi. The problem for westerners is that tai chi chuan is not an instant self defence system, it takes years for most students to attain the level of relaxation needed to adequately defend themselves. So, in this day and age of action movies and flash external martial arts tai chi has largely lost its chuan and become widely practised as the slow Chinese calisthenic exercise that gets constant media attention.

Half the alphabet

If that's all people want, fair enough, but why not try yoga; do they really not want the whole art or are they just unaware of its existence? If you only learned half the alphabet at school, what happens when you need to use all the letters? It is really quite similar to just practicing tai chi for health and relaxation. I think this is what most serious students find out during the first few months of their course and then come to realise they want more. Some have tried other external arts and because of injury or permanent damage to joints cannot practise them any longer. They come to my husband's classes and are encouraged to find they can continue with a martial art as soft and yielding as tai chi. The mechanics of the art alone are usually enough to ease the injury.

Every student of tai chi chuan should be offered the chance to learn the whole. Their teacher gives them an

instrument whether the student plays heavy rock or a lullaby is their choice, but at least they should know there is a choice.

It never ceases to amaze me when people phone, inquiring about lessons, the high percentage that know absolutely nothing about the art. It's perfectly understandable that little is known about the martial aspect for unless you read the martial art periodicals, the only exposure it attracts on TV and your local press, is its supposed health improving properties. It is constantly left to the minority to wave the banner.

Find a teacher

In my opinion, the first point we should all start at, before even searching out a reputable teacher, is read a good book; we are all influenced by our first impression. I myself began the quest for enlightenment after constantly seeing the words tai chi crop up in night school brochures. (I hasten to add, this is not the best place to begin your classes, most students you meet there will have taken cookery the preceding term and probably flower arranging the next, not really the stuff serious quests are made of.) I booked out *Tai Chi* by Danny Conner from the local library, sat on my patio on a summer's evening and read the whole book, unable to put it down. I turned to my husband (who at that time, after trying Kung Fu, Akido etc, was still martially unfulfilled) and told him to read it. An hour later he turned to me and said: “This is the one for me.” Thank goodness we chose the right book the first time or our tai chi trail could have been vastly different. Even then it took about six months of searching to find a teacher who fulfilled the criteria he was looking for. We were lucky, we knew at the beginning there was a whole pie to be found.



Jenny Peters is an instructor for Kai Ming Association for tai chi chuan. The club website is [www.kaiming.co.uk](http://www.kaiming.co.uk) Jenny is a nurse (SRN) in the NHS, working in hospitals for 18 years and GP practice for 25 years. She found she really enjoyed to write and has written for *Fighting Arts, Martial Arts Illustrated, Combat* magazine and others. She has trained in tai chi and qigong for around 30 years. Not always by choice but necessity; otherwise she would never see her husband Mark Peters.



The most informative easy read, for a complete novice, I have come across is *An Introduction to Tai Chi* by Alan Peck. It gives a brief overview of different styles of the art as well as a list of recommended instructors (of which I am glad to say my husband is one). From there it is a steady climb up the ever-increasing pile of hundreds of available titles; my personal favourites are *There Are No Secrets* by Wolfe Lowenthal and *Tai Chi Supreme Ultimate* by Lawrence Galante. Steer clear of any books stating that their's is the only true style or that drift off into the obscure (I'd be more specific but for fear of reprisals). My husband can get most titles and if not, he can recommend other sources.



**Taiji Qigong Shibashi** (18 movements) is one of the most popular Qigong forms today. Very popular in the UK, its simplicity make it easy to learn and practice. Surprisingly, very little information about its creator, Professor Lin Housheng, or the depth of the system is available in the west. Since 2012 Prof. Lin tasked his indoor student, Fabrice Piché to share the details of his system. Its relationship to the Yang style of tai chi chuan is well known but its link to the Shaolin Neijin Zhan Zhuang system is not. Often used as a warm up practice to tai chi chuan, the depth of its medical qigong is lost. Used in the hospitals affiliated with the Shanghai University of Chinese Medicine and its Qigong Research Institute, of which Prof. Lin was the director, the details that make it efficient were well studied and refined since its creation in 1979.



**Starting September 18-19, 2021 (4pm to 8pm) Fabrice will lead a series of 10 seminars on set one, the most popular form of the system. This 100h certificate programme is the entry level for the 300h Qigong Teacher Diploma offered by qigong18.com and one of the only two teacher training programmes recognized by Professor Lin Housheng. To register go to: [www.qigong18.as.me/QTT20/](http://www.qigong18.as.me/QTT20/)**