

STUDENT PROFILE: MARGARET BERMEL; IN HER OWN WORDS

By Margaret Bermel

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In 1993, my house was burglarized. Aside from the loss of jewelry having great sentimental value, there was also the trauma of the intrusion, as my sense of security in my own home was shaken. The psychological effect played on my mind: "What would have happened if I was home at the time, and unable to defend myself?" I decided to take action. We installed an alarm system; we adopted a Black Labrador Retriever; and I enrolled in a self-defense course.

The alarm system helped to restore my sense of security, Roxanne became a wonderful friend who defended the house from any crows entering the yard, and the self-defense course resulted in a 1st Degree Black Belt in Shaolin Kempo Karate nine years later.

During that same time period, I also developed an interest in energy work through Healing Touch. I spent several weekends taking courses and I became a Level 2 Healing Touch practitioner ["Healing Touch is an energy therapy in which practitioners consciously use their hands in a heart-centered and intentional way to support and facilitate physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health." (From the Healing Touch website www.HealingTouchProgram.com) – ed.]

I spent one winter learning a Long Form of T'ai Chi. I loved the flow of energy. Between Karate, Healing Touch, and T'ai Chi, I was tapping into the energy field previously unknown to me. I was hooked on Qi.

As an adjunct to my Karate training, I bought a book called *David Carradine's Introduction to Chi Gung* [David Carradine and David Nakahara. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1997], and I followed the illustrations and descriptions to learn the beginning elements of breathing and movement. This was my first introduction to Qigong.

As I moved through the aging process, I was finding the intensity of Karate grueling and punishing, and I began to think that I needed to step down. I was searching. I had always been physically active; I was a 10k runner, a skier, a golfer. But I needed to tap into the Qi. I tried Curves and found it too repetitive and boring. I tried Yoga. I tried Pilates. I took a four-week T'ai Chi course offered by Water Tiger School at Dragonfly. I bought a DVD called *Qigong Beginning Practice with Francesco Garripoli & Daisy Lee-Garripoli* [Gaiam, Inc., 2004] and followed along with the movements. I remembered that I had attended a one-night library class in Qigong, and I remembered that I somewhat enjoyed it. I searched online for the information on the school, and I corresponded with Laoshi by email. I decided to give it a try. I showed up at the Water Tiger School one Thursday night in June 2009. I was not sure that this was the same instructor, as the library instructor had hair and this one did not. I asked "Are you Laurince?" He said "I am." To which I responded, "You don't have hair." He laughed and said "You are right, I don't." And thus began my instruction.

In October 2009, I underwent extensive surgery and came out with a diagnosis of stage 1A ovarian cancer. While in the hospital, still unable to walk, I began breathing exercises and simple Qigong arm movements. At home, I continued these motions every morning. I pushed beyond my limits every day, moving from sitting to standing to walking postures. I researched extensively and found *Guo Lin Chi Gong* online and watched that website's



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video, *Fighting Cancer with your Body's Internal Energy* [www.HealthyFoundations.com]. I memorized the walking Qigong movements and went outside to my backyard, asking my husband to watch me in case I fell over. The movement begins with gathering positive healing energy from the sky, from the living beings on the earth, and finally from the earth itself – tapping into the universal Qi. Every morning without fail, I go outside and connect with this energy and practice Qigong outside, stopped only by blizzard conditions.

How did disease enter my life? I am physically active. I eat healthy foods, avoiding processed foods, high fructose corn syrup, and artificial sweeteners. What was the cause? In retrospect, I believe my Qi was disturbed. I was not committed to life; my system was in a state of imbalance. I had a series of losses in my life, moving from one loss to the next, connected by periods of grief. My sister-in-law Mary. My cat Saucy. His brother Tigger. My brother Jack. My brother-in-law Peter. My best friend Taylor. My Roxanne. My mother-in-law Virginia.

The grief kept accumulating. I abandoned the healing energy work, blaming myself for not being able to heal the people and animals I loved.

Qigong has helped to restore balance to my body, mind, spirit. *Turn, Look, and Leave Behind* is one of the *Standing Eight Pieces of Brocade*. As Laoshi instructs during the set, "Let go of whatever does not serve you." I have let it all go. I have found my core again, my Qi flows freely, I am happy and healthy. The sadness is gone. I am committed to life.

I came into the kwoon with an open mind and no expectations. My biggest challenge is adjusting to the non-combativeness and peacefulness of Qigong, as well as to the slower pace, as compared to Karate. Sometimes when I step onto the mat, I step back in time to the dojo, expecting to have to defend myself against attackers with a *crane's wing* or a *snake bite*. The biggest benefit of Qigong is the restoration of my health. The path to my recovery is "healthy living" in mind, body, and spirit. Exercise is essential, and Qigong is the foundation that makes all other exercise possible. I skied on Valentine's Day. I golfed in March. With Qigong, all things are possible.

The Water Tiger School is an unexpected gift. I found that I have entered into a peaceful, supportive place, surrounded by Reiki practitioners, kind and caring people, a very thoughtful and mindful Laoshi, a haven where universal Qi flows freely.

Life is good. When faced with death, I chose life. My intention is to stay for a while longer.



Margaret (R) playing *Turn, Look, and Leave Behind*, with arms in third position, from the *Standing Eight Pieces of Brocade*.

