



## Tai Chi Yukon Turns Twenty! by Helene Dobrowolsky



Pam Boyde, Cheryl Buchan and Helene Dobrowolsky with their commemorative teapots on *World Tai Chi and Qigong Day*, April 2009  
(photo by Tony Gonda)

Some Tongren readers may be surprised to learn that way up in Canada's far northwest there is a thriving community of Taijiquan practitioners. Shortly after moving to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory in 1989, Cheryl Buchan began teaching Taiji through the city's recreation program. Over 90 people tried to sign up for that first class and soon Cheryl was teaching up to eight hours a week to meet the demand. Since this enthusiastic beginning, we have trained additional teachers, made links with national and international Taiji organizations, hosted many workshops and guest instructors, and taught hundreds of Yukoners the relaxing and healing techniques of Taijiquan.

While we have welcomed instructors from other styles, most of our teachers and students practice Yang style Taijiquan based on the teachings of Grandmaster Yang Zhen Duo and his grandson, Grandmaster Yang Jun. Every year we offer as many as ten weekly classes aimed at all levels from beginners to Taiji "players" who have been

practicing for several years. Jeanie Maddison, our "Elder," taught seniors' Qigong classes from 1994 until her death in 2001. To honour her memory, our instructors have continued offering these classes at no charge.

Over the years, there have been many highlights but a few are worthy of special mention. In November 2004 we hosted Master Yang Jun for a weekend workshop. This was Master Yang's first visit to western and northern Canada – a tremendous honour for our small association. The executive of **Tai Chi Yukon** put in a busy year of planning, promotion and fundraising to ensure that this would be a successful weekend with a distinctly northern flavour. We drew participants from as far away as New York and Michigan and as close as Alberta and B.C. all of whom lauded this "world class event."

Our longtime instructor, Pam Boyde, has travelled to China three times as well as attending several seminars with Yang Jun in North America. In October 2007 Pam became the very first Canadian to be certified as an instructor in the *Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan* organization, a great accomplishment! Three other instructors – Helene Dobrowolsky, Jo-Ann Gates and Lisa Pan – have also studied in China and tested within the Yang family ranking system.

We celebrate the Chinese New Year with our annual free practice and feast, always a highlight during our coldest season. On *World Tai Chi and Qigong Day*, we have done our best to contribute to the flow of qi around the world.

When our organization turned twenty we had much to celebrate. We heightened community awareness of our organization with several demonstrations of our art at events such as a Seniors BBQ and two popular fundraisers for cancer research: "Run for Mum" and "Relay for Life". Jo-Ann Gates taught weekly Qigong classes to students and staff of *Teegatha 'Oh Zheh*, a



Master Yang Jun demonstrating high pat on puppy at *Muktuk Kennels*, home of renowned dog musher Frank Turner. (Judy Wenning photo)



Five Grandmasters at Nashville Symposium, Tennessee, USA, July 2009: Ma Hailong (Wu style), Wu Wenhan (Wuhao), Yang Zhen Duo (Yang), Chen Zhenglei (Chen), Sun Yontiang (Sun style).

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program for young adults with intellectual disabilities.

We welcomed two special guest instructors. In November 2008 Nancy Lucero, special assistant to Yang Jun, travelled here from Seattle to teach a workshop in '16 movement form', geared primarily for seniors. In August 2009 we welcomed Tanya Schmid from Zurich, Switzerland who taught an outstanding Qigong workshop.

Our instructors also travelled outside to increase their own skills and understanding. Laura Beattie attended a Push Hands seminar with Jan Parker on Bowen Island. Pam and Helene travelled all the way to Nashville, Tennessee to volunteer at the *International Tai Chi Chuan Symposium*. It was truly a privilege to be part of this historic event.

Our "Twenty Hour Challenge" offered prizes to the first 20 people to complete 20 hours of practice after regular classes had ended. At an October workshop, our teachers collaborated to offer a deeper understanding of the "Ten Principles".

Our major celebration took place in April on *World Tai Chi and Qi Gong Day*. Festivities began a few days earlier when a small delegation attended the City Council meeting to hear Mayor Bev Buckway proclaim April 25 as *World Tai Chi and Qigong Day* in the City of Whitehorse. Then, on Saturday morning, about 50 of us gathered at Shipyards Park in Whitehorse by the Yukon River surrounded by mountains. We stretched, breathed, practiced forms and became part of the stream of qi moving around the world. Afterwards we shared tea and cookies, allowing us to visit old and new friends and exchange memories. Our founder Cheryl Buchan was presented with a gift, a lovely teapot, to go with the souvenir porcelain souvenir cups commissioned from Larry Duguay of *Ptarmigan Pottery*. To their immense surprise, long-time instructors Pam Boyde and Helene Dobrowolsky also received teapots. President Jo-Ann Gates formally kicked off our 20 hour challenge. In the afternoon, Pam taught a free two-hour workshop on the second section of the Yang Traditional Long Form.

Twenty years of memories, friendships, working and learning together, and discovering how much more there is yet to learn... It has all gone by so quickly. We look forward to another 20 years of challenges and discoveries. We thank all our instructors, students and friends who have supported us over the years. We invite others from the greater Taiji community to visit us anytime. To conclude, here are a few inspirational words from our founder, Cheryl:

*'The practice of Tai Chi teaches us to move through changes in forms with balance, ease, continuity, presence and relaxed breathing. Transferring these principles into our lives brings about better health and well being.'*



Tanya Schmid and group at Phoenix Dojo workshop. L-R: Betty Kelly, Cheryl Buchan, Helene Dobrowolsky, Luc Garceau, Tanya, Hans-Jakob, Jo-Ann Gates, Lisa Pan  
(Missing: Tory Russell and Joan Wilson)

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Helene Dobrowolsky is an instructor with *Tai Chi Yukon* and secretary for the organization.

Please visit the *Tai Chi Yukon* website:  
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**Tai Chi Yukon** doing Qigong at *World Tai Chi and Qigong Day*, April 2009 (photo by Tony Gonda)



Scene from the Nancy Lucero seminar, November 2008 (photo by Tony Gonda)