



Tai Chi gets the balance right

By Daphne Chamberlain

“Stand like a great mountain, move like a mighty river” is a Tai Chi saying. For older people who have had a stroke, or who have a history of falls, moving and even standing can be a difficult and frightening process.

This is why Barnet’s Ageing Well Project has been running Tai Chi classes since 1999. Scientific research shows that this traditional form of exercise improves balance and flexibility, strengthens muscles, and gives that vital feeling of confidence.

Gently does it

I visited a class at the Ann Owens Centre, in Oak Lane, set up for people referred from Finchley Memorial’s Falls Clinic. Instructor Richard Selby led a comprehensive course of gentle exercises, mainly performed standing, with chairs to hold on to if necessary, and refreshments and a chat halfway through.

“It’s very relaxing,” said Bob, a former Army man, recovering from a stroke and a walking advertisement for Tai Chi’s success. “It really does improve balance and concentration.”

Members can keep attending for as long as they like, though, as they gain in confidence, they may want to move on to general classes elsewhere in the borough. Anyone needing transport can use Age Concern’s buses, with mileage and drivers provided by Friern Barnet Voluntary Care for the Elderly.

Richard is a qualified Tai Chi instructor and his assistant for this class is Deborah Cura, the Ageing Well Coordinator. Tai Chi is just one of several exercise classes held at the Ann Owens Centre. For details of these, or if you would like to



Instructor Richard Selby with Agnes Reeve. Photo by Daphne Chamberlain.

help as a volunteer instructor, please contact Deborah on 020 8455 0542 (Tuesdays, Wednesdays or Thursdays).

Wanted: Catwoman (or man)
Volunteers are urgently needed to help in the Animal Aid and Advice charity shop at 48 High Road, close to the Phoenix Cinema. Founded in 1971, Animal Aid and Advice receives no state funding and relies on sales from donated goods to raise money for its work. Proceeds go towards the care of unwanted cats.

This involves visiting prospective homes, fostering cats and kittens before they go to their new homes, the trapping of shy and feral felines and visits to the vet. There are also the necessary upkeep and administration costs.

As well as wanting people who can spare the time to serve in the shop, Animal Aid and

Advice is looking for a driver to give regular help with veterinary visits for the cats. You need your own vehicle but petrol costs will be refunded.

To volunteer or for more information, contact Sally at the shop or call 020 8444 6290. Opening hours are 10am-4.30pm Monday to Friday, and 10am - 5pm on Saturday and most Sundays.

Obituary: Bernadette

Mary Stephens

By Helen Craig-Stephens

Mum was born in Ireland in 1937. At the age of 17 she became a nun, but after nine years she decided to leave and had to get a dispensation from the Pope.

She met my father, the actor PG Stephens, a year later. They married and came to London where, without any previous formal qualifications, she succeeded in qualifying as a teacher. Teaching was her life and she became Head of Department at Our Lady of Lourdes, Bow Lane. Unfortunately she had to retire early due to disability.

When she retired she certainly didn’t “hang up her hat” at home in Cherry Tree Road. She worked tirelessly, helping to organise parts of the East Finchley Community Festival and working in the local North London Hospice charity shop. Her grandchildren became a major focus in her life. She spent many hours with them, taking them out on trips and just being with me. Eight years ago, she developed Parkinson’s and

battled with severe disability right up to her death at the end of December 2008.

The last year of her life was spent in a nursing home where she was bed ridden and had to be fed through a tube in her stomach. Despite being unable to move, hardly able to speak and with failing eyesight her spirits remained surprisingly high and she never lost her sense of humour.

Mum was dignified and supportive of me right up to the end. Sadly, aspiration pneumonia took her from us. But as somebody said recently: “Her spirit has been released from her body and lives on.”

I would like to thank all who attended her funeral at the Marylebone Cemetery, East End Road. It was a beautiful tribute to a special mother.

KALASHNIKOV KULTUR

By Ricky Savage, the voice of social irresponsibility

The day the music died

I didn’t have a Chevy to drive to the levee, I didn’t even know what a levee was, but I was old enough to listen to the radio and could work out who Don McLean was singing about. And now it’s 50 years since that plane crashed in the snow outside Clear Lake Iowa, 50 years since the music died and 38 years since *American Pie* gave me a complete history of rock’n’roll in eight and a half minutes.

Why Buddy Holly? Why did anyone reckon that his death, together with Richie Valens and the Big Bopper marked the death of music? Elvis was still there, well serving in the army actually. Chuck Berry and Little Richard were still stirring up a thrill and Eddie Cochran had got the *Summertime Blues*, so rock’n’roll wasn’t dead, it was just that a plane had crashed in the snow, in the Midwest.

Thing is, Buddy Holly was different, and it wasn’t just the Fender Stratocaster and the thick glasses. It wasn’t that he came from Lubbock in Texas not Memphis or Chicago. What was different was that he was the future. This was where rock’n’roll met pop, met country music, met a different tradition and became something new. Just listen to *Not Fade Away* or *That’ll be the Day* and you’ll see what I mean.

Buddy arrived on the scene in 1957, just after Elvis and six years before the Beatles rewrote the rules again. Buddy did something most of the other rockers either didn’t or couldn’t do: he wrote his own songs. He then played on them, arranged them and produced them. He multi-tracked and over dubbed, he put strings in places no one had ever put them before and produced the kind of pop song that made you wish you had that vision.

If he had lived he might have used up the space The Beatles came to occupy, he could have been the first serious guitar hero, he could have headlined Woodstock. OK so he might have ended up in a Las Vegas lounge in a sequined jump suit like Elvis, but he never got the chance.

They say that to be a real icon you must not grow old, you must die early, leave a good looking corpse and enough of a back catalogue to let people dream about what you’d have done next. And Buddy Holly was only 22 the day the music died.

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