

Taiwan Trip Article - May 2005

I was heading down the right track last year when I wrote the previous article...it's all about family.

It's about hopping into Mr Lin's brother's people mover van again this year, and seeing what toys their children had left under the seats this time. Once again this van was made available to us 24 hours a day for our whole visit.

It's about being taken out for pizza by people who have never eaten pizza in their lives, and who are vegetarian to boot, but who want us to enjoy the foods we are used to.

It's about being taken to a local, very local café just up the road from Tsaotung dojo, and having them cook the most delicious, freshest noodles for 10 of us in the biggest wok I have ever seen.

It's about Mr Lin, who has his own dojo at the cultural centre which starts training at 6:00 am, and who runs his own business, still finding the time to purchase and drop off to us our breakfast each morning on his scooter.

It's about the gentleman who works in the hairdresser's across the road wandering over with our breakfast which he had collected from Mr Lin and minded for us one morning when we had a late start.

It's about senior dojo members running around the cultural exhibition collecting stamps for us visitors so that we could present our entries to take part in a lucky dip.

It's about sick neighbours getting out of bed the day before we left to visit us at dojo to make sure that they wouldn't miss seeing us.

It's about friends being so concerned with our warmth and wellbeing during the cold weather that they loaned us their own clothes, or bought us new ones. And Master Huang had a set of long-sleeved team polo shirts made up for us in less than a day.

It's about being taken to another favourite noodle shop where the staff are so excited to see us they rearrange the other customers to make one large table for us.....and us going back two days later because the food is just as good as you can get, the atmosphere is fun and friendly, and the boss is totally at home there.

It's about THE weapons expert, Mr Chen, giving you encouragement and praise after watching you practice. It's also about watching Mr Chen give a flawless demonstration of controlled power in a Hsing I long pole form performance.....so much power, but so understated! And it's also about seeing his little granddaughter, no longer a babe in arms this year, leading Mrs Chen a merry chase around the dojo, as Mr Chen smiles and looks on proudly.

It's about being taken to Taichung to see Dr Liang and Candy's new dojo....beautiful, elegant, Japanese inspired décor, lots of mirrors, plenty of room to move, and which contains a shrine to Grand Master Wang Su Chin which is breathtaking in both the size of his portrait and the stark simplicity of the altar.

It's about watching a children's class in Taichung where they use tiny replica wooden swords, and have the tenacity to do stand form and animals forms as well as the more exciting tai chi and weaponry. Almost all of us individually noted the little guy most of the way down the back with the glasses and the serious expression; he just has IT.....I expect I'll be learning from him one day.

It's about at the very end of a visit to a country dojo, when we are all in the car, the boss realises that he has not said goodbye to someone, and goes looking for them.....it turns out to be the chap who looks like he may have some learning difficulties, and who gives the boss a kiss on the cheek and a huge hug before the boss clatters back in to drive us home to Tsaotung.

It's about watching the businessman who is head of a country dojo perform Tai Chi Chuan as if there was no time, there was no outside world, as if there was only grace and simplicity as he turns a palm this way, or moves his heel that way.

It's about the assistant in the traditional Taiwanese clothing shop that I love to go to making me a coffee because I was taking so long looking at everything eight times over. And on my fourth visit she presented me with a Buddhist amulet as a gift, saying that it signified "that everything will be ok". Such simple words, but so deeply reassuring.

It's about the free cup of tea, dvd and magazines I was given when I stumbled into a Buddhist Meditation Centre (I thought it was just an interesting shop), and the chat with the beautiful, young, shaven-headed nun, who wore a hand-knitted beanie to keep warm.

It's about Master Huang taking a little time off because a friend from her local temple had had a death in the family. And it's about that very same friend, Mr Li, taking time off from his family mourning traditions to come and spend time with us (he is an excellent translator) when we visited Master Huang's local temple.

It's about having breakfast with the boss. It's about drinking tea before morning training with the boss. It's about the boss driving us to lunch, and organising our lunch, and eating with us. It's about the boss driving us back to our hotel, or dropping us off in the shopping precinct if we wished, after lunch. It's about drinking tea before the afternoon training with the boss after a lunchtime nap. It's about the boss driving us to dinner, or to temple, or to a country dojo, or a city dojo.

It's about being shown where Grand Master Wang Su Chin lived in Taichung when Master Huang and Master Wang respectively came to live with him.....and meeting the man who lived there now and having reminiscences of the past in the alleyway, in the dark. It's about seeing the park when Grand Master Wang Su Chin used to train and teach, and hearing stories of he and Master Huang carrying bird cages all the way to the park (but catching a taxi back!)

It's about enjoying a Taiwanese sweet/lolly, and each being sent home with four bags of them, after Master Huang had arranged to have a whole box delivered by courier the day before we left.

It's about making new friends, who took time out from their personal lives to come and translate for us and to drive us around in their family cars. And who then turned around and said that THEY were so grateful that we had come because they were given opportunities that might otherwise not have arisen!

It's about attending dojo training on Thursday nights with a whole bunch of people whom I have never seen before, and a few whom I have, and this crew always politely makes way for me to stand wherever I feel is the most appropriate (usually hiding in the middle with someone to follow on all sides).

It's about attending Mr Lin's dojo at the start of the morning and seeing that the old lady is still there, the same one whom I was beside last year who inadvertently showed me the meaning of a move I had previously not understood. And of course it's about the wonderful breakfast spread put on for us by Mr Lin's dojo – warm soy milk (dou jiang), donuts (you tiao) in bread rolls, fan tuan rice balls – and about the group photo call.

It's about being excitedly welcomed back to Taiwan by various people whom I had only met over a long week 15 months ago, but who now treated me like an old friend, and by others whom I had seen more regularly, who gave me the utmost honour in treating me as a well-loved friend.

It's about the beautiful, imperious, tiny, four-legged Tien Tien who still rules the house and still decides who may and may not pat her on any given day.

This year for me there were no tears on departure as I knew that I would be back; there is simply no question. Why would I not come back to a place where I feel loved, cared for, respected, and where they seem to think enough of me to push me just that little bit further, both physically and mentally, than I would have given myself credit for.

And of course, the training was fantastic. Detailed, in-depth, Hsing I animal forms this year, broken down into simple sequences for us, and we trained each one until we got it right. The sort of training you always wish you could find the time for. The cooler weather meant we could train for longer periods in comfort, and the squirrel in the tree above the training ground provided the odd moment of distraction.

As always, any Cheng Ming brothers or sisters who dropped by in Tsaotung were more than willing to help us improve our technique, to help translate the many questions we had for the Masters, and to help with preparations for our own small ceremony of respect at Master Wang Shu Chin's memorial on the mountainside.

When we attended Tsaotung, Shengang and Taichung dojo's regular training sessions the members were always welcoming, friendly and encouraging, if sometimes a little shy. Those whom we had met before, although they may not be able to speak any English (and we very little Taiwanese), let us know that they were glad to see us again.

Many members were in attendance at Tsaotung for the ceremony where Tim Baxter of New Zealand and Shane Davis became inner door students of David and Amelia Zarb (congratulations guys!), helping to translate for us so that we can fully enjoy the cultural richness of the ceremony. We are very fortunate indeed to have their assistance and support.

And we are very fortunate indeed to be welcomed to share in the warmth and friendship of the Cheng Ming family.