

FREE POSTER INSIDE & FREE TRAINING VIDEO OFFER

WUSHU *Qigong*
KUNGFU

July 1998

The Legendary
**WANG
ZIPIING**

SHANNON LEE
in HONG KONG

CHINA'S
Herbal Tonic

The Mantis Trilogy
TAI CHI's Art & Science
Ling Gao Tai Kune Do

DISPLAY UNTIL JULY 31

US \$3.99 Canada \$4.99

0 74820 08502 8



07 >

Growing Up with Wang Ziping's Kung Fu



Madam Wang Jurong

A Daughter's Reminiscence of One of China's Most Famous Kungfu Families

By Grace Xiaogao Wu-Monnat

People often say to me, Grace, your grandfather and parents are famous so you must know a lot of interesting stories. Yes, I do have a few tales to tell. I will always remember the frustrating time when, because of the Cultural Revolution, we were limited to practicing martial arts quietly at night in a one-room living room-bedroom. The downstairs tenant would poke at the ceiling and yell out, "Be quiet, we are asleep." Exasperated, I would whine, "How will I ever become a martial artist under these conditions?" I will never forget the look in my grandfather's, Wang Ziping, dazzling eyes and his calm voice as he said, "Xiaogao, all you need is a dream. And you can be everything you ever want to be."

It was a difficult time of life. But it still was the best kind of life a child ever could have. The experiences I had were different from those of my childhood friends. And now when I achieve a goal or receive a compliment, I often credit that period of my childhood. Of course, when friends criticize one of my extreme behaviors, I also will blame those idiosyncracies on these same youthful experiences.

My Mother, Wang Jurong

I was brought into a famous martial arts family by a special woman, Madam Wang Jurong, my mother. My earliest memories were that life was peaceful, loving, and orderly. I got to see my grandpa, Wang Ziping, and grandma once or twice a week. Every sunny Sunday morning my older sister, neighborhood girlfriend, and I would be in my grandpa's courtyard kicking our feet over our heads, trying to jump up from a splits position, and all the while the other adults were throwing each other, lifting weights, or practicing some martial arts technique. Ever since I



Photos courtesy: Grace Xiaogao Wu-Monnat
Graphic Design: Patrick Lugo



was only three or four years old my mother would teach us something new every Sunday. My kindergarten report cards even stated that I tried to teach classmates to do martial arts after I had trained at home. It was fun to have Mom and Dad playing martial arts with us. After practice, I loved to climb to the top of a big pole where I could see my grandparents sip their tea through the window of the second floor.

Grandpa and Grandma always smiled when we were around, and they often took us out for some festive occasion or just for dinner. But I do not have any recollections of direct dialogue with my maternal grandparents at that early time. Most of the time some other adults would be there helping with conversations because my grandparents spoke a northern Chinese dialect and we were only able to understand Shanghai local language.

A part of Grandpa's house was his clinic where he practiced traditional Chinese medicine. He had a lot of patients during the week in addition to his students, friends, and other visitors. So to me, I had many grandpas, aunts, and uncles who just had different last names, who were friendly and often gave gifts to us. And some of those friends practiced Kung Fu with us.

Going to Grandpa's house was a big thing for my sister and me. We not only got to see our grandparents, but we also spent more time with my parents then since they both worked during the week. Later, I learned that even then my parents were highly accomplished in their careers. My dad, Dr. Wu Chengde was the youngest chairman in both his departments of Longhua Hospital and Shanghai Traditional Chinese Medicine College. His wushu team was the champion of the college level Chinese Martial Arts competitions every year.

My mother was a wushu professor in the Shanghai Physical Education Institution and the coach of both the college wushu and archery team. She was the first woman who was a certified judge of national ranking for both wushu and archery. A longtime promoter of wushu, a teacher, an organizational officer, and a wushu event-announcer, my mother was renowned for her oratorical, sonorous voice, and her vast martial arts knowledge. To see her two young daughters imitating her could not have been more amusing. After returning home from a martial arts event together my older sister would act out as an announcer: "Next performer, Wu Xiaogao." And I would step up and hold a fist and a palm together to salute, then do a bow-stance or hold one leg over my head. Then she

and I would trade places. Of course, we really did not know much of anything at that time, Mom said years later.

Cultural Revolution

All of this peaceful, fun-filled life suddenly changed when the Cultural Revolution started. Nothing was the same again. The word losing had real meaning to me. Overnight, we lost most of our valuables at home. My older sister and I could not go to school because no classes were held for a while. My parents lost their rights to practice their professions. Grandma Wang suffered a heart attack when the Red Guards were pounding on her door; My mom lost her mother forever. Grandpa had to give up his medical practice and stop teaching martial arts publicly. No one in the family had money any more since bank accounts were frozen and salaries were cut to the minimum or abolished altogether.

Since the Revolution encouraged kids to stand up and criticize their famous parents or grandparents in public like the Red Guards did, the people who lived with Grandfather – distant relatives whom Grandpa adopted and raised as his own son, daughter, and grandsons – began to distance themselves and neglected to care for my grandpa. My parents could not stand the thought that Grandpa was confined to the house alone all day long, but they had no idea what would happen to them at work either; they didn't know whether they would be sent to the re-education farm that day or the next morning. So one night after dinner, my parents called me aside and whispered that they wanted me to look after my grandfather. "We know you aren't even ten yet. But you are the only one we can send there." My dad bent down and patted my shoulder.

My mom picked up the conversation. "Grandfather likes you. Remember the time you stayed there overnight, you cleaned the cups although they had maids. And he said, 'I like this child and I would love to have her around more.' I will go with you tomorrow."

"What should I do there?" I asked. Mom replied, "You can keep him company. If he



needs anything, you can get it for him or come home to tell us."

The next day, I went with my parents to see my grandfather. I could tell he was happy to see me. Unfortunately, I did not understand everything he said since he spoke a different dialect. But that was the beginning of a special time of my life.

Life With Wang Ziping

My grandfather, Wang Ziping, was an extraordinary Chinese martial artist and a patriotic figure loved and respected by the public. Again and again in his life he represented the nation in soundly defeating foreign boxers, wrestlers, and karate challengers. He was known throughout China for his public feats of strength as well as his martial arts prowess. He was also a famous traditional Chinese orthopedic doctor. Even in his eighties Grandfather had a strong body. The bones under his eyebrows were prominent, and his eyes were set in deep sockets. Actually, pure Chinese though he was, he looked like a minority, more Western than Oriental. These deep-set eyes were radiant, always shining. In addition, his long silver beard flowed over his chest like a shimmering waterfall. His unique, dignified appearance and charismatic manner automatically gained respect from other people. When he smiled, I knew that I was safe and loved.

I was too young to act as an adult. Every night Wang Ziping had important visitors from all over the world. I could not even stay awake until these loquacious visitors left. I would try, but, at last, would fall asleep anywhere in the room. It could be on a couch or chair or even the bare floor. I still fondly remember that my grandfather carried me in his arms to my bed almost every night for the first couple of years I lived with him. I guess it would be fair to say that I was a little company to him in the daytime and he was a loving protector of me at night.

Because we did not speak the same dialect, we seldom carried on much conversation at first. One time he asked me to get a bowl and some washing soda. This was quite memorable. Although he had lived in Shanghai for sixty years, he never lost the habits learned 1,000 miles north in Hebei near Beijing where he grew up. I did not know that he wanted dishwashing detergent, and the word he used for bowl was foreign to me. He saw my quizzical expression as I nodded my head and stared at him. He smiled and tried to use a Shanghai dialect, but came

out with a heavy northern accent, like a Chinese singing Italian opera; but he cupped his hands in the shape of a bowl, and that I understood. Wanting desperately to help, I went to my aunt downstairs, and in my own tortured version tried to imitate his exact sentence. She laughed and said, "Oh, is that all he wants?" Grandpa was constantly entertained by my effort to speak with him. But I was so anxious to please him that we talked primarily in mangled sign language for about two months.

Life was hard at that time. What grew out of the hardship was a strong, close relationship between my grandfather and me. As time went by, we not only understood each other well but we also developed a kind of harmony within us. Grandpa had a great sense of humor. We laughed so much together. When I was a little older, instead of falling asleep, I would wait for hours until his visitors finally stood up to leave. Then, behind their back, I just had to make some naughty faces to express my relief after waiting so long for them to leave. Grandfather would heave with laughter, but tried his best to conceal it from his important guests. He always treated everyone well.

I also remember the many times after school I sat next to my grandpa comparing hand strength. He had immense and powerful hands that spread out like Chinese fans. My little hand fit in his like a small piece of dough, yet, I tried so hard to squeeze his hand. The little power I had just could not bother him. Grandpa always got a good laugh and he never crushed my aggressive small fingers.

I am so proud of my grandfather because, although he was a legendary figure, he always was a loving, compassionate, and humble grandpa to me first. Only during the years I lived with him, and, later, did I learn how special he was. Grandpa again told me many times that, "All you need is a dream. And you can be everything you want to be." His life was an example of his own words.

Wang Ziping's Martial Arts Life

Wang Ziping was born in 1881 in Cangzhou, Hebei province, considered the capital of martial arts. Both his father and grandfather were well-recognized wushu masters. Wang Ziping's feats and strength became legendary. But fame did not come easily. In fact, when he was six years old, Wang Ziping was too little and too weak to be accepted as a martial arts student by either his father or his uncle. They thought he was not strong enough. But, fortunately, the world always has its own balance and magic. On the other side of his life was the deep understanding of his mother. She told him, "If you like martial arts, practice hard. You will be good. But don't be a tiger-head and snake-tail with everything. Be consistent."

With his mother's encouragement, he took the first step of a lifelong journey in the martial arts. First, he dug a ditch for practicing jumps. As time passed, the ditch would get deeper and deeper, wider and wider. Ultimately, from a standstill, Wang Ziping could jump ten feet forward and eight feet backward. From this beginning, he developed other humble

Continued on page 52





methods, like planting a tree in front of his home so he could leap over it every time he went in or out of the house; and putting stone weights into a pond nearby so that he could develop his strength without being noticed by the naysayers who thought he was too little and weak.

By the time he was sixteen he was known for his strength throughout his village and nearby area. Once a neighboring town sponsored a weight-lifting competition. After no one could move the 215 pound weights, Wang Ziping gave his first try and the heavy stones went easily into the air above his head. "Wow!" everyone exclaimed. The young man in charge came over and asked, "Would you please tell us your name and where you come from?" Wang Ziping politely answered. Then, a knowing smile dawned across the leader's face and he nodded, "Oh! That's why. There is a note in the bar. Please read it." Everyone waited as Grandpa read the note. "We hope to make friends by this contest," it stated. "Anyone who is able to lift the weight will be awarded with his weight in groceries, except for Wang Ziping." There was a long hearty laugh. Many came to him wanting to learn how he had become so strong.



Wang Ziping was also known as Qianjin Wang (King of a Thousand Pounds). It was an honor to have such a nickname. In Shandong today people still like to tell many remarkable stories of Wang Ziping. Like how he astounded the crowd by using his single hand to stop the water-powered stone mill at Black Tiger well in Jinan. But the nickname also brought him some unwanted challenges. A German army officer was mad about hearing the story of Qianjin Wang. He would not believe that any Chinese, the "sick people in Asia," could have such power. So he put a 400-pound-plus bare-rounded stone at Jiaoji railroad station, daring Wang Ziping to lift it.



When Wang Ziping showed up with his friends, the German with a treacherous smile said, "It will be yours if you can lift it, otherwise you have to pay for the stone. Of course you are Chinese! No one can be that strong." Wang Ziping's eyes flashed with anger. He said, "OK, that's settled then, Foreigner."

Wang Ziping took off his shirt. His arms were defined with huge muscles. That stupefied the presumptuous German. His mouth gaped open and his eyes could not turn away from this Chinese. The real shock was that Wang Ziping immediately lifted the gigantic stone over his head. The German was dumbstruck and muttered, "Oh God, how could that be. Such a powerful Chinaman!"



Another time, the mosque in Qinzhou had two long, beautifully carved doors that were antiques from the Ming dynasty. The story engraved on the doors described the early Moslems' life. For generations, the Moslems cherished and cared for the doors. The Germans heard about the antique doors and were greedy for the cultural treasure. They came and unctuously offered to buy the doors. To avoid a conflict, the priest asked for 16,250 pounds of pure silver. "That's too much," said the Germans. "We will pay you



half." That worried the priest because he did not want to be the Moslem who would sell the nation's treasure. He called a meeting in the mosque. Wang Ziping suggested to the rest, "We shall all stay in the mosque and guard it. The Germans can't take the doors from that many of us."

Hearing this, the Germans planned strategies too. They thought that if they could get rid of, or embarrass, Wang Ziping they might have a chance to take the doors. The conflict ended with another weight-lifting challenge. The Germans wheeled in two 250-pound stone weights connected by a thick bamboo bar. "We heard you practice kungfu in this mosque, and the 'Qianjin Wang' is a usual visitor," the Germans said to the priest and the crowd. We specially brought these weights that no one has been able to lift for eighty years. We want to ask Wang Ziping to lift them. Everyone knew what was going on and held their breath for Wang Ziping. Heavy weights on a bare bamboo bar without fixtures would slide, creating difficulty or accident. Wang Ziping recognized the German's trick as they taunted him.

Wang Ziping could not wait any longer and stated, "Chinese kungfu is rich and varied. Foreigner, don't you taunt us." The crowd shouted, "Good, show them your power!" By then, it was a fight for the nation's pride. Wang Ziping bowed to the crowd, flipped away and intentionally landed on his back right in front of the weights. Then he extended his arms over his head, two large hands grabbed the bamboo bar and quickly pulled up the stones. People cheered. He bent his arms, then tossed the weights away from him. Suddenly, he threw up his legs and caught the weights with his feet. He gestured, and six young men came out. One lay down across the bar, facing away from Wang Ziping and supported by the weights and Wang Ziping's hands. Three more young men then got on top of him and on top of each other. Two more then stood on the bamboo bar. They modeled Stone Luohan (stone Buddha) and Phoenix Emerging Its Wings. To the sound of long-lasting applause, the Germans nodded and disappeared. The doors were saved.

Kungfu Skills and Wude

My grandfather often said to me, "As a martial artist, one should always be alert, and be prepared. "How?" I asked. He'd answer, "You need to learn quickly what's going on when you walk into a room. Always look to see where the exits and the windows are. Don't stand anywhere with your back facing a door or a crowd. Just in case something happens." He often brought his sleeve-swords with him when he was younger. When we had our daily walk in the neighborhood



he always carried a cane with a metal point. During our strolling he would add a quick step and thrust his cane into the trees along the sidewalk. The first time he did that I asked why. He smiled, and replied, "Oh, to let others know that you're ready any time."

Later, I understood that Grandpa never lost a fight in his life because he was always prepared. But people respected Grandpa not only for his super-strength and kungfu skills, but also for his high standard of *wude* (moral standards). His older students loved to tell the story of the contest resulting in a friendship between two heroes.

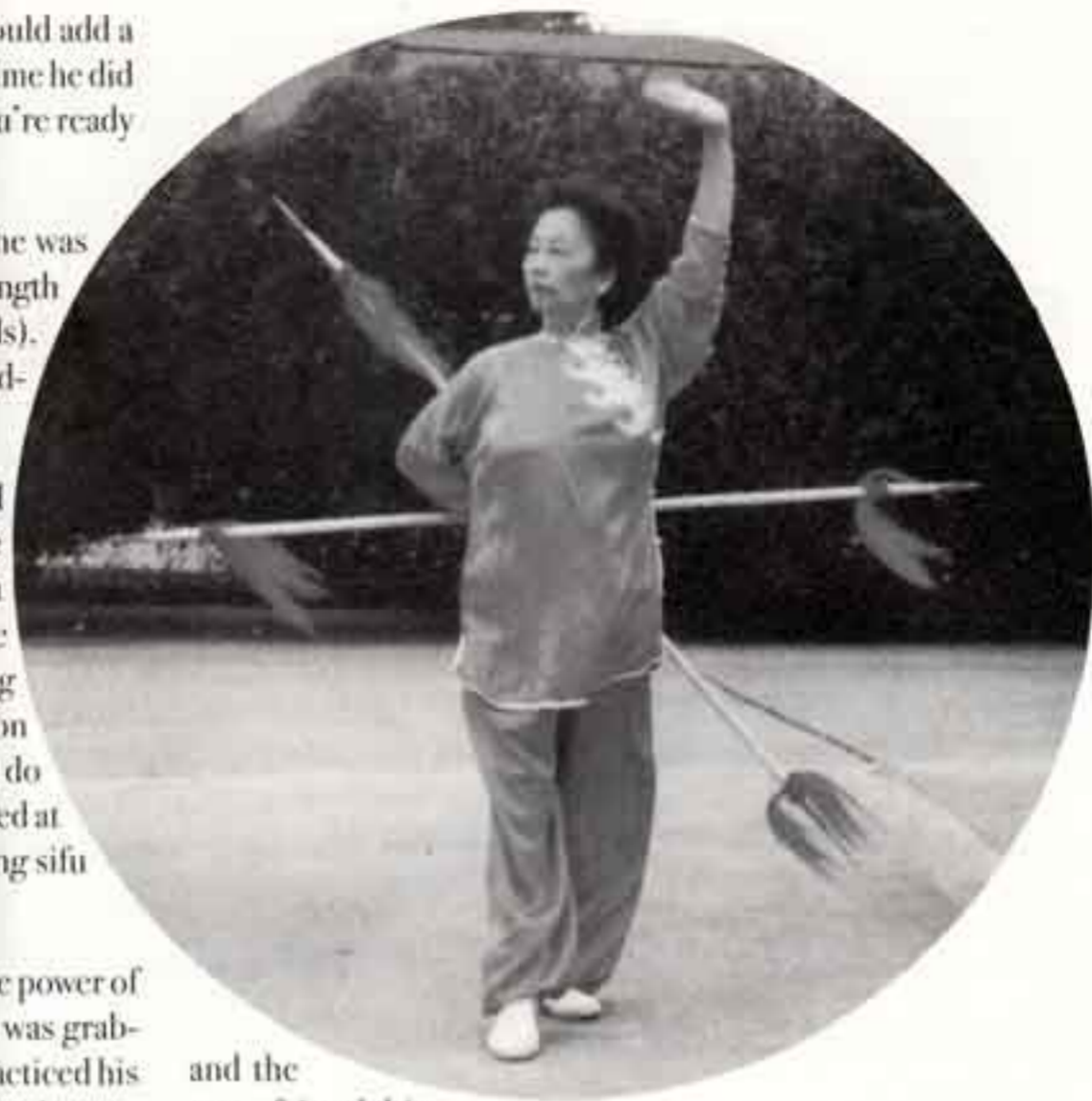
A wrestling contest was held in Zhang Jia Kou one year. Only skilled wrestlers were qualified to attend. Everyone knew that Hong sifu was the best since he had not touched the ground for eighteen years. Many kungfu sifu together invited Wang Ziping. He accepted the invitation and came into town. The first thing he asked for was to observe Hong sifu's morning training section. Hong sifu was a tall and well-built individual, like an iron tower. After watching the training, Wang Ziping said to his hosts, "I will do the honor, but I need three months. I will be back then." Everyone looked at each other and thought that Wang Ziping was frightened by the big Hong sifu and had made an excuse to leave.

Wang Ziping returned to Beijing and practiced every day, focusing on the power of his legs and foot techniques since he had learned that Hong's strength was grabbing, being a bit weak in the legs. To condition himself, Wang Ziping practiced his kicks on a large prune tree day and night. He started a hundred kicks each time. And he put a 250-pound blue rock on his ankle during lifting exercises. Wrestling needs good grabbing and wrist strength so he practiced with belts and thrown sandbags.

Three months later, Wang Ziping was back for the contest. This time he was ready. After a hand-shaking, the two men looked at each other for a second. They both saw the difference in size. Wang Ziping was strong but not even close to six feet tall. Hong sifu felt a bit of comfort about that. Wang Ziping, however, had thought out his strategy to overcome the disadvantage. Suzan sushen (quick fight and quick win), he decided. The moment their hands touched, Wang Ziping gave a *pujiao* (low kick). Hong was thrown out and lost balance. But Wang Ziping did not fully release his hand. In fact, right before Hong fell to the ground, Wang Ziping pulled him back. The audience all nodded with approval. For eighteen years Hong had not touched the ground, but in this contest he fell for all three rounds. The promoter, Zhang, asked Hong if he would like to go for five-rounds, thinking that might give Hong another chance to win at least once. But Hong politely said no.

Later Hong told the media, "Wang Ziping has speed like lightning, just too hard to avoid. He is the kind of person who won't ever fall as soon as his foot lands. In addition, his mental strength is so forceful. He shows no fear to a big one like me. I respect all that." Hong went to the hospital for a retreat after the contest. Wang Ziping heard the news and went to visit Hong at once. He complimented Hong's refined skills and stated, "Let's get together again to practice some more."

"You are the only true opponent I've met in the last eighteen years," replied Hong. "You have impressive kungfu that I deeply admire." They both enjoyed the meeting



and the new friendship.

Then Wang Ziping was invited to be the wrestling sifu there, but he did not accept the job. He thought, "I will never take a seat to block another martial artist from making a living." On the day of the award ceremony, both Wang Ziping and Hong sifu were absent and left the town unannounced. Both thought that would make the other look better. True heroes, great minds think alike.

Like Father, Like Daughter

Grandpa was a person I will always be proud of. And I also am grateful to him because my mother is so much like him. I respect and admire how much my mom has accomplished in her life. Many people love her because of her professionalism: twice gold medalist for her Cha meng double-hooks and Green Dragon double-sword; the first woman to hold two national ranking judging certificates; the first woman wushu coach to leave China to promote Chinese martial arts; and the recipient of The Pioneer of New China Sports and the Wushu Contribution Award from China's Department of Sports. In addition, in America she has received the Lifetime Achievement Award from USAWKF.

People also love Madam Wang for her character. She is a kind, caring, and fun-loving person. Regardless of how much she has accomplished, she remains courteous and humble. At work, she always respectfully greets colleagues, students, gardeners, janitors, gate-watch guards, and just about anyone she sees. She often got fresh flowers at her desk from the gardeners. They appreciated her never being overly proud but instead kind to them for years. During the Cultural Revolution they were the people who became the leading class and in charge of everything. The professors became the object of the Revolution, ordered to accept re-education. Other teachers were asked to do janitorial work or gardening on campus. But Madam Wang was getting a different treatment. "Professor Wang, you don't have to do all that. Just push around newspapers and stay in your office since no one will be here," said a former gardener. "We just can't do that to you. But don't tell anyone." Even then, she still got one or two flowers.

In the re-education farm, under the hardship of life and high political pressures, Madam Wang finally got very ill. But no one would force her to work in the field. She was called in to be a kitchen



helper. Then she was told, "Since you are good at giving wushu-event announcements, you can be the newslady." She knew in her heart that this was an unspoken way to care for her by the people to whom she was kind. I still can vividly picture the grateful expression on Mom's face when she told us these stories at the dinner table during those dark years.

Chinese New Year Daffodils

I used to complain that we, the kids, did not have enough time to talk to my mom because her students, other martial arts lovers and friends would take up a lot of her off-work time. Why do they have to come to see her every week? Even out-of-town students would always make an effort to see her when they were in Shanghai. The person I remember the most is coach Cheng who, for as long as I can remember, brought to her the only kind of daffodils that would bloom during the Chinese New Year. Sometimes, trying to maintain his schedule, he would come to our home ever past eleven p.m.; he never left before midnight, regardless of what time of day he came.

The friendship began thirty-eight years ago. Shortly after the fall semester school was unusually quiet and empty. Teachers were finishing up last-minute work before the winter break began. My mother saw her student, Cheng, eating alone in the school cafeteria. She was puzzled and thought that all students had returned home for the holiday. She went to him and asked, "When are you going home?"

He stood up. "Hi, teacher Wang, I'm not returning home this time."

"Why? Don't you want to see your parents during the holiday?"

"Yes. I love to." He played with his fingers. "I can't go." He looked at his toes, rocked his body a bit, and muttered, "My mom didn't have the money to buy me a train ticket." He blushed.

My mom asked, "Where do you need to go? I know, somewhere down south in Fujian province. I'll buy you a ticket."

"Really?" The young man's eyes brightened. "But, I couldn't let you do that. I don't know if I'll ever have the money to return to you."

"Don't worry," she said, "We can talk about that later. Which train do you take?"

The next day, she found Cheng at the dorm, handed him a train ticket and some money. He bowed to her. "Thank you. I'll never forget this." The next time she saw him in spring, he had a bag of daffodils in his hand. The mother had a flower shop back home. Madam Wang took extra care of him for the rest of his school years.

Years later, he said, "Teacher, you not only taught me kungfu, but you also taught me everything else in life. I couldn't ever repay you for what you've done for me. I'm grateful forever." Cheng is a man of his words. Although he did not stay to live in Shanghai after his schooling, for those thirty-some years he never forgot his teacher. I enjoyed the daffodils every New Year for as long as I was home. Last year he was in Shanghai for business and learned from a newspaper that Madam Wang was also back home attending a wushu national competition. And he showed at her door at midnight.

Anyone who visited Madam Wang once soon became a regular guest at our home. She would take time to listen attentively and sincerely to all her visitors and help with their lives and careers if she could. Promoting wushu is her life's career. She started it by practicing kungfu since she was four or five years old. Wang Ziping loved his only daughter, and he did not think one should raise a girl any differently than boys. So the young Madam Wang often was able to lift heavier weights before her older and bigger kungfu brothers. And she was encouraged to learn many other family styles of kungfu besides Shaolin. That is why she mastered all taiji styles. Taiji master Gu Liou Sin, Zhang Yu, Fu Zhongwen, Sun Jianyuan, and other masters were all her good friends. They often got together to practice and exchange their expertise. Mom says, "Uniting all kungfu families, different styles, and systems is important to wushu promotion." She and Grandpa often let the other competitors and performers borrow their weapons. Yi Wu Huai You (to make friends from martial arts) was the way Wang Ziping and my mom approached life.

True Masters

My mother answers any request from the martial arts world. Sifu Zhang Luping would tell you the story of how my mom supported him on organizing wushu in Pinhu, a small town outside Shanghai. Madam Wang took a team of thirty-seven volunteers and traveled by boat on a weekend. In three days they performed martial arts five times in different locations. I remembered my younger sister, Wu Xiaopin, went with them and was the announcer. When they returned on a rainy day, they were exhausted and wet. Mom would announce for any wushu event as long as you asked her, even when she was a chief judge and officer general in national competitions. For awhile, if Mom was home for the evening that was unusual to me. She announced for all-level wushu events more than a thousand times. And Dad, my sisters, and I were the loyal fans of her and all the martial arts performers, whether they were kungfu lovers, professional athletes, or masters.

Caring for other people is why my mother has been so successful. Both Grandpa and Mom are not merely masters of their profession; they were and are masters of human goodness and compassion. I suppose one might say that I speak from the prejudiced viewpoint of a loving granddaughter and a daughter, but Wang Ziping and Madam Wang are bright beacons I honor.

Today, my older sister, Helen Wu, and her husband, Simon Hu, teach kungfu together and share their knowledge of Chinese medicine at the Wang Ziping Martial Arts and Chinese Medicine Center in Toronto, Canada. My younger sister, Xiaopin, teaches kungfu in Shanghai. I also am a kungfu instructor. My sisters and I often comment that we are not physically as strong as my grandpa and my mom, but the legacy in spirit will always carry on. The words of my grandpa, "All you need is a dream" brought me through the difficult time of starting a new life in the United States without speaking English and having no money, and that helped me to earn a masters degree in sports administration. I am proud to share my family story in English. And I know the same voice will give me the strength to finish translating the family book, *Wang Ziping and Wushu*.

"All you need is a dream." ☺

Grace X. Wu Monnat has a Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education, Specializing in Chinese Martial Arts from Shanghai Teacher's University and a Masters degree in Sports Administration from Wichita State University. She has successfully been operating a Chinese Martial Arts School for the last thirteen years in Wichita, Kansas.

