

Kenneth Chung's Boston Seminar

By Kathy Jo B. Connors, November, 1997

Many of you have heard and read about Ken's methods, and have a good idea already about how he conducts his seminars. For the best technical overview of the types of things Ken covered, I would refer you to "A Path to Wing Chun" on the **Planet Wing Chun** web site. Rather than taking the same approach, perhaps the best way for me to tell you about Ken's seminar in Boston, is to share my experience with you in a more subjective and personal way. So here is part of my story...

On Friday, I made my 6 ½ hour drive from my home in Rochester New York to meet my former teacher and his girlfriend at their home in Burlington Vermont. The drive was gorgeous. I ventured off the NYS thruway at Utica in order to cut through a corner of the Adirondack State Park. The road cuts kitty corner from New York to my destination in Vermont. It was like driving through a landscape painting of mountains in the latter stages of fall foliage, with the surprise of a hidden lake or stream, clumps of white birch, amidst the hills and mountains at each turn. The peaceful drive gave me time to reflect on what I'd read and heard of Ken and his approach to Wing Chun, and also to reflect on my own training thus far.

I arrived to meet Eric & Erica in the afternoon. To stretch out from the ride, we walked to a nearby park overlooking Lake Champlain, and chi sau'd by the water's edge as the sun set. They then served me with a delicious meal of homemade nori rolls, and taught me how do dress and eat them. After dinner, we climbed into the car to continue the remaining 3 ½ hour trek to our motel in Waltham Massachusetts. When we checked in, we were greeted by a note from Dr. Jack Ling, saying to meet him and Ken the following morning in the motel lobby, so we could ride together to the seminar.

At the appointed time on Saturday morning, I found Ken waiting downstairs. When I walked in I recognized him immediately from the pictures I've seen on the Internet. He identified me also, either from the expression on my face, or perhaps from the video I made last March for the Sil Lim Tau video project which he said he had seen, and gave a warm and hearty greeting. A moment later Jack Ling walked over, with an enormous smile which is dwarfed only by the size of his heart. With Eric and Erica arriving just behind me, the introductions were hardly over before our conversations turned to Wing Chun. As we rode, Ken began explaining some wing chun concepts needed for understanding the "soft" way. He told us that the keys are position, sensitivity, and power, in that order, and that he applies his skill first by neutralizing

the opponent, then by utilizing them. So in his way, Ken was warming up our Wing Chun minds before we even started.

We arrived an hour before the official seminar start time. This allowed Ken to give us and the other first time attendees an overview of the material from his last visit to Boston, and to begin explaining his interpretation of Wing Chun. As the time neared, more students filed in. Though there were only 13 of us over the course of 2 days, we were a very eclectic crowd, including people with backgrounds in Moy Yat, Yip Chun, Augustine Fong, Yip Ching, Fut Sao Wing Chun, some with a mixed background in other families, and of course a couple of people following the Ken Chung/Leung Sheung path. In fact, Dr. Jack Ling was also a student of Leung Sheung in Hong Kong, and with Ken's help is now reviving and renewing what he learned there.

Ken began with demonstrations of his "soft force." This is where Ken first really gets your attention. Through what seems like the lightest of motion and touch, Ken will rock your world. As he went around the room to give each person the first hand experience, I saw one by one, the big guys being off balanced, in some cases displaced by several feet, and others with no visible movement other than something akin to a shock wave accompanied by a look of total astonishment. When it came my turn, I received a very light and controlled version of his "girl hand," and though I thought I was prepared for it I heard myself aspirating an involuntary "Oh my God!"

Throughout the course of the next two days, Ken demonstrated, illustrated and explained in painstaking detail both the implications and the mechanisms involved in producing the soft power. Ken is "hands on" in a multidimensional a sense; not just by letting you feel his force, but also by having you try the concepts out on him, and by actually having you touch and feel him. He will show how to do something, then let you put your hands on his arms, legs, or back to feel what is happening that is not visible to the eye. When you watch him in action, you will visually see the result of his effort and say to yourself, "only a very strong guy like him could do that!" but then he will have you touch his upper arm as he repeats the same application, only to find that his large biceps and triceps are completely relaxed and disengaged. I will not make a lame attempt at explaining his body mechanic, but see that it absolutely requires a relaxation, using muscle would only be a detriment. There is a physical development that supports and drives the relaxed force though. Ken let us feel the development of the knee and elbow areas which are acquired through persistent training. There is also a body mechanic, a sort of dynamic connectedness that I have yet to fully understand, but I believe it is related to the idea of what is often called "borrowing" force from the floor, up through the joints, the back, and out through the shoulders, arms and finally projecting somewhere behind or through the opponent.

But there is more to Ken's Wing Chun than just body mechanic. It is his constant positioning, calm, lack of greediness. It is also his attitude, and his intent. He does not rush in, he will wait for you to come to him, then he will use you. He does not avoid you or push you away, he "embraces" you. Ken says he is "very sensitive" but there is more meaning in that than just the physical contact of his heavy "wet noodle" arms, which reminded me of limp Play Dough. He is also sensitive in a visual way; he will look at you, sometimes expressionless, sometimes with a great big grin, but always through you and all around you - his eyes are not tunnel visioned at yours. He can "sense" without touching you where your balance is, and how to uproot you. I also hypothesize that his "sensitivity" has a key mental and psychological component, but this is an area not easily explored in a 2 day seminar.

Ken showed us how to train the first form, stepping, punching and bong lop. On the second day, Ken gave us opportunity for his correction, in stance, first form, stepping, and for some in chum kiu. For those who may think this is too elementary, I guarantee that if you have not been training in a way that is consistent with Ken's path, you are ripe for a big awakening. Ken's approach is very personalized. While he is addressing the group, he is also working with each person individually, showing or giving each person something they need. To correct my SLT, he helped me into my stance, deeper and deeper, and more in and more back; by the time I was in it (as close as we were to get anyway), I was so challenged by my concentration on maintaining the structure, trying to understand my body position, and managing the pain, that I did not have enough concentration left to even remember the opening moves to SLT correctly. Ken corrected with exacting precision, the feet, the knees, the hips, the hands, the head, the axis, the hands again, the feet again, the sink, and so on. He even tells you to correct your facial expression, to smile (LOL) and how to use your vision. I don't know how long I was in the stance, it may have been all of 30 seconds, though it felt like eternity. Again, Ken's sensitivity came into play...just as he had helped me into the stance, he was kind enough to help me out of it and to lend support until I could reliably stand on my own again. Later, when checking my stepping, he immobilized my forward hip momentum, which I have been using to propel myself forward; no hip also immobilized me, and again, painfully, brought to my attention that I must learn a new way of moving. I have never had a teacher who provided such painstaking analysis and detail of my positioning and mechanic.

It is impossible to capture all the detail that Ken covered. But all the while, his incredible teaching and coaching skills were evident. He is sensitive and a multi-media presenter. He uses words and descriptive phrases and illustrates through demonstration. He has a most delightful sense of humor, which not only draws people in and relaxes them, but helps to illustrate his points. He mixes his humor with his intensity, which allows him to convey the gravity of the subject matter while keeping

the atmosphere enjoyable and not too heavy. He uses his incredible persona to make a lasting impression on you. He has a knack for knowing what works to explain, and also who is receptive and who is not. And as much as he is demanding, he also has a deep wellspring of patience, which I personally put to the test again and again.

Ken's Wing Chun does not turn off at the end of the class. At lunch and dinner, his conversation easily returns again and again to Wing Chun. He is in his element in entertaining an endless series of questions on technical issues, his training in Hong Kong, Wing Chun history, and more. Ken calls himself "cocky" but I distinctly see it as the kind that stems from validated confidence, and not the kind of cockiness rooted in ego. He is at once self assured and humble. He is also very generous and kind, and open in his sharing of himself and his Wing Chun.

I hated to see the seminar come to a close. Ken really does **connect**, and the impression he makes is a lasting one. By the time I left, I felt that he was not only a coach to each of us, but also an ally and a friend. He is a complete package. It was also sad knowing that all the wonderful people at the seminar live so far away from me. Fortunately, a number of them have email. ;)

I have a lot to digest, and a lot to work on. No doubt I will have lots of questions. For those of you anxious to collect forms, drills, and fancy hands, best wishes to you. I am no longer worried about not being able to do pushups; in an ironic way, I'm kind of happy about it. As for me, my SLT and I will be spending a lot more time together. I believe that anyone truly interested in Wing Chun would be benefited by a seminar or training with Ken. Anyone can attend a seminar with Ken and enjoy the privilege of being reeled by his power. But to really receive something of value, I think you must also be willing to come with an open mind, an empty cup. Being among the "youngest" at the seminar in terms of my Wing Chun training, may in a sense have put me in company with the luckiest.

Well, there you have it, at least a start of my impressions. I'm off now to try and recapture my "girl hands." But my first order of business is to eliminate that little head shaking thing I do when I know I've executed something incorrectly (which is most of the time)...Ken hates that, so if he asks, tell him I'm working on it. ;)