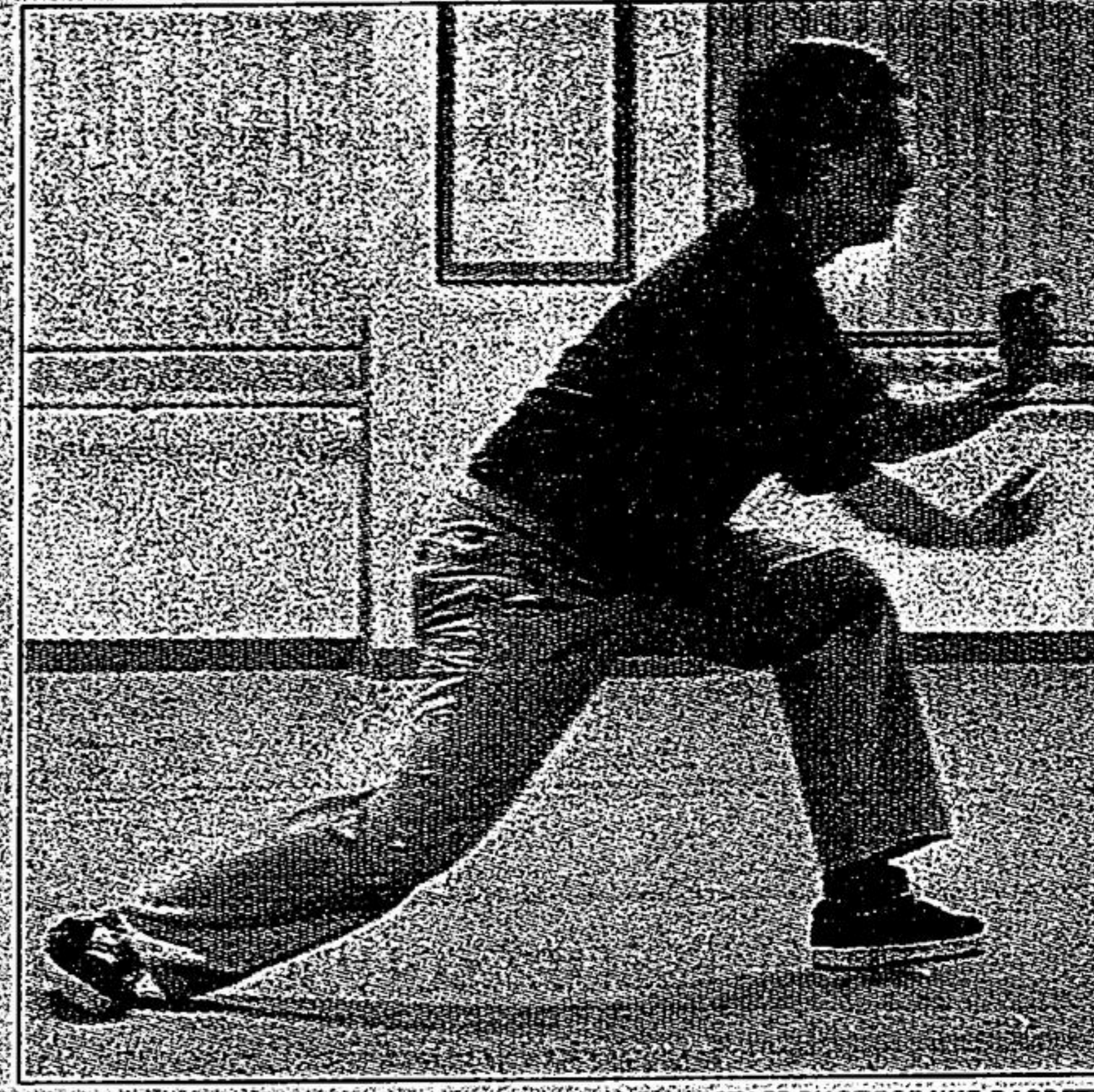
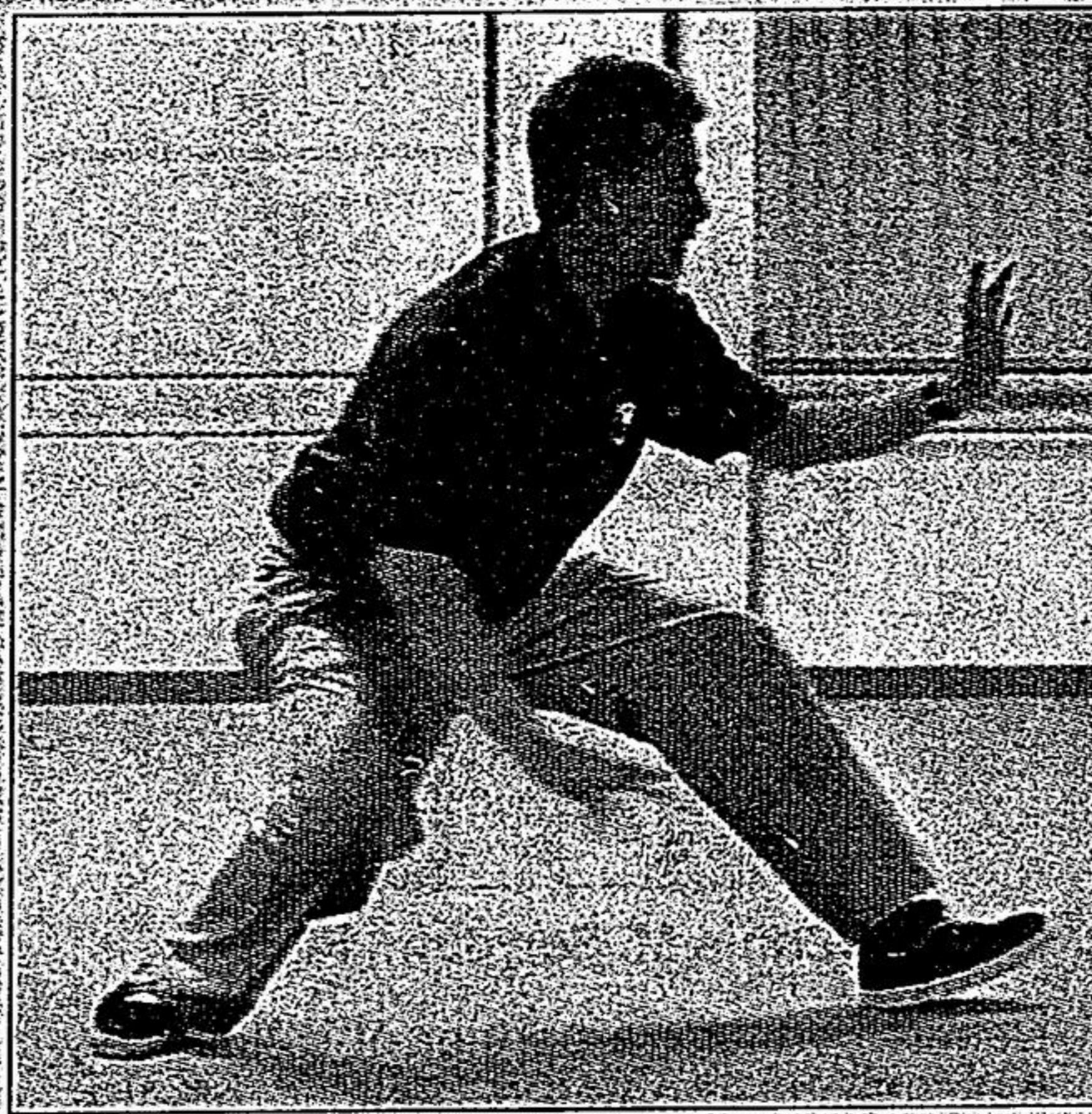
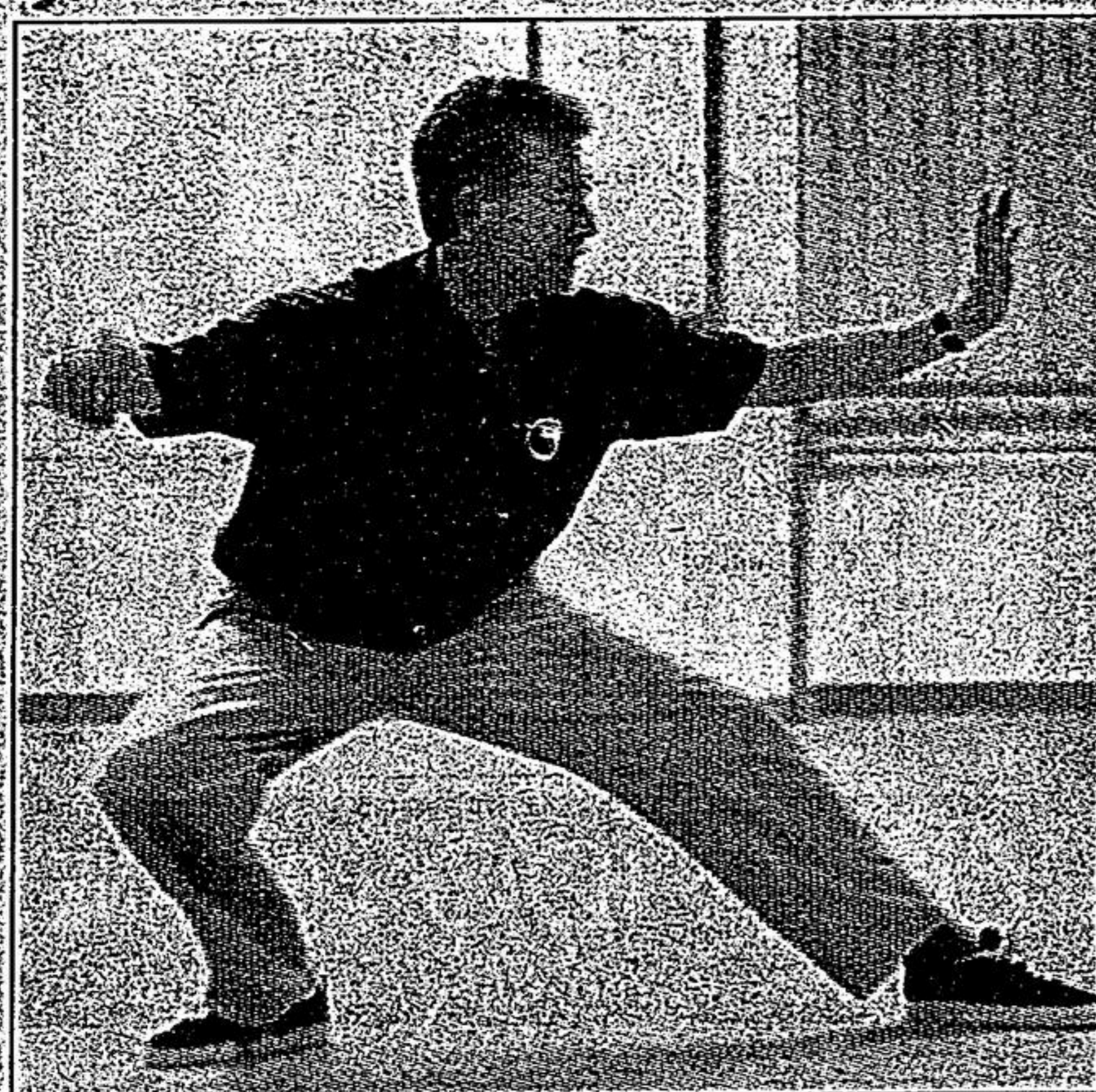


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# LIVING

## Snake Creeps Down



STAFF PHOTOS/MIKE BARRETT

*Tai Chi is an all-round exercise that helps blood flow and fights the stiffening and tightening aging brings.*

BY MIKE ADLER  
Staff Writer

In the Chinese Cultural Centre studio above Markham's Market Village mall, Tai Chi instructor Chan Kwai Hung is urging his students to put more weight on their legs, to be firm on the ground.

The ease and smoothness of the movements they are making belie the strength it takes to make them.

Tai Chi is an all-round exercise. It helps blood flow and fights the stiffening and tightening aging brings, with none of the loud grunting, dance music and no-pain-no-gain atmosphere of the Western health club.

Chan teaches Ng-Tai Chi, one of the gentlest and mildest of the five traditional Tai Chi systems.

It can be taught to young children and to the very old.

Chan's oldest student in Hong Kong, where he got his certification, was 93.

"The gentleness and mildness can conquer," said the Scarborough man, whose wife Chan Ping Hing is

also an instructor.

Go to the park on Highgate Drive in Markham and you can watch, early most mornings, as Chinese seniors take daily practice in an art that has prolonged lives and maintained good health in China since the 11th century.

But how did Tai Chi change the life of Gord Claus, an ex-school principal from Newmarket?

*"I don't feel 64 years old. I feel much younger."*

Before he retired in 1992, Claus' job was stressful, the hours long. Yet he had too much energy and it tended to make him hyper.

Last fall, he was told he might have to take cholesterol medication. He answered a newspaper ad for a Tai Chi class instead.

Claus found its slow movements — stretching, turning, sitting and bending — added up to a tremendous workout, and he walked away feeling great.

It took him two months of daily

practice to master these movements, some with quite colourful names, like "wave hands like clouds" and "stork cools wing", at Newmarket's Taoist Tai Chi Society



Above, Wendy Williams practises Tai Chi at the club in Newmarket. At top, instructor David Frame demonstrates the movement known as "snake creeps down."

of Canada club.

Claus' health improved, but, more surprisingly, he felt calmer, almost as if his energy were better distributed.

"It made me more relaxed, more patient," he said at the society's Bayview Avenue studio.

"I don't feel 64 years old. I feel much younger."

*"It works from the inside out."*

The Newmarket club and about 500 others like it are volunteer-run and base their exercises on the teachings of Moy Lin Shin, a Taoist monk who came to Canada in 1970.

"It works from the inside out" and its movements come from the spine, said Gary Ross, the society's Newmarket branch leader. "The spine is the engine."

Like Moy, who faced serious illness as a child, and Chan, who once suffered from poor digestion, many club members discovered Tai Chi in a bid to improve their health.

"I fell off a chin-up bar," recalled Mary Biddulph, a registered nurse from Barrie, who injured her neck and back in the accident and pinched a nerve. Through Tai Chi, Biddulph learned to stretch her spine in ways that relieved the pressure.

"I ripped my Achilles tendon playing squash," said Dave Frame, the society's new national president, who once loved the racket game but found Tai Chi more vigorous and hasn't returned to the squash courts in 15 years.

For Ross, though, it was back pain in the morning combined with the feeling it might be interesting to see a class. "I was 36 years old and starting to notice some changes."

It was 1978 when he saw Moy teach in Toronto. He noticed there were four generations of people in the room and the atmosphere was calm.

"I was welcomed," said Ross, who taught his first Tai Chi class in 1985 at Huron Heights Secondary School. The Newmarket club, which Ross leads, now has 120 members.



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