

THE BEACON JOURNAL  
TUESDAY, APRIL 19, 1988

SECTION B

Abe  
Zaidan



Don Niam and Liz Krosiak

## An ancient art has some answers for modern ills

You can't miss Liz Krosiak. She's the sandy-haired woman in the black gym suit, stretching an arm in a stylistic motion toward the floor-to-ceiling wall mirror. With a shy smile, she glances at a visitor, then continues her routine. The main reason you can't miss her is that she is the only woman in this night's class at Don Niam's Kung Fu Academy on Fir Hill.

There are nine or 10 people there working out, including a high school wrestling coach, a former Golden Gloves champ, a muscular Akron police sergeant and a fellow who is slamming his fist against a heavy cylindrical tackling bag. The room is filled with animalistic grunts. It's not show biz. The grunts, I was told, ride out on bursts of newly tapped energy from somewhere deep in the human torso.

You get the picture. But not all of it. Fifteen years ago, Miss Krosiak, who is 37, was in a wheelchair, a multiple sclerosis victim. But she decided, she said, that she wasn't about to live out her days as an invalid. She put herself into a daily physical therapy program. She ran along the city's Parcours, which has a series of gymnastic routines. And for the past two years, she has been working with Niam, her kung fu teacher.

## Ancient martial art of kung fu helps peaceful folks 'feel great'

Continued from page B1

moves," Niam said, "and there are groups of movements that help develop balancing, power, timing, finesse, concentration, endurance and breathing. You develop a lot of internal power."

That was soon obvious to me. I found a safe spot along one wall as the students practiced their moves with the deep-down "ughs" and glares, feet planted this way and that, arms streaking straight ahead.

The biggest fellow on the floor was the police sergeant, Tom Hooper. Later, the mean look now gone from his face, he told me why he was there: "There's a

lot of stress and frustration in my job. This takes a lot of concentration. It's a mental vacation for me. I like all of the people here. We're like one big family."

His mild manner belied the talk during the sessions in which Niam demonstrated how easily one might crack an adversary's knee or elbow with a targeted chop or kick. (At this point, Miss Krosiak is practicing a "block and chop" with Hooper.)

"Do you ever bother to warn somebody else that you're an expert in kung fu? You know, to give him an opportunity to back off before you break his arm?" I asked.

Donald Niam is really a mid-

mannered-peace-loving young man with a body from the front of a cereal box. "Hey," he said with a trace of a smile. "I don't sweat my butt off to go around telling people to lay off because I'm a kung fu expert." He doesn't — and to the painful surprise of a bully or two that he has met along the way, he hasn't.

Self-defense, of course, is a major staple of kung fu.

And then there is Liz Krosiak, who walks around telling people she's "feeling great," which makes a lot of other people feel good, too.

Abe Zaidan is the Beacon Journal's senior editor.

# NIAM'S KUNG FU ACADMY<sup>PO</sup>

After one recent workout, Miss Krosiak, her forehead still damp with sweat, said proudly: "My whole body feels rejuvenated after this."

"She's doing this through sheer determination," Niam said. "She never quits."

There's her shy smile again. "Yes," she says. "I haven't been in a wheelchair for 15 years. I feel so good."

Although kung fu is generally considered to be a potentially lethal form of self-defense, Niam regards Miss Krosiak as an example that not every student need aspire to being another David Carradine.

The 33-year-old Niam has been teaching the ancient art for more than 10 years and now specializes in a form of kung fu (loosely, "successful hard work") called "kung fu" (a combination of fist and palm). He still travels to Maryland once a month for private lessons from an eighth-generation grandmaster of the art, Yin Tai Loi.

Last fall, he ran the University of Akron's football squad — 105 athletes — through a series of early morning kung fu sessions with Coach Gerry Faust looking on. ("That's nothing new," Niam said. "The martial arts have been popular with the pro football teams.")

Niam has about 50 students, from ages 6 to 56, he said, and their goals may be as varied as their ages. Some, as is Miss Krosiak's case, say they want the benefits of mental and physical conditioning.

"There are hundreds and hundreds of

See ANCIENT, page B3