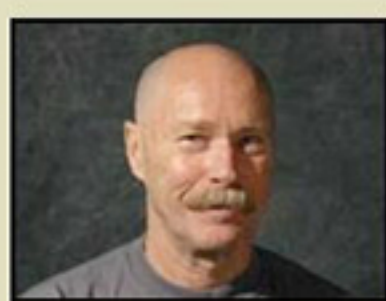


# A Life Biography of Kenneth Van Sickle



I was born in 1932 in New Brunswick, New Jersey, U.S.A. We lived in a small house on my grandfather's farm; he grew flowers, vegetables and decorative trees, which he sold on location. My parents, uncles and aunts were all

experimenting with the new technologies and gadgets of the 20th Century; I was particularly impressed with binoculars, guns, cameras and 8mm Film cameras.

My father taught me to shoot a 22 rifle when I was 5, and my grandfather gave me a 410 shotgun and took me hunting when I was 6. I got a bow and arrow set shortly thereafter and carried it around from then on whenever I walked in the countryside.



I was constantly brandishing anything that looked like a sword And would play at dueling with any kid of similar persuasion, it seemed to be in my blood I spent a great deal of my time outside, playing with boomerangs, javelins and bullwhips and precious little time doing what I was supposed to be doing.



In school much of the time that I was supposed to be studying was taken up in drawing guns, airplanes and swords. I don't draw guns and airplanes anymore. I was on my high schools gymnastic and wrestling teams, and I studied western saber fencing at a nearby university. I won the New Jersey archery championship in 1948 and 49.

I was drafted into the army in 1953; in basic training I made the highest score on the fitness test in the history

of the 9th division infantry, then I was sent to Korea; the truce was called shortly after I got there which I take absolutely no credit for. While in Korea, one of my fellow G.I.s was a brown belt in Judo and I learned as much as I could from him. I also qualified expert marksman in pistol and rifle. I returned to the U.S. in early '55, and then went directly to Paris to study art and live the good life, nothing much in the martial category happened there except the time I got hit in the head with a snowball.



I returned to New York in 1956, began the study of Goju Karate in 1960 with Peter Urban, who had studied with Yamaguchi Gogen (The Cat) in Japan. By 1967 I was awarded a 3rd degree Black belt and had developed some ability with the Sai and the Short chain.

At this point I was becoming disenchanted with some of the aspects of Karate, its brutality and lack of philosophical depth to say the least; "if your opponent is drowning, throw him an anchor." So I

began a quest for an art that contained an element of spirituality and philosophy.

I observed classes in Gung Fu, Kyudo, Iaido and Ju Jitsu, to name a few,



then a friend told me that there was an old Chinese doctor who taught Tai Chi on Canal street, so off I went; The moment I saw him I knew that he looked like the little old Masters in the Gung Fu movies who have magical powers, so I signed up on the spot.

I went to study at 211 Canal St. 3 or 4 times a week, I first studied form, then push hands, sword form and fencing, I made it my business to fence as much as possible with Professor and/or one of the first 6 instructors. I attended all of his lectures on Taoism, and any on painting, calligraphy or poetry. I asked permission to take photos pretty soon after I started and was pleased to become his official photographer and cinematographer (both were my profession), I was thereby given access to many other facets of Cheng Man Ching's life.



I believe it was in 1972 that he undertook to give special classes that



included his first six students, plus the second seven, chosen to be certified as teachers. We underwent intensive training in solo form and sword form and we attended all push hands and fencing classes. I became an instructor and continued to study with him until his death in 1975. I began teaching on my own in 1980, conducting classes in New York City and in Brooklyn, also giving private lessons from my apartment.

I knew that there were many Tai Chi schools in the New York area and didn't understand why they never got together, even Karateka would visit and free style at other schools, so in 1984 I rented a studio one night a week for two hours and got the word out that anyone from any school of Tai Chi, Aikido or Gung fu was welcome to play push hands, soft hands or sticky hands, whatever their style called it.

At first there were attitudes about who was doing it right or whose master was higher, but soon they realized that this exposure made everyone better. I think the general feeling of camaraderie, of traveling on the same path provoked new ideas and made new friends.

In 1992 I took a trip to the Island of Majorca, to visit friends I had known since 1955, it was my good fortune to meet the son of Robert Graves who was born and raised there, these and the "Balearic Islands" were named for the balls, the stones, that they expertly propelled with their slings, I spent many hours with him slinging stones from the cliffs into the beautiful Mediterranean.