

# The Speech We Should Have Made

By Mark Spence

<http://www.chisauclub.com.au>

On Friday, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007 Chi Sau Club had our first Christmas Banquet. It was an excellent night attended by 54 students and partners, quite a large number considering that we have only been in existence for a little over six months. At an appropriate time, our waitress and dear friend Rosita, led the school in a call for a speech. Both Des and I had not even thought about one. I offered up a few rather lame sentences, and Des said something in Scottish, (even worse!). Afterwards, I felt that the occasion deserved a little more, so now aided by hindsight and the eloquence of a word processor, I would like to give the speech we should have made on the night.

I suppose many people attending the banquet would not know how Chi Sau Club actually got started. Here is the story for those people and anyone who may be interested.

Before the name Chi Sau Club had ever been thought of, in 2003 I began training on a regular basis with Martin Kerrigan. At the time, he and his partner Yeng were running the Manly Vale branch of IWCA, (International Wing Chun Academy), and had been training for about 14 years. I sometimes visited in my role as branch supervisor. We did a lot of chi sau together and I believe Martin felt that he benefited from the sessions. We began training at the academy in the weekends. I would give private lessons to IWCA members and Martin would come along to train afterwards. This continued for some time and I was surprised at Martin's dedication, showing up weekend after weekend, despite the considerable distance he had to travel. I was also impressed at how skillful Martin became in a relatively short time.

At the end of 2003 I moved into a house at Coogee Beach with another IWCA student, Enrico Gili. Enrico is one of those guys that makes everybody smile. He is Italian through and through, and passionate about wing chun as he is about most things. We became good friends and started training at home together, most nights. The house was large and had a great courtyard and garage to train in. Other IWCA students started to show up to train and party at nights and weekends. They were Jan Kroupa, Nima Khezr nejat my teenage son Kane, and a few others. These people remain among my dearest friends now, (even Kane!). It was at that time I had the idea of starting a social club for IWCA and naming it Chi Sau Club. I will not go into the politics of IWCA at that time, but my idea for a social club was rejected, and Chi Sau Club moved underground. I guess we had become something between a social club and a street gang. Interested readers can get a taste of our group in those early days in the video section of this website.

In 2004 I moved to live with Chie, who is now my wife, and my stepdaughter Satomi. Training continued 7 days or nights per week in the new garage, attended by more chi sau addicts. I was Head Instructor for the full-time CIV students at IWCA at that time, and finally had enough people to train with. Every night at least a few people would show up. Des Ferris came into the picture about this time, and became one of the inner circle of Chi Sau Club. Des and I have been friends for over 20 years. Pat Ridley, a CIV student was also inducted. I had said to Nima that I would train any time that he could make it to my garage. Nima is one of the most enthusiastic wing chun players I have ever met and he showed up every, (and I mean every), night, and would stay for hours. His energy lifted me and I will always be thankful to him for that. He later introduced John Cogan and Matt Travis to the group and they also became hardcore chi sau club members. Some nights we would have 15 or so guys training in the garage or the park nearby until 1am. Until this

time, chi sau club membership was strictly by invitation. Phil Warburton, who knew of us through Martin at Manly Vale, had the cheek to ask if he could attend. Caught unawares, I could not refuse and he also became a member of our gang.

I think the best indication of the commitment of Chi Sau Club is that in the following years Enrico, Nima, John and Matt moved to live in Hong Kong in order to train with our sigung Chu Shong Tin. They are still there now.

Following the passing of our sifu Jim Fung, Des, Martin, Yeng, Phil, Pat and myself decided to turn Chi Sau Club into an official school. Martin and Yeng run a branch at Harbord, Pat has one in the Blue Mountains, Phil operates his school in North Sydney and Des and I run the school in Surry Hills. What began as a kind of underground gang for chi sau addicts has become a school. Or more precisely in my opinion, a family.

That brings me to the point that I tried to make on the banquet night. Most martial arts schools are run like an army, with discipline a high priority and respect for rank enforced vigorously. I do not wish to criticize that model as I'm sure it works well and provides what many people seek in martial arts. I believe however, that there is a different type of school that I greatly prefer, and that is the type that feels like a family. I feel this very much every time I visit sigung Chu's school in Hong Kong. On the night of the banquet as I watched the members of Chi Sau Club enjoying each others' company, I had the same warm feeling. So now Des, Martin, Yeng, Pat, Phil and myself would like to thank our kung fu brothers and sisters in Chi Sau Club for being part of this wonderful experience. May it continue for many years!

- Mark Spence, 2007.

