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Everybody was kung fu fighting

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In keeping with the Eastern Concord theme, it was decided that I should try out a martial arts class. I signed up for kung fu with Averill's Martial Arts on North Main Street. They've been teaching martial arts for 18 years, so I figured I was in good hands.

Beginner kung fu is a little bit like gym class in middle school, minus the rotten children. The environment is less "I'm going to beat you up after recess" and more "great job!" For this reason, I enjoyed my first experience as a karate kid, but I must confess to feeling some anxiety during the class.

I mastered our first move, the horse stance, pretty quickly. That's where you space your legs several feet apart and act as though you're going to sit down. Most of the work we did in the class stemmed from this pose. My legs were burning as I eased into the lowest sitting position I could handle, which was probably pretty close to standing up.

Our instructor, Paul Averill, had us form two lines. I should mention that my class consisted of two boys in either middle school or early high school and two guys who I would guess were a closer in age to me. While I later found out that there are girls in the

class, this did me little good during the ordeal. I lined up behind the younger two and prepared for our next drill.

This time, we were going to practice moving while staying in the horse stance. Each person sunk low and started moving down the studio and back, returning to line. Naturally, I was the last person completing the drill, so it felt as though I was on center stage while I tried to remember which foot went first.

At one point, as we were learning to switch directions and move across the room, I forgot what to do and basically made myself dizzy spinning in circles. Looking back, I'm not sure how I managed this, but so it was.

To avoid embarrassment, I tried to head back in line, but my instructor would have none of it. He didn't quite see the deer-in-the-headlights/girl-who-hated-gym look on my face and had me work on the moves again while my classmates waited.

No one was looking at me, and my instructor was helpful, but my aim in life is to avoid embarrassment due to my lack of coordination and athletic ability. I don't need kung fu trying to thwart this one, very achievable, goal.

The next section of class was the most fun - we got out what appeared to be giant padded shields that we would practice kicks and punches on, while our partner took the hits. One of the kicks stemmed from grapevine leg work, which I remember using frequently when I took step aerobics in college. It was sheer joy when Paul clapped while demonstrating the move, a joke on his part, I'm sure, but it gave me the push I needed to get through the rest of the class. I channeled all of my step aerobics energy and completed the reps of kicks and punches.

By this time, Paul's wife, Chrys, had joined the class, so we partnered on the pad work. If I ever wandered into a dark alleyway, Chrys would definitely top my list of people to fend off villains. Though I could tell she was holding back, it was still difficult to take some of the kicks, even with the shield absorbing most of the impact.

Eventually the class broke up to practice some blocking moves. I was excused to take pictures, a great relief. I had worked up a sweat doing my kung fu moves and was ready for a break. After all, this is the most exercise I've had since I got talked into trying out jogging last summer.

If you're looking for a mental and physical workout, martial arts is the way to go.

As my arms hurt for several days after the class, I can comfortably conclude that I am horribly out of shape and that the kung fu moves, a blend of multiple martial arts styles, made for a good workout.

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