



Linda's T'ai Chi Weekly Handout November 6, 2022

Surviving a Crowd Crush Event Using T'ai Chi Principles



La Catastrophe du 11 octobre 1711 au pont de Guillotière.

October 1711, 245 people were killed in a crowd crush on Guillotière bridge (Pont de la Guillotière) in Lyon, France, when a large crowd returning from a festival on the other side of the Rhône River became trapped against an obstruction in the middle of the bridge caused by a collision between a carriage and a cart. (Wikipedia). This is likely the first recorded history of a crowd crush. Since then, there have been many tragedies like this including the most recent Halloween Night crush in Seoul.

One of our T'ai Chi students, Kathleen, brought to my attention a story in the NYT about how to survive such an event. It is worth reading about strategies if you like to attend large crowd events. I am going to write about three strategies because they are postures that are fundamental to our T'ai Chi practice. Deaths in crowd crushes are mostly caused by compressive asphyxiation as people are squeezed so tightly, they can no longer breathe. The second cause of death is being trampled.

The first and most important strategy in surviving a crowd crush is “Stand like a Boxer”. In T'ai Chi, we call this the bow and arrow stance. The Boxer stance or the bow stance keeps you steadier and better able to absorb pressure from people pushing against you. Keep knees bent and flexible so that the body is not rigid and therefore you are more likely to move when given the opportunity.

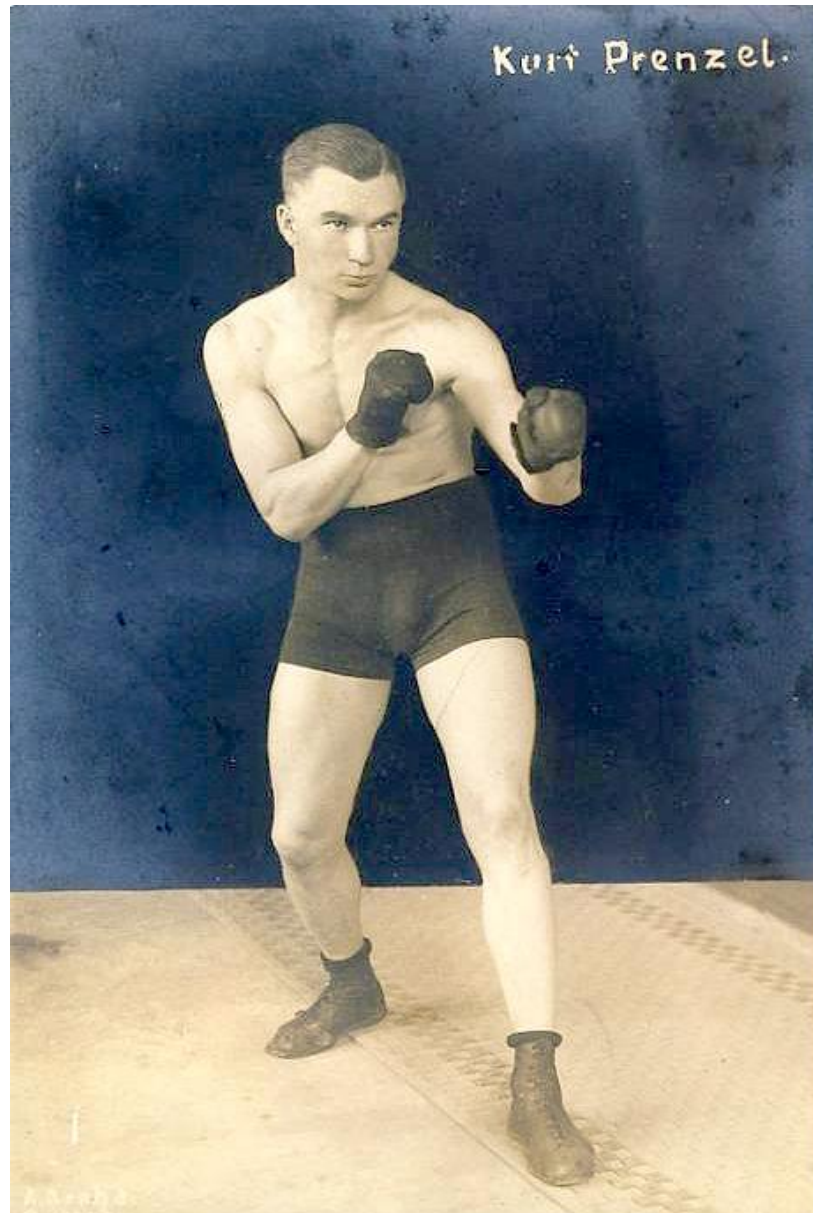
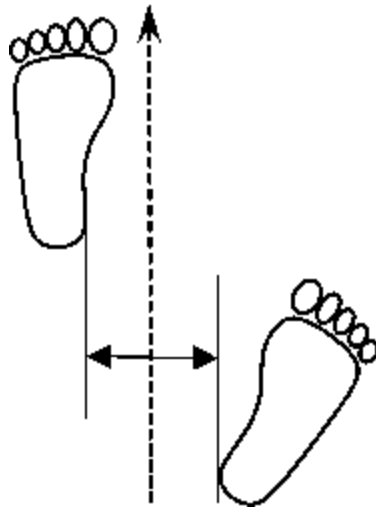


Image of the Boxer Stance- notice the direction of the front and back foot as well as the channel between the feet. This is a classic Bow and Arrow Stance.



Here is another image of the boxer stance or the bow and arrow stance. Notice the position of the front foot, the back foot and the channel between the feet. This stance not only provides stability but it is easy on the back. It takes pressure off the knees and lower back. Use this stance as you wait on lines or as you shovel snow or rake leaves.

The second strategy is to keep hands in front of the body the same way a boxer holds his/her arms and hands. This keeps more space between you and person in front of you. It gives you the space you need to avoid the crush. Note the arms and hands in the image above.

The third strategy is to avoid falling and if you do, go into a fetal position and protect your head; get up as soon as possible. In T'ai Chi, one of the goals from a martial art point of view is to keep on your feet. Once you lose balance and fall, your chances of winning the fight becomes almost nil. Remaining upright is essential to survival in fighting and crowd crushes. It is our number one goal in balance and stability to prevent falling.

I am not writing about all of the strategies to survive a crush but I feel I need to mention that during the lull, when the crowd surge releases, move quickly on the diagonal to get out of the crowd. This is using the rhythm of the crowd to your advantage. Just like T'ai

Chi, going with the flow is a key concept in the rhythm of Tai Chi. This strategy is worth reading about should you find this topic of interest.

Our hearts go out to the families and friends and to the over 150 people who lost their lives in Seoul this past Halloween.

Stay safe and well,

Linda

