

An illuminating evening with “Lou Reed”

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According to Chinese culture, and Buddhist teachings -- especially Tibetan Buddhism belief -- the 49 days after a person’s death are extremely important. On the 49th day, family and friends gather to mourn and honor the passing loved one.



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Legendary musician and poet **Lou Reed** died of liver complication on Oct 27, 2013 at age 71 in Southampton, New York. Born to a Jewish family, he once said “my God is Rock’n’Roll” and spiritually subscribed to Tibetan Buddhism. This Hall of Fame inductee was the godfather of Punk Rock and influenced the world’s brightest musicians in the past four decades. His death was felt by musicians, artists, and common people around the world. Obituaries were read, posted, and tweeted by celebrities, and media in the U.S, European countries, Australia, China and many other countries. Famous musicians and bands like David Bowie, Pearl Jam, the Killers, Rufus Wainwright, Neil Young, and many others made tributes. Various memorials were held more than a month long. Dec. 15 was the 49th day since Lou passed away.

Saturday Dec. 14, Manhattan was battered by snow, wind, and freezing rain. The next day, the weather calmed. I arrived at Lou’s penthouse in the West Village around 4 p.m. The foyer is double height and above the door hangs a large Chinese calligraphy “magically spiritual dragon (*Shen Long*)” written by a 19th Generation Chen Family **Tai Chi** Lineage Holder Chen Xiaowang. Lined against the long living room wall are tall shelves of books and a Tai Chi Yin/Yang emblem sculpture from his beloved Tai Chi teacher Grandmaster Ren Guangyi and a fabric knot hand crafted by **Kung Fu Tai Chi Magazine** publisher Gigi Oh’s mother. The opposite wall has two large pictures of a **Raven** face. I could hear Lou cite “my soul shall not be lifted from the shadow nevermore” from **The Raven** (click the link here to hear Lou read *The Raven* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7t6Wc8ww64I>).

Passing through a narrow hallway decorated with black and white photos including his mentor **Andy Warhol**’s, I entered a large open area filled with sun light coming through the large window pans on two sides of the room. It is a family quarter: no luxurious furniture nor fixtures only a cozy couch, a wood dining table, and rustic wood benches those match up with the antiqued indoor window on the upper floor looking down; it is a place to cook, dine, lounge around, meditate, read poems, play music, listen to CDs and records, watch TV, and hug family dogs. In one corner, Lou’s guitars yearn to be played again. There is a large lazy chair by the window looking at the glistening Hudson River and next to it on a windowsill sat a small rave sculpture. Above the mantel are three astonishing looking

black/white landscaping photos from Reed's [Romanticism](#) photography collection.

The fireplace façade adorns Lou's Tai Chi weapons. I secretly admired his dedication and persistence to master multiple Tai Chi bare-handed and weapons forms in the past 17 years – he practiced at least 2 to 3 hours daily, seven days a week. Click on the video at the top and you can see some of [Lou Reed's](#) awesome Tai Chi movements. Tony Visconti, a renowned record producer, fondly recalled that he and Lou spent many hours in front of the fireplace practicing Tai Chi together. Amanda Harmon praised Lou's generosity of opening up his home for his fellow classmates to practice on the rooftop. There is a large old pen among Tai Chi weapons. I imagined that Lou used it to write some of his poignant lyrics and powerful melodies. Due to its size and shape, it looked like a weapon at the first glance. In reality, the pen can be mightier than the sword. [Business Insider](#) echoed others' views and commented that Lou Reed helped to bring down the communism in Eastern European

http://www.slate.com/blogs/business_insider/2013/10/27/how_lou_reed_helped_bring_down_communism_in_eastern_europe.html.

Lou's loving wife and eternal friend, [Laurie Anderson](#), an accomplished experimental artist and vocalist, was busy greeting guests while putting final touches on hors d'oeuvres and savories. Japanese [Gyokuro tea](#) (Jade Dew) was served in tiny ceramic cups for sipping. With little make-up, 66-year-old Laurie radiated with unassuming beauty and brilliance in her eyes.

I glanced through Lou's latest published photo album and was amazed by his diverse interests in people and nature. He preferred black and white pictures. One photo shows a woman whispering to another on a street. They could be a mother and a daughter. The picture depicts a loving relationship, very sweet. This photo book reveals another side of Lou: less sarcasm or anger as his music but full of love, harmony, and humanity. There are a few pictures he took in Tai Chi mecca Chen Village, Henan, China: a street view from inside of a taxi, tractors on a dirt road, a farmer squatting in the woods, people practicing Tai Chi on the street in a quiet morning, and time-aged paint-stripped doors and windows. He included a couple of Push Hands photos taken during Master Chen Zhiqian's workshop in New York two years ago. An interesting picture is Grandmaster Ren Guangyi's portrait that made him sculpture like and full of energy and spirit.

The ceremony started with a Rabbi singing psalms and reading [Kaddish](#), then a therapist led a short [meditation](#), a Zen monk shared a story about Lou's formidable attitude toward death, and a Tibetan monk said prayers. At Laurie's request, Grandmaster Ren performed his creation, the Tai Chi 21 form. Surrounded by one hundred and fifty people, Ren delivered a powerful performance in a space less than four feet by four feet. Famous pain doctor [Dan Richman](#) talked how Lou Reed shared his knowledge on Tai Chi with him. Lou's backup singer remembered one quiet night when they were listening to music together and tears were rolling down Lou's cheeks and he apologetically said, "I am susceptible to beauty". His gardener appreciated him for generosity and nonjudgmental attitude. Other friends also shared personal stories of Lou.

As hard as he fought liver cancer and the disease after a liver transplant, Lou was never afraid of death. A week prior to his passing, at his request, Laurie moved him out of the hospital and stayed at their home in Southampton. Lou spent his last days looking at trees and marveled nature's beauty. He was too frail to stand up and practiced the Tai Chi 21 with his hands only. In the morning of Sunday Oct. 27, he asked to be moved out to the porch so he could see and feel the light. He continued with his Tai Chi movements. All of a sudden, he felt his body had dropped inside. He looked up into the sky with arms widely extended to the sides and mouth opened with joy and left the world.

At Laurie's recount of Lou's last moment, an image emerged. Before the memorial started that evening, the sun was setting on the west side. From the large windows, I noticed that light clouds covered the sun softly. Unexpectedly, the sun brightened up and created an enormous view of energy and optimism along with its reflection in the river. Then it disappeared and the sky was dark.

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