

My Personal Journey Through Tai Chi

And my experiences through teaching Tai Chi over many years.

As individuals taking the first tentative steps on our Tai Chi Journey we may flexible, more graceful, to have better balance and co-ordination, to be more confident, more relaxed, less stressful, more patient, to make friends or any mixture of these goals amongst many others that I have heard expressed through the years.



However in my experience, once under way, the journey taken by each individual is as diverse and varied as the journey of the multitude of stars and planets in the universe. Each Journey enriching the life of that individual in a wealth of different ways maybe not at first expected.

Here I hope to explain a little of my own Journey with Tai Chi and also to share with you all the wonderful contributions so generously written by my students so eager and willing to share their journey with others. Indeed I have observed that when people start to feel the benefits of Tai Chi however multivariate these benefits may be, they want to share their experiences and transformations with others so that they too might be, encouraged, inspired, motivated, fascinated or intrigued enough to join a class and begin their own Tai Chi journey.

The Journey Begins.....

Movement had always been a huge part of my life going right back to Musical Movement sessions in infant's school, vivid memories of moving my body in ways orchestrated by the ever-changing music played by my teacher. Here I was able to explore the feelings and actions of being as strong as a Lion, as graceful as a gazelle, as scary as a monster, as fly away and dainty as a fairy. I believe that at the tender age of 5 years I became aware of the feeling of liberation brought about by the joy of movement.

In my teenage years this joy was expressed in a very teenage way through the joy of disco dancing, the frenzied pleasure found in wriggling and writhing around any dance floor willing to accommodate me and my equally frenzied friends.

At 23 I discovered Aerobics to music and worked my body to its limits each day no doubt releasing huge amounts of feel good endorphins which undoubtedly masked several unexpected problems with my skeleton that were later to be diagnosed as Arthritis. My GP recommended I work through

the pain or stop exercising. Being enthusiastic I continued until the pain in my spine, knees and ankles told me there had to be another way. At this time there was a lot of publicity advising us that high impact exercise may not be the best way to help preserve our joints so I needed to find something else.

In my 30s this Journey led me to the gymnasium where in my usual enthusiastic way I beefed it out against heavy metal machines until my super lean body was able to lift 2½ times my own body weight. Then one day whilst working away against the weights a crushing pain in my spine winded me and my days in the gym were over. My body quit!

So it was through movement that I also learned perhaps a little late that it was important to respect my body. That joint pain was no fun and by pushing my body to its limits it had eventually said enough is enough. For some time I had physiotherapy which taught me the importance of core stability, that I had been training the big muscles on the outside of my body but not the small muscles supporting my skeleton at a deeper level holding it in good shape. My understanding of exercise began to move onto a different level exploring the power of kinaesthetic movement.



After a period of recovery my search for a more gentle form of exercise began, something that could hold my attention. I had worn out my Callenetics exercise video which led me through exercise but didn't challenge me in the way I needed to be challenged. Having always had an interest in Martial Arts, Tai Chi shone out in my darkest, dreariest moment. My best friend cut an advert from the paper for a new Tai Chi class starting and a new me emerged!

From this time forth I attempted many different classes and gleaned different aspects of Tai Chi knowledge from each. My first instructor was wonderfully graceful and inspired me in the ways of Tai Chi movement and what I would aspire to in this aspect but as often happens the teacher held back the very essence of what I needed to know, I hadn't yet 'earned' my Tai Chi years of service! My next experience was equally poor where I spent 3 years learning a Form with no name, no back ground and no application but worse still, the instructors ego often got in way of the essence so I was still deprived of the depth of Tai Chi, the internal art.

Good Fortune took me to a small class where it truly felt that I had 'come home'. The diminutive Chinese lady of unknown years smiled from her heart and welcomed me to watch. I could barely sit still in my seat as she led the movements I could not hold my body still, it simply needed to move and my joy through movement was truly restored. It was in this place that I was truly

inspired not only by her skill as a Tai Chi player but also by her willingness to share all that we asked of her, her unrelenting passion for Tai Chi led us on to greater heights in our own understanding and her great patience and gentle corrections kept us on track tirelessly.

Within 6 months I began to understand 'Internal' where I had previously studied for 5 years and it had never been mentioned. I felt my body grow stronger and my arthritic pains diminish. My mind became less erratic and more focused and I knew that Tai Chi would always play an important part in my life. So when my instructor left the UK 6 years later to return to her home in China, sad though I was, the confidence she had instilled in me helped me to understand that I had sufficient experience of co-tutoring with her to help others and promised to do so with her blessing.

By now I was working by day in the field of Information Technology in a college of further education and teaching Tai Chi by night. It was at this time that I was first approached by the local Arthritis Care group to give a lunch-time taster session which I accepted delightedly without realising how this was to change the rest of my life.

Classes became so successful that all my spare time taken with teaching adults in the community, specialist groups in hospitals, mental health groups, Parkinson's Support groups, Multiple Sclerosis Support Groups, Stroke carers groups, Age Concern groups. It felt so wonderful to be able to pass on my knowledge and to help other people improve their lives. Over a period of years this often specialised work helped me to gain an insight into the many different needs of my Tai Chi students and embracing what I had always held so true - that anyone can do Tai Chi as long as they work at their own level, find an instructor that they can study and play with and get all the encouragement that they need.

When I responded to an advert for Paul Lams Tai Chi for Arthritis Course I had not realised that a monumental change was about to happen in my life. Through his ever growing Tai Chi network I was able to make connection with instructors all around the UK to share and discuss a diversity of ideas about teaching Tai Chi. Three years later – never to forget the day in Monterey, California when Paul Lam invited me to be Master Trainer for the UK. We knew that in this role I would be able to go forward passing on good teaching practices and to create more safe Tai Chi Instructors to promote the Tai Chi for Health Programmes. His confidence in me as a teacher was the boost I needed to pull out the stops and sink myself wholeheartedly into the hard work he had planned out ahead of me. It would involve attending training courses in Australia and America whilst working through a two year mentorship programme and also to be pro active in supporting and further developing the programme to help others.

This unique network has now spread worldwide and my colleagues extend around the globe. As a team we endeavour to keep up to date with safe

exercise practice and continue to promote Tai Chi for Health Programmes around the world. I was also introduced to Kam Lau Fung who I have been fortunate to train with at workshops and also as a personal Student His Tai Chi electrifies every cell in my body and his strong teaching techniques have led me to a greater depth of Tai Chi.

On a personal level this opportunity has enriched my life with amazing experiences, travel around the world and meeting wonderful people filling my days with happiness and love whilst encouraging me to give my best as a teacher - To take the best of all that I have learnt and offer it forward to others. I value each and every student that I meet, watch their progress with love, happiness and pride in my heart and listen to their stories with respect, admiration and wonder.

I call my journey 'Tic - Tac -Toe with the Universe' never knowing quite where I was going, but rather allowing my instincts to follow the path as the ways of the universe led me on. A path that I have followed with great conviction and excitement having always been a traveller and adventure and able to let go of 'the Norm'. Sometimes my journey was side tracked making it appear that I had gone off course, only to later find that the side step had offered a new experience or understanding further enriching the journey allowing me to go on with still more conviction.

Tai Chi continues to thrill and absorb me, to challenge me in new ways and permits me to share my passion for it with those that come to me to learn. Through out my life there have been many aspects that have come together to make mine a wonderful Journey of Joy through Movement.

Thanks you for sharing my Journey.
All good things
Lesley Roberts