



European school
of t'ai chi

T'ai Chi

Newsletter spring 2006

Letter from the New Chair

Hello Tai Chi Family!

It is with surprise, joy, humility and a little trepidation that I take on the role of Chairperson. I would like to say a hearty thank you to all the outgoing officers, in particular to Kamal and Louanne (Chair and Vice Chair) for all the sterling work, perseverance and commitment to ensuring the healthy continuation of the European School of Tai Chi, I know they will continue to offer their support as committee members.

Some of the more long standing members of the school may remember that I took an active role at its inception and on the committee as Hon. Secretary from 1989-99. For the last six years much of my energy has been diverted into full time education, teaching GCSE's and A Levels in Ceramics, Sculpture, History of Art, (Dance for a year or so!) and as an extra curricular activity....Tai Chi - hooray! The latter helped me and the pupils stay rooted and connected to the earth when the going got tough. I'm just so thankful that I have this practice; it's been a life saver.

Excerpts from my journal 13/2/06

Spent all day yesterday doing Tai Chi with Juanolo and the wonderful and strange Tai Chi family. Arrived after the day had started....but it was like stepping onto a magical moving carpet. The room was silent, a very beautiful silence that filled the space. I stepped onto the raft and was taken away by the current of the river. What a day! Every face was familiar, warm, comforting. In the silence there was a sense of serene acceptance, total involvement, no strain, a dropping away of self, a total surrender to the Chi - wonderful. How I cherish this Tai Chi family. I hope I can bring a renewed energy to the family, a commitment to listen, to be involved and to act when necessary.

For the last six years I have been immersed in teaching, not of an entirely different kind, but in a different situation - that of an independent school. A very intense period of giving, organizing, team working, negotiating, discriminating, reporting, to name but a few elements. Lots of routines and deadlines to meet.

Then I made a very conscious decision to change. It was a very hard decision to make, to choose self preservation on a creative rather than a material level. At the deepest level of my being I knew the time had come to change. It was the Tai Chi training that gave me the courage to make what seemed like a momentous step, out of job security into the unknown, or maybe onto another moving raft on the current of life. It is this energy current, this visceral connection with the Chi that allowed me to take another step in my life, to take the risk, to act as a warrior.

Life is full of decisions, this was a big one, but these steps face us all, - do we take them, do we move forward, back or sideways? There are no rights or wrongs just choices. Change is the nature of energy, continually on the move, just as the tide rises and falls there is ebb and flow. The practice of Chi Kung and Tai Chi give us an opportunity to be in the circle of flow, it's up to us to listen, to shape and re-shape our realities. Each of us is given the opportunity to create, to sense, to feel to listen.

Thank you to all those people who shared themselves, their strengths, vulnerabilities and their wonderful, infinite Chi on Sunday 12th Feb. on a cold winters day at the Hale Institute. We generated lots of heat, Chi and Metta, the room was full of Metta and laughter. It warmed my spirit and I am happy to serve again, as Chairwomen.

Julia Webster

My Year of T'ai Chi

By Sue McAlpine

T'ai Chi was like a constant vein of gold that ran glistening through my year that began troubled and ended with a deepening sense of well being and contentment. The process of letting go in between was guided by my tai chi practice. At the sea, in the mountains, in the city, in village halls, in orchards, in airports, in fields, in woods, in school halls, on beaches, in gardens, on streets, in parks, on rooftops, in hospitals, on the edges of lakes I did the practice. And in all weathers: wind, rain and sunshine. Wei Chi on the end of a icy peninsula on a winter's day on the west coast of Scotland, leaning against the wind with the taste of salt in my mouth and the sound of waves crashing against the rocks. Spiralling chi gave me extraordinary inner heat.

New Year's Day 2005 I spent washing up dirty saucepans for Crisis at Christmas. I found a quiet place under the vaulted roof of the Millennium Dome to do the short form. In the adult college in North Ken we're making a mosaic to commemorate the Spanish Civil War. One evening in January, waiting for the others to arrive, I found a huge empty classroom with an old parquet floor, redolent of polish and wooden desks, no longer there, the perfect place to spread out and do the long form. I remember the snowdrops in February as I practised in the garden at Samye Dzong – a tiny oasis of Buddhist peace in the centre of London, edged by Waterloo Station, Westminster Bridge and St Thomas' Hospital.

In March I moved out of the house that I had lived in for almost 30 years and in April I lived nowhere – in a kind of no man's land with a rucksack and my walking boots. The first week Green Tara practice, Guan Yin chant and Chi Kung with my dearest friend Gwen was a life support for me. Incidentally Gwen introduced me to Tew and took me to his class in Petersham twenty one years ago. The second week I did T'ien Hsiao standing in the wet grass early in the morning under the old apple trees in my parents' orchard in Berkshire reflecting on the decisions I had made and wondering what the future would bring. The third week I stayed with my sister in Devon and did flowing short form in the driving rain on an isolated part of Dartmoor before joining her in the pub for hot whiskey.

In April I moved to North London where Sodge, my tai chi brother, has loved me and looked after me. I joined him teaching tai chi in a primary school in Golders Green, which has made me search out new ways to inspire and calm children who are restless and distracted. April 16 was the anniversary of the death of a man whom I fell in love with; I knew him for the last three years of his life. We lit candles in

his memory and sent them off in paper boats along the river at Kew. I stood on the bank and did the ancient section to persuade the river currents to take them out to the sea.

In June I got on a crowded bus in the rush and sweat of a London heat wave, took the train north and arrived in Lockerbie where it was cold and raining. The bus for Samye Ling came two and a half hours later and wound its way through green, lonely lowland Scotland to the great Buddhist Temple, now shining in the evening sun. A long weekend was spent drawing the Buddha, getting up at sunrise for the pujas, meditation and of course my own tai chi practice on the roof of the temple. An Israeli taught me healing Chi Kung from the medicine Buddha bringing light into the body. I practised that on the hill above the temple with sheep as my witnesses.

In July we went to Brittany and with the wise and compassionate direction of Louanne, Jos and Penny we went deeper into the practice. Our place to work was by two ancient standing stones: we did our sabre form near the yang stone but I took refuge at the yin stone which was hidden in the shade in the woods and which patiently absorbed the pain in my heart. I was reminded of an olive tree at the old monastery in Corfu which once worked the same magic for me.

Then the terrorist attacks hit my part of London. On July 21 I found myself in King's Cross underground station, waiting in the deep lines to go north to do the last T'ai Chi of the year at the school and then on to another stressful job interview. The station was evacuated. I found a reserve of inner strength to get me up the escalator and out, walk home and bicycle to Commercial Road where I hit a cordon of terrified police around bus no 26 where the suicide bombers' detonators had failed to go off. I biked around a back road and stood outside the door, hesitating, shaking. The street was deserted – Aldgate East underground station was closed and the whole area was cut off. Round the back was a lift entrance, with rubbish on the ground and overflowing dustbins. I stood in there, closed my eyes, breathed deeply and brought to mind the yin stone in France and the olive tree in Greece as I began to do the old familiar Chi Kung movements.

In August I walked along the Pennine Way, out of Leeds, and stood on the top of a limestone pavement with a view around me stretching for miles as the wind blew away the stress of London and I began to feel safe. My arms floated up from the ground and once

again I became the great female eagle huntress with a huge wing span. Later that month I was working as a stage manager for the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester. Our hours were nine in the morning till three in the morning and by the end of the week I was so tired that I fell asleep at the back of the cathedral under the built up seats where the choir sang. When I woke up I decided I would add the cathedral to my year's list and relished doing the short form underneath the stage!

Throughout the summer I joined Sodge and friends doing T'ai Chi by the sparkling waters of Hampstead Heath lido and on the roof of Kentish Town tube station where his Fifth Column T-shirt factory is. The view over the rooftops as the sun sets on Parliament Hill is beautiful. On an early misty morning in mid summer, barefoot in the wet grass, I was standing under the trees in my sister's garden gathering myself for the beginning of the sabre form when I was aware of my brother in law standing quietly waiting to hand me a heavy old iron Chinese sabre! Staying with a friend in Herefordshire, in the late summer, I did the long form with the smell of lemon balm in the air and the sound of an angry robin sitting on the telegraph wire. I had invaded his territory but from my point view I was in the right place at the right time and wanted to be nowhere else on the planet but there.

It's been a year of demonstrations: a protest at dawn on the giant's table and chair on the Heath against the Arms fair in Docklands and in Whitehall at the front line, supporting the Tibetans during the visit of the Chinese president, Hu Jin Tao. I felt compelled to raise my fists in the air in a kind of rebellious T'ien Hsiao. In October I went to Liverpool to see Anthony Gormley's iron statues stretched out as far as the eye can see along Crosby Sands on the Mersey. As I did the practice my eyes were fixed on the horizon where the most distant figure stood up to his neck in the sea; I imagined him raising his arms to start his own solitary form.

And then I went to New York! On a mission! To my delight I was taken by my host Henry at 6 o'clock in the morning through the leafy streets of Greenwich Village, down to the Hudson River, where he did karate and I did Michael Che's wild goose exercises on the warm wooden decking of Pier 45, overlooked by a familiar city landscape of steel, concrete and glass hiding the desolate footprint of the twin towers space.

Then I went to Morocco! On another mission! This time the call to prayer at 3 o'clock in the morning got me out of my bed, first to meditation in a simple octagonal room with a blue glass dome and then onto the roof to do the T'ai Chi as the prayers resounded from mosque to mosque and the sun rose from behind the Atlas mountains, climbed the walls of the old

city lighting up the pigment of the red houses clustered around the mosque. What a time and place to be alive!

I climbed up onto another roof last week, took stock and gave thanks. This was Rupert Murdoch's News International Building in Wapping where I teach tai chi before work. From up there I can see the Thames snaking round the city and familiar London landmarks, the Gherkin shoving its nose into the sky, the new City Hall like a drunken tortoise, the Wheel, gracefully revolving above the river, a yin fretwork to the yang dome of St Paul's Cathedral, steadfast survivor of three centuries. Three thoughts came to mind. I love London, this city I was born and brought up in. T'ai chi is my life line and my life's pursuit. And I'm very much alive.

Sue McAlpine



AGM -12 February 2006

The May and October retreats at Springhead had both been a success. Thanks to Tew for the teaching in May and to Chris Sadler and all those who contributed to the programme in October.

Members thanked Kamal, Louanne and Jos for all their hard work over the past few years as Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Secretary respectively. They have all invested a lot of time and effort in ESTCC and it has been very much appreciated. All agreed it would be extremely helpful for them to remain as committee members to ensure a smooth transition between them and the new post holders.

The following were proposed, seconded and therefore elected as members of the committee:

Sodge Adams, Deputy Chairperson (including t-shirts and video stock)
 Jos Hadfield
 Fiona Hogarth, Secretary
 Sue McAlpine (website)
 Jane Muir (newsletter)
 Lynn Rackham, Treasurer
 Louanne Richards
 Kamal Thapen
 Julia Webster, Chairperson

There was also a discussion on accreditation and evaluation for teachers. (Paper circulated to members under separate cover) ESTCC has an obligation to certify and accredit anyone teaching T'ai Chi under its auspices. This is to ensure that students will receive a consistent standard of teaching. This process also ensures that everyone teaching is covered for insurance. Further views/ideas regarding the proposals should be forwarded to Sue McAlpine.

RETREATS IN 2006

T'ai Chi & the Elements With Tew 19th-21st May

A weekend at Sprinhead, Fontmell Magana, Dorset
19th-21st May.

The focus will be on deepening our understanding of both the benevolent and the destructive qualities of the elemental powers.

Cycles of Change within T'ai Chi Sat 5th – Fri 11th August

With Jos Hadfield, Louanne Richards & Penny Allen
At 'Keravel' Bulat Pestivien, Brittany.

Taoist practices are a celebration of cycles of change – the joint action of Sun (Yang) and Moon (Yin). T'ai Chi is the physical expression of these cycles of change through the energy centres of the body, heart and mind.

The Spiralling Snake – T'ai Chi & the Healing Journey 25th Aug – 1st Sept

With Caroline Merry, Val Androutsopolou & friends at
Casa Lucia, Corfu.

Holiday in Wales

Shusa/Mandarin/Pulsation/Meditation – learn, receive, have fun amongst the mountains + sea of Wales. Shusa (Chinese Calligraphy), Hanyu (Mandarin) possible pulsation available through Blue Moon Tai Chi.

T'ai Chi Classes

Sodge Adams, practice group in Hampstead,

Val Androutsopolou, Corfu,

Helen Baker, Havant,

Keith Gull, Central London,

Jos Hadfield, Farnham,

Glyn Jones, Machywllleth,
*Also Chinese calligraphy and Mandarin
lessons in London and Farnham.*

Ian Lillicrap, Battersea,

Sue McAlpine, Islington

Georgina McLaurin, Isle of Man,

Caroline Merry, Oxford,

Rory Norton, Sussex,

Louanne Richards, Oxford,

Chris Sadler, Inverness,

Ali Sandeman, Havant,

Richard Siviak, York,

Kamal Thapen, Balham,

Sue Webber, Egham,

Julia Webster, Farnham,

Sue Woodd, Surrey, Sussex and Glasgow