

Why I “Play Tai Chi”

by Wendy Annand

The first time I became aware of Tai Chi was during a women’s conference where we were given the opportunity to observe and experience some Taoist Tai Chi moves.

That was fascinating enough, but then the instructor showed us a couple of moves of the sword set. That really hooked me! Unfortunately it was years later, after retiring from my full time job, that I felt I had the time and the need to try Tai Chi. By then I had developed a back problem that was seriously limiting my ability to enjoy life. Nothing I tried seemed to help.

Transformations

After my first Beginner class, I was again hooked. They say the direct translation for practicing Tai Chi is in fact “playing Tai Chi,” which better describes how I feel about it. But just like playing sports, playing Tai Chi is a great workout, physically and mentally. After nine years of playing Tai Chi, my only regret is I didn’t start earlier. All the excuses about not having the time were just that, excuses.

Why do I stay in Tai Chi? Partly because of the structural changes in my own body, partly because of the transformations I’ve seen in others, partly the stories from members from around the world of how Tai Chi helped lessen the effects of chronic health conditions and illnesses and speed recovery from injuries and because I believe in this volunteer based organization dedicated to helping people.

A moving meditation

None of this is to say I have not encountered health challenges along the way, but no matter my overall physical or emotional state, I’ve generally been able to maintain my Tai Chi, both as a student and an instructor. I doubt if that would have been possible with many other forms of movement. While the set seemed confusing at first, it occupied my mind so totally that I could forget whatever else was happening in my life. That’s why it’s called a moving meditation. Just watching others perform a set of moves, feeling the “chi” or energy flow, is calming.

Obviously I cannot stop the aging process, but I can help my body gain and maintain as much flexibility as possible. I look at the 80 year olds in our Branch and I know that’s how I want to be at that stage in my life. I have no intention of growing old gracefully, but I do intend to get there with as much vim and vigor as I can create.