

# Meet Katherine Allen

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## **How many years have you been practising Tai Chi?**

More than 20 short years. I started towards the end of 1987.

## **What stimulated your interest in Tai Chi Chuan?**

I had sustained a serious horse riding injury where I had damaged my left elbow and shoulder along with other minor injuries. After two failed operations and four weeks on traction, the prognosis was not good. I had heard that Tai Chi was good for joint mobility, and my Tai Chi journey began.

## **What does Tai Chi Chuan mean to you?**

Tai Chi is part of my life, but not all of my life. I have other interests which always vie for attention, so my yin/yang balancing act is constant and sometimes I fall off my tightrope. Tai Chi has taken me to countries I would never otherwise have visited; Tai Chi has led me into new interests, such as learning Mandarin and making sojourns into other areas of kung fu. Tai Chi leads and I follow.

## **What is the most important aspect for you?**

Tai Chi is a mysterious vehicle. I've always wanted to fly on the wind, and Tai Chi is the closest I've come to this. I am always amazed at how Tai Chi can offer different things to different people. It is intriguing and its meanings have endless layers, which can take a lifetime to unravel. Every layer has its beauty and its pain.

## **Do you have any personal goals in Tai Chi?**

Tai Chi has helped me to feel ageless and free, and I often feel the desire to pass this quality of feeling on to others who are interested.

## **Who or what inspired you?**

I had seen newsreels of Chinese people in parks performing Tai Chi, and their grace and balance impressed me. I looked for a teacher and found Dan Docherty, who was very encouraging and didn't seem to worry about the fact that my left arm movement was severely restricted.

## **What do you make of Tai Chi Chuan's current popularity?**

Tai Chi can be as easy as you wish it to be and many people are attracted to easy exercise options with minimal injury risks. There are lots of teachers around who teach a fraction of what Tai Chi has to offer, and this fraction satisfies many people. Mass popularity of anything can result in dilution and dumbing down, but on the other side, results in many people looking deeper into the art and sharing insights. So on the whole, popularity is favourable.

**As a Teacher, how do you feel about the Martial aspects of Tai Chi?**

The martial aspects are fascinating. Every self-defence application expands the doorway to ten thousand variations. Every martial piece of theory can be applied to other areas of life.

**What are your views on competition?**

Yin and yang operate in all matters, including competition. There are benefits and detriments. Benefits include: providing an environment in which people can see what other enthusiasts are offering; participating in a contest with tai chi colleagues and seeing how well you play; seeing whether you can maintain equilibrium in a competitive arena; protecting you against the fate of being a big frog in a small well. I have been a competitor, judge, observer and go-between at many competitions, and feel that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

**What direction would you like to see Tai Chi Chuan going in the future?** I have taught many types of people and have seen improvement in every type of practitioner. For example, I have seen the elderly improve their mobility and balance; sportspersons improve their game; the mentally unstable regain their emotional stability (for 8 years I taught in a psychiatric unit); the young develop their sense of self-worth and self-discipline (for 5 years I taught in a boys' school); the aggressive become tempered; the shy become poised; the bored become enthused; the loner become a team player. Tai Chi can provide opportunities for all groups and types of people and so I would like Tai Chi to expand into every area of society as a life art.