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Tai Chi and Me and my search for a “perfect” exercise class

Monday, February 09, 2015

I have belonged to a gym or some kind of fitness center for 40 years, beginning with “Spa Lady” in 1975.

Back then aerobic classes were 20 minutes long and we jumped around shoeless in leotards, tights and sometimes even leg warmers. I liked the music, but never achieved the enthusiasm of the other participants. However, it was only 20 minutes, so I kept at it.

There were a variety of weight machines too, interesting and new to me. I didn't need the treadmills or exercise bikes at that point since I got enough of the real thing (walking and biking) outside anyway. It would be another decade before I tried running – my favorite activity from then on.

Note: Exercise was never my problem. Food was – great quantities of food – even healthy food.

As the years went on, exercise classes got longer and more varied, shoes provided support, and clothing styles changed. Perhaps I don't take instruction well, but 1 hour was too long for me to be told what to do. Fortunately, I finally learned to swim and distance laps provided a similar whole body workout.

Then on June 3, 2006, our 39th wedding anniversary, as we were coming out of the restaurant, I tripped over a planter and fell forward taking the full impact on my outstretched hands. I hadn't had too much to drink. I was searching for the “Cheesecake Factory” and didn't watch where I was going. See, FOOD is my problem.

I jumped up with nothing broken or hurting other than my pride. As time passed though, my shoulder became progressively stiffer and movement restricted. By the time I sought medical attention I couldn't even raise my arm enough to turn a doorknob.

Diagnosis: a frozen shoulder

I followed the rehabilitation program for 4 months (Daily exercises at home with periodic checkups at the facility) and regained about 90% of total mobility. I was told that was the best I could expect.

While at the gym one day I noticed a class doing some unfamiliar movements. They were doing slow, controlled, fluid movements and all together in sync. The room was quiet except for the soft soothing music. Yet everyone knew what to do.

This was my introduction to Tai Chi. I was intrigued and joined the beginners' class where the movements were explained. I progressed to the regular class and one day I noticed that my right arm was straight up above my head. My shoulder was 100% unfrozen.

I continued these 30 minute sessions twice a week. I learned that flexibility and balance were as important to fitness as the cardio and strength training that I had already accepted. My 95 year old classmate was visual proof. Not everything has to burn mega-calories to be valuable.

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Retirement and a move to a rural area put an end to my Tai Chi class. This activity was quite unknown in my new surroundings. My class made a video which I packed away with other memories of my previous life.

Recently, I noticed that my gym was starting a "Tai Chi for Arthritis" class. Fortunately, I don't have that affliction although both of my parents did. My cousin refers to it as "our family curse."

On the first day of class there were 2 of us plus the instructor. He began VERY slowly, explaining the philosophy and benefits of the program. (1.2 billion Chinese might be on to something). After 1 month we are still going very slowly and working on the basics. However, there are now 9 of us and I intend to keep going to help the attendance numbers.

It will take time for my current class to progress. At the rate we're going, maybe 6 months to a year, but I don't mind. I'm patient and persistent and a great believer in baby steps.

Meanwhile, I dug out that old video my class produced and have added it to my fitness routine. I want to be like my classmate, still doing a controlled "right leg kick" or crouching into "snake creeps down" or balancing like a "rooster stands on left leg" all at age 95.

Eight years later it's unlikely she is still alive, but she can still inspire me on the video.

Maintaining fitness is all about how we want to spend our last years.
If you've read this far, thank you. I must be feeling very introspective this morning.

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CD14764282

i've always been fascinated with Tai Chi, but never knew how complicated it is until I tried it. I never got very far, so I'm starting over again. I wrote an article once about how Tai Chi helps seniors not fall as much. I've fallen twice; once broke an elbow and once my wrist. I got Dr. Yang's videos, and although sometimes I wish he would go faster, and not talk so much about fighting, I'm learning a lot about how my body works. I have a hard time relaxing and letting things flow, and I really need to learn that. A friend of mine who had horrible anxiety disorder with attacks every day started Tai Chi and within 3 months, her attacks completely disappeared. I'm hoping this will happen with me, although my anxiety attacks are further apart.
2296 days ago



1STBUCKETITEM

My introduction to Tai Chi was through the Qi Gong video which SP had provided in one of the "fitness videos." I started incorporating it into my daily routine every night before bed to relax. I did it faithfully September through most of December, then in January I kind of neglected the routine. January was the first month I had a "gain" (2.2 pounds) for the total month after losing each month since May. Hm-m-m... could there be a connection? I have been in a deep slump since the beginning of January and as of this morning (after a binge last night, truthfully for the last few weeks) found myself right back where I was the beginning of December. I've been keeping a colored chart for myself, green for a "losing week" and red for a "gaining week" since May. My first 31 weeks are all green except for one week which was red. Then since December 1st, out of the past 11 weeks I've had 6 red weeks and only 5 green weeks. Hm-m-m... another clue. My fitness minutes have also been on the decline the last 11 weeks. Sure I had some spurts, but I lost my consistency... and I've been going the wrong direction. I have to go back to my healthier habits prior December. Qi Gong to start with and consistent "daily" exercise again. Thanks Brooklyn for



THANK YOU!

the "wake up" call!
Sorry this is so long, but I just had to work this out and open my eyes. I've always been good at "record keeping" but sometimes I forget to "see" the records, if you know what I mean. So I'm going to start using the Tai Chi video I purchased for my Christmas gift to myself today. Here's to

!!! WE CAN DO IT

doing the Standing Rooster when we're 95!!
2309 days ago



CD13758606

What a real success story. Thanks for posting. Tai Chi is on my bucket list. I tried the self-taught method with little success, so I need to find a studio to learn the art. It was beautiful to see Tai Chi in the streets of China.





2310 days ago



MILLEDGE2

This blog intrigues me. I'm thinking Tai Chi over from a different point of view. Thanks!
2311 days ago



MIRAGE727

I hit the motherlode, Brooklyn! Check it out!

<http://www.taoist.org/usa/new-international-centre-dunedin/>

As a "mature" Triathlete, I need all the benefits of this rich discipline. Because of your blog, I'm going to visit them today! Thank you for the enlightenment!



2312 days ago



ONEKIDSMOM

I have watched Tai Chi on the public access channel here... hmmm... maybe I should consider doing more than watching... it's actually slow enough movement for me to do, as opposed



to feeling embarrassingly uncoordinated.
2313 days ago



DOVESEYES

So glad you got a Tai Chi class to go to and you are respecting the trainers slow progress to teach. It sounds a little like my pilates which has given me motion again with my back problems.
2313 days ago



WATERMELLEN

Love the idea of Tai Chi -- in my community the classes are scheduled for "retirees" at times I'm not available.

But it's always seemed one of the most interesting and satisfying forms of exercise to me too.
2313 days ago



PHOENIX1949



Speaking of early exercise places, two pieces of equipment that a sister and I laugh about are the vibrating belt around our hips that would leave us 'all shook up' and the wooden dowels on a rotating cylinder that we mounted like a saddle to break down inner thigh fat.



2313 days ago



WALLAHALLA

I love Tai Chi, but haven't had the opportunity to do it for years. I'd be right back at square one, but would relish the opportunity.

2313 days ago



MARYJEANSL

I'm glad the class you wanted has come to your gym. That sounds like the sort of thing I might actually be able to do if and when. I imagine that when you're 95, you will be the inspiration to others that your 95 year old former classmate was to you.

2313 days ago



GIVEUP30

I use to be a Jack LaLane (not sure last name right) that was the best thing in the world.
2313 days ago



BBEGAN

So true! There's a woman at my gym at least in her late 80s, who has clearly been doing yoga for decades. She stands serenely in a corner and fluidly moves through the most astounding poses. I find it so inspiring.

2313 days ago



GINIEMIE

My Chiropractor taught Tai Chi, but I haven't seen it in my area. She is a good 45 minutes





away and I don't know if she is doing it. I think that would be a good thing for me and also to recommend to my MIL in Florida. I'm still struggling with balance the books for the judge so I'm not in search mode. I need to put it on my list of to do's for when I finish my current mess. Meanwhile I have to go to the podiatrist for

a foot injury from last summer. Woohoo-this procrastination is really got to go.



2313 days ago



LIVEDAILY

I think it is important to find those things that we look forward to doing...besides eating! I've always been interested in Tai Chi, but the classes that are offered near me are almost always in the mornings. I shall continue to look, though!

2313 days ago



DDOORN

It's wonderful when we find our workout groove. For now Spinning works for me, but I've got yoga and Tai Chi in my sites for the day when more time opens up for me...i.e. retirement. Looking forward to exploring new activities! :-)

Don
2313 days ago



IFDEEVARUNS2

It's long been on my list. Maybe this year I'll actually try it.

2313 days ago



LFBC1100

Tai Chi is **GREAT!** exercises
2314 days ago



LINDAKAY228

I have a 30 minute stretching routine I do every morning to help my body be a little more limber. I also have ST and walking I do most days but the stretching is important to me. I've thought about Tai Chi but haven't decided on it yet. I'm glad you found something that works well for you. There was a CD called Yoga for Seniors I used to have several years ago before I was a senior. Not sure what happened to it. It didn't have moves that tied you in knots ha ha. I'm thinking of seeing I can try to find that one again.

2314 days ago



TERI-RIFIC

I like TaiChi. I think it is deceptively difficult (in a good way). It's not offered at my gym and I can't find a DVD that I like. Now that you've brought it up,maybe I'll look again.

2314 days ago



MISCHAKEO

I have started doing yoga in this last year. I think it has a similarity to Tai Chi. I cannot do the one legged balancing poses yet..my goal is to be able to do them. I love the development of flexibility and balance. I am very glad you have found a new place to practice. Maybe by the time we are 95 we will be able to do that rooster pose.



2314 days ago



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