

# Learning to go slow

## Jan Dickson

I'm 63, born on the Ayrshire coast but have lived in a glorious red sandstone tenement flat in Glasgow's east end for 40 years. I've worked in the fashion industry, as a steward on car ferries and played bass guitar / keyboards in various punk bands which never got anywhere but were fun to be in. Screenwriter and playwright by trade, these days – which means I spend endless hours alone at a laptop.



**How long have you been practising tai chi?**

I have been practising t'ai chi for 12 years or so.

**What stimulated your interest?**

My martial background is traditional boxing then into kick-boxing (jeet kun do / savate / muay thai). I got into t'ai chi while battling depression due to work-pressures and following a boxing shoulder injury that took a long time to heal. I tried meditation but could not sit still so when I saw a notice for Mari Graham's t'ai chi classes, described as a moving mediation, at the now-closed Healthy Living Centre in Crownpoint Street, I thought: What the hell... Initially I admit I was sceptical: t'ai chi seemed WAY too slow, a bit airy fairy and the class mainly consisted of older people. But I got over myself, kept going back, practised every day (cos that's the kid of driven, over-achiever I was, back then) and slowly, insidiously, t'ai chi worked its magic.

**What does tai chi mean to you?**

To me, t'ai chi is the best all-round fitness activity ever – physically, mentally and emotionally. There's personal discipline involved in learning the sequences and the forms, which ticks my martial arts' box. In turn leading into that wonderful mental uplift and sense of community, neither of which I have found in any other physical activity.

**Who or what inspired you, both in the beginning and now?**

I'm too cynical to really do the inspirational figure thing but what DOES inspire me is witnessing the ways in which t'ai chi can change the lives of others. I teach in Dennistoun, Bridgeton and Barlanark in Glasgow's East End, including an open air class in Alexandra Park, provided free to participants and financially supported by local housing association Milnbank. In parts of the East End, average life span is something horrifying like 59 and we remain one of the most economically and socially deprived parts of Scotland. Many of our class participants are living with complex physical and mental

health issues. Witnessing their dedication to the challenges of t'ai chi on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis and seeing the changes this dedication engenders in these individuals is my real inspiration. Deep down, we all want to make a difference, don't we?

**What is the most important aspect to you?**

The 'slowing down' for me is key. In an increasingly frantic world, with all the time pressures of modern life, the ability to slow down one's movements – and to FEEL the clarity and focus which flows from that is so valuable. Learning to move more slowly, through t'ai chi, has literally changed my life for the better.

**Do you have any personal goals?**

As a life-long over-achiever whose very existence was once ruled – for the worse – by the concept of having goals, these days I am a lot more relaxed in this area: something I feel both stems from and helps me in my role as a teacher. I will, however, admit, if pressed, to harbouring a burning desire to learn one of the fan forms.

**What do you make of tai chi's current popularity?**

I think it can only be a good thing. Regardless of age or ability, there's so much benefit in coming together for an hour a week with others to move slowly and mindfully, with grace. The more people who discover this, the better. Will there be issues, in some quarters, over maintaining the purity of the art if this happens? Undoubtedly. But everything changes: one man's watered-down is another man's accessibility.

**What are your views on competition?**

As a former willing professional rat racer who bowed out before the finish line and a regular participant in kick-boxing sparring sessions and the grading system (I still have a current ring licence) I initially moved from all that stress-inducing malarkey to taking a very anti-competition stance. These days I'm more ambivalent. I still believe any form of competition fosters ego and, for me, t'ai chi practice engenders a healthy loss of ego so there will always be a contradiction there. On the other hand, t'ai chi is all about working with the opposites so if competing helps us grow in any way, go for it.

**What direction would you like to see tai chi taking in the future?**

I'd like to see t'ai chi in hospitals – for patients AND staff. I'd like to see t'ai chi in schools, playgroups, care homes and addiction recovery organisations. And I'd like to see more practitioners of the art opting to teach t'ai chi cos I've learned more about myself and those with whom I share this world from teaching than I ever thought possible.

[www.facebook.com/East-End-Tai-Chi-229920254602382](https://www.facebook.com/East-End-Tai-Chi-229920254602382)  
email: [jdic101769@aol.com](mailto:jdic101769@aol.com)

# Tai chi was a life saver

## Marion Copeland

**Biog:** A bit of personal background

I'm a 75 year-old former steamstress and now very active in my local community: mum, gran and great-gran – born and bred in Glasgow's East End.

**How long have you been practising tai chi?**  
15 years

**What stimulated your interest?**

In 2005 I lost my mum and was very down. I saw a class for t'ai chi in a local health club and went to have a look. The rest is history.

**What does tai chi mean to you?**

T'ai chi was a lifesaver for me and through the years I have helped a lot of my friends by urging them along to classes, to try t'ai chi. They liked it and still come.

**Who or what inspired you, both in the beginning and now?**

Just going along for the first time to that first class. I loved it. Something about t'ai chi just spoke to me and I have never looked back. I recently gained my TCUGB basic instructor's qualification. I would never have thought of applying had my teacher not suggested it but am loving taking our beginners' class at Reidvale Community Centre. The buzz from seeing other people enjoy t'ai chi is unbelievable.

**What is the most important aspect to you?**

Meeting new friends. T'ai chi is hugely social for me. The ageing process can be isolating for many of us. Our t'ai chi classes have become an additional support system for us all – AND we have an annual class Christmas lunch in the community centre where our classes are held.

**Do you have any personal goals?**

Not really as I'm 75 yrs old. My life is happy.

**What do you make of tai chi's current popularity?**

I think it's great. I have new ladies starting my class and it's really great to hear their feedback about the difference



it makes. Our oldest class member is 87. We can all get something from t'ai chi.

**What are your views on competition?**

I have none – while it's not really competitive as such, being filmed doing my 24-step form for my basic instructor's exam was a bit daunting, felt like performing a bit. But I knew it had to be done so just buckled down, did what was necessary and am very pleased to now be a member of the TCUGB .

**What direction would you like to see tai chi taking in the future?**

Oh I don't know! I can only say it's been great to have t'ai chi in my life for 15 years. It would be fantastic to see it growing further.

