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My experience learning Tai Chi with Karen Atkin has been a true life changer for me. I decided to try her classes because I understood that Tai Chi would help me with my balance, however I continued to attend classes because the movements that we were learning had such an impressive range of immediate benefits, both for the body and for the mind.

Having had both of my hips replaced, I noticed a significant improvement in the mobility of my new joints, as well as much greater stability. I quickly realized just how many Tai Chi movements corresponded to the physiotherapy exercises I had been doing after my surgeries, especially the basic but powerful practice of "Tai Chi Walking" that Karen includes in her classes.

The most significant change in my overall health, however, since starting to practice Tai Chi with Karen, has been a remarkable decline in the frequency and severity of the debilitating migraine headaches that have been a lifelong challenge for me. Karen's style of teaching Tai Chi simplifies the movements in a way that has enabled me to do Tai Chi on an almost daily basis, often even on the days when I am struggling with a migraine.

Karen conducts her classes in a supportive atmosphere, encouraging beginning students like me to try to tap in to our inner energy. In my case, Karen's approach has allowed me to move forward in my life, calming my apparently over-reactive nervous system, strengthening my body and giving me hope. I am using prescription pain drugs far less often now and, when I do need to use them, I can often treat a migraine with half of the usual amount of sumatriptan, a drug that I have been using for over twenty years.

Karen teaches her students to visualize the center of energy in the body and, through both movement and coordinated breathing techniques, to actually feel the flow of energy in the body change. In addition, Karen's classes have taught me far more successfully than any other mode of treatment (including physiotherapy, massage therapy, acupuncture and osteopathic treatments) how to soothe and strengthen my neck and shoulders, sites where tension and fatigue could frequently also trigger a severe migraine episode, sometimes lasting several days. Happily, I can now usually ride a bike, paddle a canoe, kayak or swim without suffering pain the next day. I can also say that events such as family reunions no longer overwhelm me to the same extent!

Karen's innovative and entertaining teaching techniques allow the student to experience the joy of simple, graceful movements from the very first lesson and her style gradually builds the student's confidence and skill level. Karen is always professional yet extremely personable, designing her classes in a unique way to both encourage first-timers and also challenge more experienced students. Her classes have provided for me a bridge where Eastern wisdom with its powerful traditional healing meets and greatly enhances the Western concepts of physical health, positive psychology and well-being.

Jan Saddington