

STUDENT PROFILE: LOIS MITCHELL

By WTS Staff

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Lois Mitchell first stepped onto the mat at 29 South Ocean on April 28, 2009. She had attended our *World T'ai Chi & Qigong Day – Patchogue* event three days earlier. During the morning in Shorefront Park, she and McElroy Laoshi spoke about her history with T'ai Chi through a number of different instructors and the fact that someone had told her that she needed to learn Push Hands to help her on her journey with T'ai Chi.

Lois's first experience during the early Tuesday morning class three days later included Mirror Push Hands with Laoshi, Valerio Laoshi (before his ascension), and another student who is no longer at Water Tiger. Her partnership with Laoshi included detailed conversation about the breath and his standard tree images. As the exercise unfolded, Lois shared that she really liked the willow tree image to exemplify how the entire body should be engaged in the movement. She also spoke to being intrigued by the deeper concept of how we should embrace being the tree to our partner's wind while also being the wind to our partner's tree. She left that morning and did not return until July 2011. Her attendance has been regular since.

Lois's journey to Water Tiger began with her move to Long Island from San Francisco in 1992. She had been a resident of The City by the Bay for 22 years and felt a little lost with the change of culture. She became friends with a woman who also felt a little lost after moving to Long Island from Manhattan. In 1995, her friend found a T'ai Chi class that was being offered at the Setauket Neighborhood House in East Setauket. Lois had studied yoga, meditation, and modern dance while living on the West Coast and immediately felt a connection to T'ai Chi's combination of movement and meditation. She attended the weekly class for three years. Unfortunately, Lois eventually found that she was not challenged by the instructor's broad approach to those in the room.

The lack of challenge played into the discovery of another program. A neighbor told her of a class being offered in Port Jefferson Station and she made the switch in 1998. She remained in this program until 2005 when the instructor, Sifu Chang, abruptly left the area. Lois says that she enjoyed the meditative nature of his focus on breathing. Sifu Chang is well-known to Water Tiger. He was also Si-Hing Michael Kandel's previous instructor. It was through Sifu Chang's classes that Lois met Michael and his wife, Margie.

After Sifu Chang's departure, Lois joined her neighbor and Margie Kandel for regular weekly play at each others' houses for a number of years. She also continued to look for other instruction. There was a T'ai Chi for Arthritis session at her local library that she attended "even though I don't have arthritis". Then she discovered that a class was being offered through the Suffolk Y Jewish Community Center in Commack. She was surprised to discover the person at the front of the room had been a disciple of her first instructor. As she continued to play with her friends, she attended class in Commack. According to Lois, "I went there for several years; but, frankly, felt something was missing in the session. I did learn some new forms, but the body balance, breathing, and meditative mode was not there for me."



During her first experience playing *Mirror Push Hands* on the mat, Lois shared that she really liked the willow tree image to exemplify how the entire body should be engaged in the movement.

It was her practice with Margie Kandel that finally brought her to Water Tiger. She says, "Margie kept telling me about it and how much Michael liked it."

Even though she tells us that she's happy with her find, Water Tiger isn't the only program that receives her patronage. When her husband retired in January 2012, they began splitting their time between Long Island and San Francisco. They divide the year evenly between their two residences and Lois wanted to find a Left Coast program to balance her experience on the Right Coast. She found Attaining Harmony School of T'ai Chi Ch'uan, Elena Kotenkova, and Cheng Man-ch'ing's Yang-style, 37-posture form. Lois finds similarity between the two programs as they seem to share emphasis on balance, alignment, weight distribution, and movement from the center. Though there are differences, she finds the similarities allow her to carry aspects of both to either. She also likes the fact that her classes in California are very physical and physically challenging.

Her favorite aspects of her time with Water Tiger are found in the simple playing of the floor exercises or, as she describes it, "the just doing". She explains, "I just like the repetitive moving across the mat; it puts me in a blissful space. I feel grounded and floating at the same time." Lois also embraces Water Tiger's 10-Piece T'ai Chi Qigong Breathing Set as a favorite.

Aside from traversing the distance from her home in East Setauket, Lois sees continuing her practice to allow for learning a form as a challenge. While she wishes she could attend more classes than her current weekly Saturday morning, she insists she is very content with the pace of her experience. She tells us the mat is also a source of contentment:

It is a very different experience from anything I had been doing, but it is still compatible. I use all the training I come into class with; and, that prior training fits the mat like custom made glasses. Even though the frame may be a little different, the prescription still works beautifully.

It's a prescription that she wants to maintain. In her words: "My goal is to keep coming and do as much as I can as long as I can. At 70 years old, my goal is to just keep doing and to feel strong and peaceful."

We believe Lois has the right mindset to keep that prescription relevant. When we asked for her to share something about herself that her fellow students would not know about her, she gave us an answer that was both quite enigmatic and very wise: "Oh, too much. I have had a very interesting life, but the moment is the important thing. They should know that being in the moment while also being in the world is important to me."



Lois explains the floor exercises are one of the favorite aspects of her time at Water Tiger, "I just like the repetitive moving across the mat; it puts me in a blissful space."

