

STUDENT PROFILE: MARY WALSH

By WTS Staff

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“The Grand Ultimate Journey” is what Mary Walsh calls her experience with the art of T'ai Chi Ch'uan. She tells us that the beginning of this journey actually unfolded about ten years ago. “I was on a break when one of my co-workers started to share some of the benefits that were manifesting for him through the art,” she remembers. There was a short detour six years ago when Mary gave Kempo Karate a whirl. She says, “It looked a little interesting as it mentioned better health, concentration, and self defense.” These were some of the benefits her co-worker had mentioned in regard to T'ai Chi, but she didn't connect and determined the art just wasn't for her. The next leg of the T'ai Chi journey happened two years ago when one of Mary's professors showed a T'ai Chi video in class and asked the class if they would like to play one of the exercises. Mary was among those in the class that said, “Yes.” Her experience in the college classroom combined with her co-worker's sharing and the spark was lit.

This spark of interest became a flame when she found herself in the room with Si-Suk Paul Adago, Jr., at Tremont Elementary School. Mary was a student in Si-Suk's Spring 2006 Patchogue-Medford Continuing Education short-term class. The 10-week session included a whirlwind introduction to Grasp Sparrow's Tail to the Four Cardinal Directions, plus play with The Temple Exercises, the T'ai Chi Qigong Stretch, and our signature T'ai Chi Qigong Breathing Set. She tells us that she was not able to attend the first class of the session, but when she arrived for the second class, she arrived early and was able to watch Si-Suk play through some of his forms. She says, “The moves were calm, fluid, and graceful. The music he was doing the forms to was peaceful and relaxing.” As the weeks unfolded, Mary discovered that she connected to the art and found that it was not only fun, but also that the experience was something she wanted to continue. She describes the feeling, “This is right; this is what I need to be doing.”



Mary Walsh (L) playing a little Pattern Staff with Si-Goo Mui Francesca DeStefano.

When she voiced this feeling to Si-Suk, he shared details of his experiences on the mat at the school and handed over one of Laoshi's business cards. Armed with the website URL, Mary's first visit to Water Tiger School was virtual. She tells us that she was attracted by the sense of community that was evident as she browsed the site. Her next contact was with Laoshi at *World Tai Chi & Qigong Day 2006* when she also purchased the Water Tiger guided meditation CDs, *Flowing Relaxation* and *Oneness*. She sums up her impression of the audio, “The music and the calm sound of Laoshi's voice took my mind to a world of relaxation, awareness, and discovery.”

Before “officially” joining Water Tiger a few weeks later on May 28th, Mary had four *Tai Chi in the Park* Saturdays and one Spencer Gee seminar, *ABC Tai Chi ... How and Why Tai Chi Works*, under her belt. She has been a constant participant both on the mat of the studio and at almost every Water Tiger public event ever since. “It almost doesn't seem like an event unless Mary is with us,” says Laoshi with a smile. “And,” he adds, “she is the most prolific contributor to the life of the *VirtualKwoon* – both versions.” He tells

us that he has lost count the number of times he finds Mary on the *VK* at the same time as he is. The board's statistics reveal that only Laoshi and Si-Hing Joel Valerio have posted more often than Mary – and Joel is only ahead by three posts!

If one were to look through the posts on the *VK*, they would soon learn that Mary prefers to be outside when she practices off the mat. She assures us that there is a great deal she likes about time in the studio: the handouts, the sharing of experiences by Laoshi and other students, group play of warm-ups and form, addressing challenges, the monthly Festival of Push Hands, and the time in casual conversation after classes. However, it is when she is playing outside that she feels a connection to the deeper aspects of T'ai Chi, which she describes as much more than an exercise. She explains, "It is moving meditation, a dance, a martial art, energy work, a philosophy, and a way of life." She tells us that it is when she is outside she can not only feel a profound connection to nature, society, and the universe, but she can also feel free.

But her freedom isn't without its glitches. Mary admits her greatest challenge is with her *monkey mind* and its distracting from her being in the moment. There are others: balance being dependent on moving as a whole; and holding onto things – breath, mood, etc. Regardless of the bumps in the road, Mary has a wonderful outlook, "My goal is to take my present and future challenges, turn them into triumphs, and hopefully one day share the knowledge acquired through Water Tiger School in helping someone else."



When Mary (center) plays outside, she feels a profound connection to nature, society, and the universe.

Some of that help she might offer to others is the help she has found on her own Grand Ultimate Journey. In her words:

I have made great progress in making peace with my past. There has been a refinement in body mechanics on the job, which is great because the type of work I do requires me to assist individuals who really can't walk very well. My health has improved and I have lost weight. I breathe better. I sleep better through the night. And, I can climb a flight of stairs without panting.

As Laoshi is fond of saying, "Wow – guess this stuff works."

