

Dear Kathleen,

I want to express my gratitude to the UIHC Trauma Injury Prevention Program for sponsoring the Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention (TCAFP) class on the Zoom platform. I have been attending this class for this past year, having enrolled officially for the fall 2022 series. This experience has been one of the best special “perks” available to me since retiring from The University of Iowa in 2006 and moving to Bainbridge Island, WA. Making this class available on Zoom means that it is not restricted to those living near enough to Iowa City to commute there twice a week, but rather opens it up to anyone in the state - or, as in my case, to anyone with UI ties living anywhere in the world!

Over my years at the UI - from Assistant in Instruction in the Biology Department in 1974 to tenured Associate Professor in the College of Nursing at retirement, I had participated off and on in various wellness programs offered by the UI and by other practitioners in Iowa City. Since many of these had some lasting benefit, I was excited to try TCAFP when I saw it advertised on a departmental notice particularly when I saw it was open to retirees and offered on Zoom! Even more wonderful for me was discovering that I could continue to participate in the class series that followed, with my computer camera turned off so I could see and hear the instructor but not clutter up the gallery view reserved for coaching the new enrollees.

The structure of the class was excellent, especially for remote participants and instructors. We had a skilled instructor to teach the forms live on-camera, explaining each movement with associated posture and breathing, who could concentrate on those complexities and respond to questions from us learners immediately. We also had a second highly skilled instructor who watched what all the on-camera new enrollees were doing at each step of the way in the gallery view of a large computer. By observing all of us with a (definitely) critical eye, the second instructor could inform the on-camera instructor of problems the on-camera learners appeared to be experiencing as they arose. Thus, the class continued smoothly with fast feedback to adjust easily to benefit all learners. As a 30-year classroom teacher and life-long learner, I was totally impressed!

The precise scheduling and continuing availability of the class for long-term retention of the tai chi practice has been a second important benefit for me. It can be so easy to let other events or demands slip into a daily schedule that has soft boundaries, at least for me; much more difficult to slack off when the experience one needs to succeed in the next practice session depends on being present for the previous one. It is also more engaging to participate in a group that continues to be present and learning on a schedule than to watch recorded lessons alone just whenever convenient. I made a point to tune in for each scheduled class regularly whether at home or on vacation (assuming internet access) and that practice has become a habit.

Although I've maintained decent joint flexibility (for my 80 years) by practicing qi gong forms off and on for a number of years, I can tell that I have improved my ability to move smoothly through space during this past year of TCAFP classes. Importantly for maintaining my balance, the practice has sharpened my sense of how my body is oriented in space, which part is bearing

weight and how that shifts as I walk or turn, and how I can maintain control of it. The slow flow of the movements loosens any tight muscles after a few repeats of “wave hands”. My legs have actually gained strength, tested by standing up or sitting down slowly under control. I find the heel to toe stepping we do feels more stable when I walk, and the concluding motions after “move the mountain” has helped me swivel on my heel or on my toes so I can make smoother quick turns without getting off balance. Coordinating movements with my breath, enhancing ventilation by belly breathing and more upright posture, and keeping knees slightly relaxed to absorb shock of steps somehow gives me more energy at the end of practice than I had at the beginning. Holding my focus on all the above during our practice period keeps out all concerns about our messy world or my latest to-do list - a lovely meditation space for physical and psychological balance.

Gratefully,

Leslie Marshall

BA (Grinnell, psychology, 1965); PhD (UW-Seattle, neuroscience, 1973); BSN (Mt Mercy, 1990); RN (IA, HI, WA) retired.