

Dan Docherty: a tai chi journey

A selection of the many tributes to Dan from friends and colleagues

It was a great shock to hear of Dan Docherty's passing.

I first met Dan during my time in London in the late 1970s. We became friends and, later, colleagues when I joined the Tai Chi Union and started to attend his yearly Oxford Tai Chi competition with my students.

He was a controversial figure in the tai chi world then, and remained so during the turbulent events in 2018/19. He was always his own man and went about things his own way. Something to be admired. After Dan invited me to onto the TCUGB executive/board I came to understand how passionate he felt about our Tai Chi Union acting as a uniting force for the UK/Ireland/ Europe teachers and instructors. Going back more than 20 years, he had a built-in radar for influence and possible moves that in the future were likely to emanate from China central Wu Shu organisations. The pressure to link up with Beijing Tai Chi/QiGong rule makers and gradually become an outpost open to control was an absolute no no. I shared that sentiment.

Some saw Dan as a bit of a wolf. In reality he was more the opposite, a sheep in wolf's clothing. I will remember him with affection. He will be missed.

Shelagh Grandpierre

Marnix Wells

Dan was a man of action, of few words and no nonsense. He was intensely loyal to his Wu-style taiji teacher in Kowloon (Hong Kong) Cheng Tinhong (Zheng Tianxiong) and refused to question the latter's faith in the legendary Zhang Sanfeng as the art's founder. I found him a faithful friend but very private person. His enormous legacy in the world of taijiquan through his school and writings lives on.

Dr Alex Ryan

Many tributes to Dan will honour his unusual skill in taijiquan. He was an exemplar of how to unify the martial, medical and meditative dimensions of our art. Like so many, I benefited hugely from his wise, forthright and authentic training – he was simply one of the best teachers I've known, in any field.

But I would like to pay tribute to another aspect – his scholarship and this aspect of his legacy. I started a PhD on the British taijiquan movement in the late 90s. I reviewed all the available books and was stuck for making sense of the history until I found Dan's work. He was clearly a controversial character but from his writing it was obvious he was extremely witty and highly intelligent with an impulse for truth-seeking and for cutting through delusions and ignorance for the sake of protecting quality. All key attributes for any scholar – particularly in the contested world of martial arts history.

I went to interview him for my PhD. I didn't know what to expect from this feared fighter – but Dan invited me to his home, cooked me supper and mad eme welcome. He challenged me to get his stories out of him – we talked for hours and became friends.

As well as his involvements in the TCUGB and TCFE, and the development of his own school, Dan dedicated himself to writing several books. This continued through the last decade or so of his life, despite illness compromising his ability to work and to type. I was privileged to help him with these productions, notably the trilogy of the *Tai Chi Bible*, *The Complete Tai Chi Tutor* and *Tai Chi Chuan: Decoding the Classics for the Modern Martial*



Dan Docherty

Artist. I told him I reckoned these were in turn his undergraduate textbook, masters dissertation, and his doctoral thesis. He cared deeply about making these books as good as he could, so the wider community of current and future practitioners could learn from them, no matter what style they practised.

Richard and Simon Watson

To Daniel Docherty's family and friends. We are at a loss for words. We know there is nothing to say that will make your loss easier but know that you are in our thoughts and prayers, we are sending you our love.

We hope you can understand what we can't put into words. RIP Daniel Docherty.

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Bob Lowey

It is challenging to witness one's friends and colleagues slowly being robbed of their health and vitality. Dan's vocation in life was slowly curbed by Parkinson's disease an infirmity which, whether you liked him or not, you would not wish on anyone.

I met Dan a year prior the conception of the TCUGB and admired him for his forthright attitude when engaging with people. He openly voiced his opinions and demonstrated great organisational skills.

There is no doubt; Dan was a resolute, sometimes enigmatic character, who will be preserved in the chronicles of Taijiquan. ☪

Catherine Birkinhead Tai Chi in the Chilterns

Only ever knew Dan after he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. They say when the student's ready the teacher appears, and after at least 10 years or so of tai chi practice in another style, our paths aligned.

Dan became my sifu. He was the right sort of person to get the best out of me as a student.

He was a generous, loyal, reliable, supportive teacher and friend. So many moments I cherish, whether it be one-to-one tuition or small group seminars with him or having the privilege of him teaching at seminars for my own students.

He would be the first to admit he was no saint, but he made up for that in spades in so many ways.

A true master of their art inspires beyond their earthly existence, and since his sudden passing (only one week ago at time of writing this tribute) it has already become apparent how many people he has inspired and continues to inspire. ☪

Nick Singh

I was raised in a military boarding school from the age of six and lived with mum in London from 12yr of age. I bumped into Dan age 14 at Michael Sobells – I had no concept of payment or classes or why I was there – just instinct and a voice in my head telling me I needed to protect myself.

This man taught me 4hrs for free for the first few years. I have never been bullied, badly pushed or even lost a real fight since.

You were an amazing guy, Dan. I always had and will continue to have a lot of respect and gratitude for you.

You literally gave me the tools to help protect myself and others around me. ☪

“ A lovely man. Very supportive in my development as a tai chi instructor. My thoughts are with his family ☪ ”

Jan Gardner



Bob Lowey (L) with Dan

Stephen Wooster, Canvey Island Essex

I first heard about Dan Docherty in 1986 and having a previous background in Japanese MA, I went along with some friends to learn the hand form and improve my karate. Little did I know that this man would change my life. I embarked on my tai chi chuan journey under his stewardship; it would take me around the world to visit some fantastic places and meet interesting people. I have many wonderful memories, one of which was in my first lesson I was introduced to a something called pushing hands. Let's just say I thought I knew a few things and was very strong but after being bounced around the church hall and getting to know the floor really well, I knew this man had the goods.

Lastly from me, it is a great testament to Mr Docherty that he has truly created an international family with people from all colours, creeds and various, religious denominations all working together under his practical tai chi chuan clan. ☪

Heidi Tordrup

I met Dan in 1999 in Cranbrook, where I received my teacher's certificate. Shortly after that I went for my initiation at his home in London. This was the beginning of a long friendship, and a lot of travelling.

I helped him many times sorting his house and garden. I taught him to cycle, I often drove for him. He was extremely interesting to talk to, and an inspiring master.

I went to China and Macao with Dan together with Geert Van Loo and Tony on Dan's last visit to see his master and have been to many sacred sites with him over the years. I am eternally grateful for all he has taught me and for his support and inspiration. He was truly one of a kind. ☪

If you would like to pay tribute to Dan you can do so on the website here:

www.taichiunion.com/dan-docherty-1954-2021/