



Ali's story, October 2018

I joined GMax just under 2 years ago and was starting pretty much from zero fitness after a pregnancy at 42 and several years of sedentary desk-based work. A competition squad gymnast in my teens, I knew I was looking for a fitness challenge, so when I heard about Kung Fu class in Royston, it appealed on so many levels.... to learn a traditional martial art, do acrobatic moves, get an intense training experience and go on a progressive journey through the syllabus.

I was amazed at how much I learnt in the first year under Glen's steady guidance. He not only teaches the foundational movements and routines, but he fully explains the combat applications with detailed information about weaponry, culture and the history behind traditional and modern Wushu. He also helps us understand the body's structure and development process for the muscles and joints.

There are two standout moments for me on this journey. The first was the time when I did an aerial cartwheel by myself – 30 years after the last time!! (I was 15 when I stopped competing after busting my knee). The second was my first training in sparring wearing all the protective gear with Chris, one of the coaches. He went slowly and supportively, letting me discover how to move around the mats, and to block and duck. When he put me up against one of the senior lads who didn't hold back, I was amazed to discover that I didn't freeze or lash out in reactive panic, but was surprisingly calm and even able to try a few combination moves.



Ali sparring with Glen for her Green belt

Learning Kung Fu is a bit like joining the Cirque du Soleil – because there's all the gracefulness, balance and showmanship of performing routines (sometimes with loud music on!!) with all the strength, flexibility, power and energy of a combat art. It has given me that incredible aliveness I experienced in gymnastics and it's as if the body remembered everything and was slowly getting back to what it knew. Recovery times are definitely longer as a 46 year old though! ☺

I love using the self-discipline that I developed in my youth and continually learning new moves that are all part of a language of combat. Sometimes I intensify the training – for example, by supplementing the Kung Fu classes with a Kick Boxing session. I feel like I've got an essential part of myself back again that I'd lost over the years. It has brought many more physical and mental benefits than I could ever have imagined when I started!