

A special form of Tai Chi has revolutionised Sophie's life, as she explained to **Richard Davies**

Somewhere over the Rainbow

A SPECIAL form of Tai Chi has revolutionised Sophie Toye's life – helping her to win her battle with eating disorders – and now, slightly to my surprise, she wants to share it with me.

Sophie is insistent, I have to put my hand on my heart and try and listen to the beat.

'Don't worry if you can't feel it, you're still alive,' she smiled as if we had known each other all our lives. In fact we have only just met.

The 28-year-old from Staverton, near Totnes, is reassured when I give her the good news – I have a heart after all. But it is the pauses in between on which I have to concentrate.

'The stillness is really important in Tai Chi,' she explained. 'Because from the stillness is where we can connect to the energy.'

When she arrived at the office I fondly imagined I would be interviewing her about the revolutionary changes that her particular kind of Tai Chi has made to her life, but she soon makes it plain that 'if I am open to the idea' she would like me to work through some exercises first.

After a while she takes my arm – my right – and urges me to let her have the weight of it and while I wonder if I will ever write again, an amazing thing happens and I start to feel as if I am floating on a cloud high above the room, a feeling that only increases when, as

'I have found it really benefits the elderly with their various mobility problems'

instructed, I close my eyes ...

When we finally start to talk Sophie's voice seems to come from a long way away, but finally everything snaps back into focus.

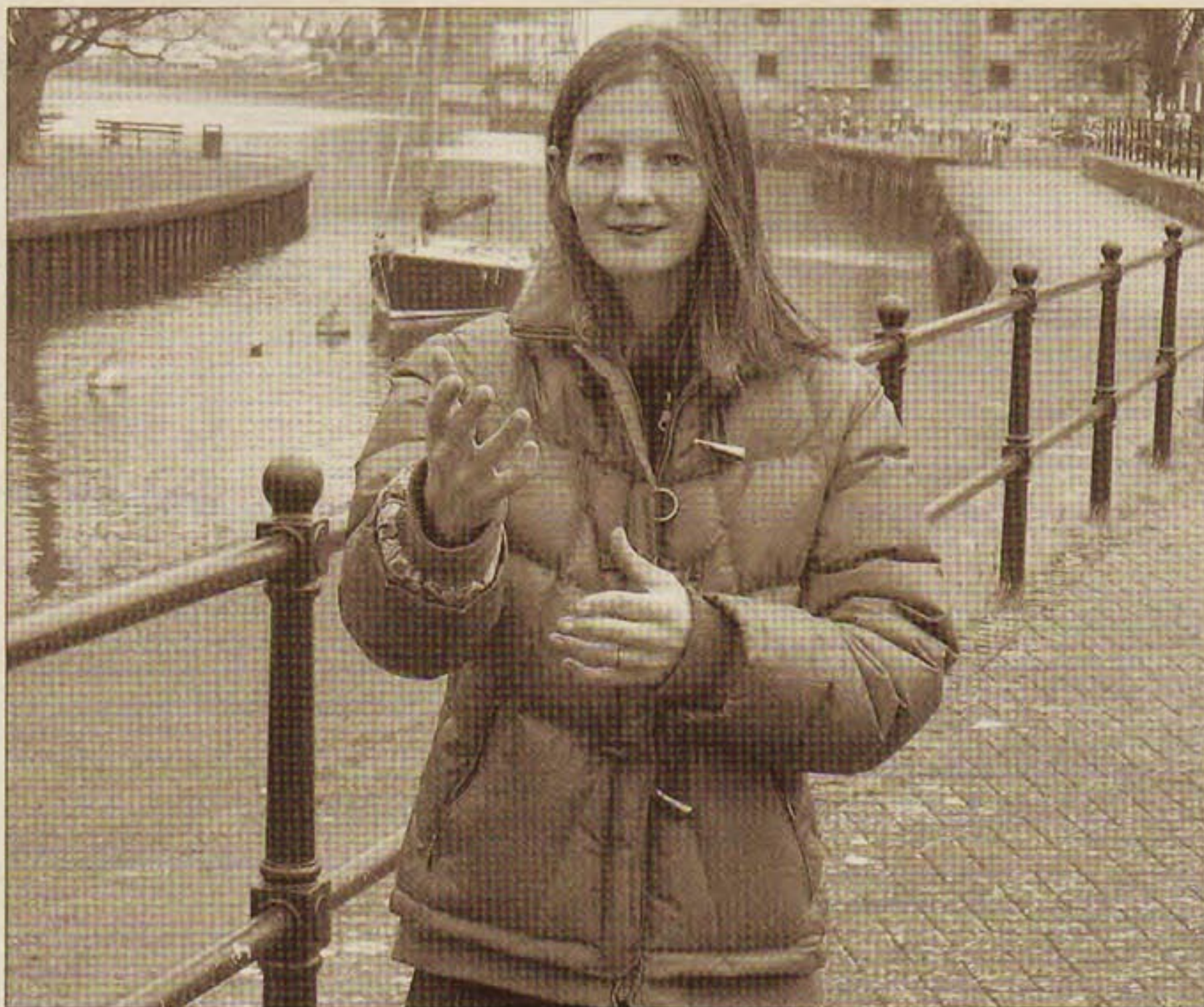
Tai Chi came into her young life by chance four and a half years ago when she went to some classes run by a neighbour, joined a summer school in Ashburton and, sufficiently intrigued, did a two year training course to become a teacher.

The kind of Tai Chi she teaches is for relaxation and health, and for the last year and a half she has been teaching it in old people's homes.

'I have found it really benefits the elderly because a lot of them have mobility problems, some of them can't stand, and can't use all of their limbs, they've suffered strokes and all sorts of medical problems. And I've found that Tai Chi is something they can really enjoy and benefit them.'

But the main way the ancient Chinese art has helped Sophie is in her battle with the eating disorders anorexia and bulimia, which afflicted her since her early teens.

She said: 'I got to the level when I just wouldn't eat enough, I wasn't happy with the way I was eating and I just wasn't quite giving myself enough to eat, I still had the kind



Sophie warms up for her Tai Chi session

Richard Davies

of mentality of wanting to eat enough, and that's where I was when I started the Tai Chi.

'I was quite afraid of food at that point and I had quite a few issues about it when I first began and it's something that I thought I might not ever be able to completely resolve in myself, and through the Tai Chi it helped me enormously, relaxing me, and it has changed my feeling about my body and completely changed my relationship with myself.'

The last two years have seen a complete shift in her attitude to food, because her Rainbow style of Tai Chi – the heart, body, mind, spirit, system which looks at people's emotional needs – can have a direct affect on your well being, Sophie insists.

'Things like eating disorders, or even ill-

nesses, often come from imbalance in the emotions. Emotions cause problems in the organs, all the Chinese medical people know this, and through working with the emotions we help to balance the person.'

She compares it to an 'internal composting' whereby negative emotions are used, accepted and from which you find the positive and creative ones. And Tai Chi practice need only be 10 minutes a day.

Sophie, a former primary school teacher, is passionate about her work – and passionate too about children, although she hasn't any of her own yet.

She is married though – to Mike – and credits Tai Chi with helping their relationship. 'I feel it helped create a more beautiful

relationship between myself and my husband'.

Now she is keen to spread the word, to underline the help that Tai Chi can give in all kinds of spheres, slowing people down to connect with their internal energy, which is very beneficial for their energy. 'It's a very, very valuable thing,' she said.

And as for Sophie herself: 'For myself, to learn to love myself, and to find peace within myself, that to me is the most valuable thing, and I feel that is something everybody would benefit hugely from. I think it's something that everybody needs in the world.'

For more information on how to change your life through Tai Chi, contact Sophie on 01803 762818.