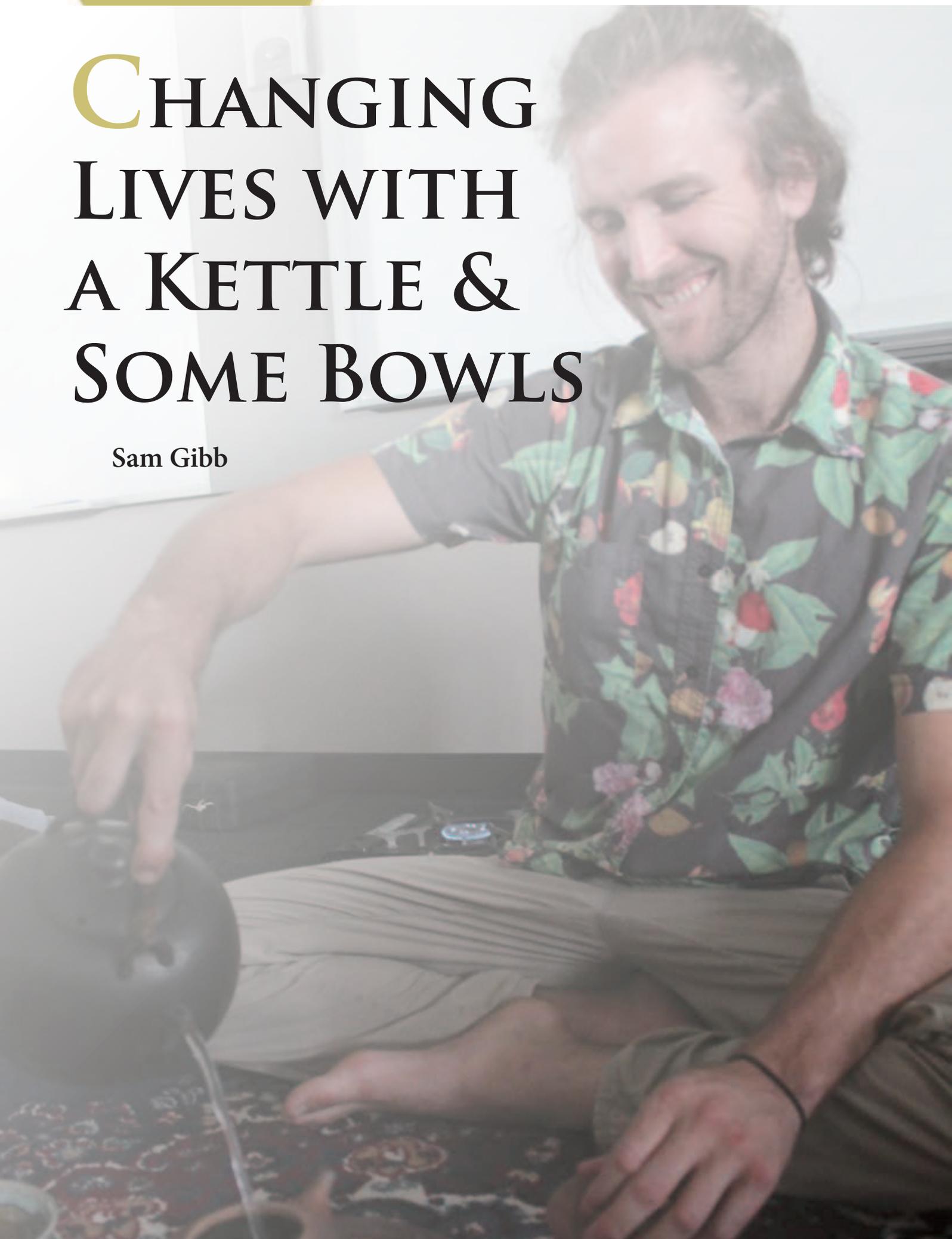


Voices from the Hot

CHANGING LIVES WITH A KETTLE & SOME BOWLS

Sam Gibb



This is one of the most inspiring stories our community has produced; one that may moisten your eyes... Our Tea brother Sam started causally serving tea to some of his students on a camping trip. Over the course of the next few months, these amazing young people started to transform, and so did he. We offered all these participating students a free month of Global Tea Hut if they'd also share with us their experiences surrounding Tea. This is a beautiful tale best read over a bowl of your favorite tea.

茶友

So often I look around and feel we have it all backwards: Society is not an easy place to live, to *really* live. It seems we are encouraged to numb ourselves to experience. At every turn there is an escape, a way to avoid things we do not accept or over-indulge in things we find pleasurable. We are encouraged all the time to bury our heads in the sand so we do not have to face our lives.

As a middle school teacher, I see this so clearly in my students. The moment something bores them, they are upset or unfocused, their phones are out and their heads are in the sand. It is almost automatic. Sometimes I wonder whether they even had a chance.

Then I look at my own life and realize I am no different. I am no better. I do the same things. I do not have a phone or Facebook for this very reason. I use them to hide. But even in getting rid of these things, I am still running. Because I get so frustrated with myself for not being able to have self-control or discipline I throw these things away. They feel too big an obstacle, so I don't want to face them.

Within these few paragraphs lies the essence of why I am leaving teaching, I think. Ultimately, the role of a teacher is to guide students—guide them towards a better life, a more authentic version of themselves and to show them by example how to face existence. Perhaps one could say I am merely running away again, but I do not feel I can be this example. Despite my

efforts, I feel for the most part like I've let my students down. While I loved them and they loved me, which is an amazing experience in itself, I am not ready to be a guide to others.

Before I became a teacher, I had done a lot of things. I was blessed with a good education that opened a lot of doors for me. But I came to the realization that most of these doors did not take me anywhere I wanted to go.

“Contemplation, for me, seems central to living. For growth, for understanding and for being. I have often wondered how I could share this with my students...”

After sitting my first Vipassana course some five years ago, I had my first glimpse of the path that I was meant to walk. Since then I sort of oscillated between the externally and internally focused realms. I jumped from advertising to monastery, ashram to refugee camp, trying to find a balance, bring the two together, and dissolve the barrier. I never really achieved this, but I believe this was my intention when I became a teacher—to bring the self-reflective, spiritual realm into my students' lives.

Contemplation, for me, seems central to living. For growth, for understanding and for being. I have

often wondered how I could share this with my students. For two years they have had to meditate for a few minutes at the start of every lesson. Perhaps some have benefited from this, while others have not, but it's always felt like something imposed on them. I don't believe growth or Spirit can be forced on anyone. It is only when we knock that the door is opened.

Most of you turning these pages will have some experience of the power of Tea, and Her ability to transmit Stillness and guide us through the forest of noise to a quiet spring within. My first experience of sharing this with my students came at a year eight camp. It was something I stumbled upon really. I had set a resolve to practice daily, and so had brought a few bowls and a thermos along for the ride. Every morning at 5am I would wander down to the lake to drink Tea and meditate. I was surprised to find that the very first morning two students were waiting for me—two students that I had taught for the year and had always resisted meditation. And by resisted, I mean refused! They were in a scattered group of students within every class that would just stare at you as you guided the class through the meditation with eyes that said, “Try and make me, you weird hippie”. So before the sun had risen over the lake we sat and drank Tea, watching the crocodiles silently moving through the water.

Later that day, another two students asked to drink some Tea. Shocked again, we headed down

to the lake and sat in the shade of a tree, hiding from the oppressive Australian Outback sun. We drank in silence for forty minutes, which was at the time the longest time I'd spent in silence with a student. Afterwards, we did not talk much, but I overheard one say to the other: "The patterns in the tree's leaves are amazing! I've never noticed them before!" To which her friend replied, "I know, and did you see the way the sunlight was shining through the trees; it was awesome!" I just smiled...

The next morning, I was up at 5am again and surprised to see that our numbers had grown: *some five students awaited me this time!* I was delighted by the motley crew that awaited me this time. After drinking with the sunrise for a second morn-

ing, some sat with me as I meditated and others headed back up to camp. Later that evening, while most students were playing games, a small group asked to have Tea and we sat under the stars while the chaos raged around us, bowls in hand.

A Second Chance

The two-day camp was soon over and I was back in the classroom trying to get the same students to meditate—back to pushing the boulder up the hill. I had thought about drinking Tea at school but this idea never developed. The camping trip still stuck out in my mind, and when I was asked to go on a year nine weeklong camping trip a few months later, I decided to focus on

servicing Tea to students during this trip. So I packed up my kettles, pots and bowls, preparing to more thoroughly introduce my students to Cha Dao.

This time, I was lucky enough to have Dan along with me. He is a dear friend, colleague, spiritual brother and my general partner in crime. We rose on the first morning and after some yoga and meditation a group of boys drifted over to the tree we were set up at. Just as the sun rose, I found myself once again sitting with an unlikely group of students drinking Tea in silence. Over the next few days, I shared Tea a number of times: some in silence, some over deeper conversation, but I always left with the feeling that the students had experienced something



they had not been exposed to, something out of the ordinary for them.

Halfway through the week, we moved camp. Our new site was in a dried-up riverbed, surrounded by lush tropical forest. This was where the power and potential for Tea with youth was really shown to me. By this point I had drunk Tea with a large portion of the students, so I set up regular drinking times at 5.30am, lunchtime and another in the evening. At 5.30am, I had a full table of ten students, sitting in silence waiting to be served. And this continued every morning for the rest of the trip! Every ceremony was done in silence and every time I was either at capacity or close to it.

Perhaps one of the most illuminating experiences happened at midnight after two extremely rambunc-

tious students had been swearing, breaking tents and threatening to “skull drag” a teacher. Our principal suggested we all sit for Tea. After only three bowls of Tea, the two boys excused themselves, walked over to their tent and fell straight to sleep while the teachers stayed and drank more under the stars.

Back to School

Upon returning to school, a small core group that was really drawn in by the Leaf asked me to continue the ceremonies. So, for the last three months, I have served Tea every Monday after school, and it has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my short teaching career. Every week, between six to ten students from all year levels join me for Tea. We sit for an hour in silence as music plays and incense burns with our bowls in hand.

These days, the students set everything up and I just watch. They meet me at the door asking what Tea we will be drinking and the old hands quiet those that talk during the ceremony. Seven students started drinking Tea at home on a regular basis, some rising early for three bowls in the morning while others drink theirs in the garden during the afternoon. In one of my younger students, I’ve noticed an especially radical shift starting to take place: He’s started opening up, dropping his guard, speaking with confidence, smiling a lot more, socializing with others and generally he just seems much happier! Teachers have made comments about his improvements and I see he has a lot more friends than before. He tells me he is not as sad all the time after drinking Tea and that life does not seem as bad.

I love my job. (Well, I don’t actually love the job part, but I love the students whom I work with.) Working with youth is such an inspiring privilege that I often do

not honor in the way it deserves. I spend lunchtime sitting and eating with students because I love being in their presence. I do not know what happens to us as we grow older, but my kids seem so quick to love and forget mistakes you made with the same ease. Teaching middle school has been one of those opportunities that have challenged me in so many ways. Like all human systems, it seems to be so broken. In many ways, schools reflect our society: There is a focus on obedience, outward success and competition. I often find myself falling into demanding these things of my students, even though they feel empty. I then see my kids taking on these values. Schools also seem to be echoing society in the movement away from Stillness and connection. For the easily distracted mind, there are so many outs these days...

But for those students drawn to the Leaf, Tea seems like an amazing gateway into Stillness. As with all of us, Tea guides them deeper within their experience, offering insight and tranquility along the way. This seems so important and needed in the lives of my students. Seeing the changes and effects it has had on some of these students gives me a sense of hope, not just for them but also for all of humanity!

Wu De told me you have to draw a circle around one area of your life and in that be who you would like to be. I am trying to draw that circle around my Cha Dao, making it a path I walk fully with my heart. While I think there are many areas of being a teacher in which I was untrue to myself, perhaps in this one area I came close to really serving my students. Mother Teresa said, *“In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love.”* Maybe this is closer to the truth of it, that while serving Tea I did one small act with great love. And it is amazing the impact those small acts can have...





The Students' Experiences

Ben

I enjoyed learning about Tea at school because I was curious about it. I do drink Tea at home in the mornings now and life is not as bad. I am interested in the impact Tea has on people's everyday lives both mentally and physically. I've learnt that the Tea ceremony makes you one with Nature and clears the mind. I do think that after school finishes, I will still do Tea ceremonies and enjoy drinking Tea. Since I started drinking Tea, I am not as sad all the time.

Lachlan

Hi! My name is Lachlan Miller and I have been asked to write this paragraph on behalf of the Mackillop Catholic College Tea group. When I first heard about this group, I asked what a Tea ceremony was. Luckily, one of my friends was in it so he informed me on what it was and how it helped in day to day living. Examples are that it calms your mind, relieves pain and helps your overall mental health. When I was first told of the benefits of Tea drinking by my friend, I was pretty skeptical on these things but I went along anyway. I was excited and curious, as most kids would be. When I arrived I saw my friend and the other kids sitting down. The teacher ushered me over and I sat down and copied the other kids. I listened to the music and started to feel relaxed and I was surprised that I was. I waited for my first cup of Tea and when it came I drank it. A sudden warmth came over me and I was completely calm, nothing distracting me, nothing in my mind, no troubles or anger; and for the first time in my life I felt at one with myself. A true happiness had overcome me and I became calmer and calmer. As it went on, I had no muscle pain anywhere. I was centered. When it finished, I had never felt better in my life. So far the Tea had done everything my friend had said it would. I was calm, happy and painless. That day, I went home and did some work. I had never been so focused and it was all thanks to some Tea and music. I was amazed. The thing about Tea that I enjoy the most is the feeling you get from it. I feel calm and happy after drinking Tea at school, more than I've ever been. I've noticed many changes in my life since I've started drinking Tea, such as being more focused, in less pain and I'm happier.

Mackinlay

When I drink Tea the world seems to slow down. You have to be very still and not talk for the Tea to do its magic.

Amelia

I like Tea because of a few reasons. One reason is that I like the way I feel after I drink it; it feels like I've been given relaxation pills or something. Another reason is that I love all the different flavors. Flavors like oolong or GABA. Tea for me is a safe, peaceful place.



It's amazing to read about all the ways Tea has helped these young people, some of which are struggling with the values of society or coming from troubled homes or neighborhoods. Their voices are clean and simple, demonstrating sentiment without too much gloss. And this can help inspire us all to take Tea where She's needed: to nursing homes and troubled youth, etc., etc. This medicine is needed now more than ever!



Dear Tea Lovers,

I'm Mackayla McGowan from Mackillop Catholic College in the Northern Territory of Australia. My teacher Mr. Gibb introduced me to real Tea. Not the Tea you buy in the supermarket. Tea that when you drink it, it clears your mind and any tense muscles. It is the number one cure for many illnesses you might have. There is a large range of Tea, so many that I may not be able to try all of them. But I will try my very best to try different Teas and show other people. You may think Tea is gross. You may be drinking the wrong Tea. I'm sure you will find one you will enjoy. Tea is also a great liquid to drink if you are trying to lose weight.

The thing that inspires me the most about Tea is that each one is unique, just like people are. I also like when the Tea is hot and you can feel it going into your stomach. Once I have Tea at school I feel like the stress has been lifted off my shoulders from the day I just had. Then I would be a nice, calm person when I get home. I have my own little Tea ceremony on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. I have noticed I sleep better because I am calm and collected. Tea feels like a light of power going into every part of my body, relaxing it and giving it power, especially my heart and brain. Tea is a form of energy that allows me to have an open and clear mind. If I could drink Tea with anyone it would be the person who owns Lipton Ice Tea to prove to him what real Tea is. I love all the different ways of having Tea and meditating as well as that Tea has been used as a form of medicine helping people with great sicknesses.

So guys, get out there! There is a whole world of Tea just waiting to be discovered. These are my opinions, feelings and emotions about Tea.

From,
Mackayla McGowan



Cameron

The first Tea ceremony was at camp. I'd had a rough day and Mr. Gibb invited me to a Tea ceremony. At first, I was skeptical, but by the end I was relaxed and nothing could ruin my mood, not even Joseph! Best thing ever! So I kept on coming back and now you know what happened in my first Tea ceremony. And it is also the reason why I come back.

Felix

I think Tea is a great type of meditation because of the concept of being able to drink something that has been used for thousands of years for meditation and medical purposes. I like drinking Tea because of the way it makes me feel when drinking it and afterwards. The Tea makes me feel calm and relaxed with the taste and the warmth of the Tea running down my body into my belly. After we finish Tea at school, I feel better after a big day of school because it gives me quiet time to reflect on the day. I drink Tea around six days a week, not including Mondays because I drink at school. I drink in the mornings, but if I miss out in the morning I do it at night. Tea in the mornings sometimes cures sore throats or headaches, but in school I am calm for most of the day. My favorite Tea would be an oolong because they just have a good taste and it was one of the first Teas that I drank. I would like to learn where Teas are grown because I am interested if they are grown on a farm or in the wild and I would also like to learn about all the types of Tea. I have served Tea to my brother and sister a few times. When I serve Tea to them it is a lot different to when it is getting served to you. Overall, Tea is a great social or private drink that can cure people and make them feel calm and better. While I haven't noticed any major changes in my life, I have been a lot calmer. I think these changes will get a lot stronger as I proceed with drinking Tea.



Sarah

The thing about Tea that I enjoy the most is how it calms and relaxes you but at the same time makes you aware of your surroundings. After drinking Tea at school, at first I feel tired, like I could go to sleep. But then it's like all the energy I saved during the Tea ceremony comes back to me like an energy rush. It's a hard feeling to explain. I get this feeling quite a lot as I drink Tea every second morning at home. Also, I feel on the mornings I don't drink Tea that it is harder to focus on something for a long period of time and I feel restless most of the day. Whereas on the mornings I do drink Tea, it is a lot easier to get my work done and I get more time to myself. I think everyone likes me more on those days. I feel I don't really have a favorite Tea because for 1) I don't know many Tea names and 2) I think although they are all so different I like them all the same. One thing I would really like to learn about Tea is how it can help or improve injuries, mentally and physically. I would like to do this so I can spread the word about Tea and get everyone interested in trying it. I think that Tea is an amazing thing and it should be shared. I am definitely going to continue to drink Tea and encourage all of my friends to join me.

Nathan

Tea helps you and makes you feel happy, restores your energy and tastes good. Different Teas can help you in different ways. I reckon everyone should have some. I don't drink Tea at home but I would like to. I would do it out in my front lawn in the morning. The thing I like about Tea the most is that it relaxes you right down afterwards.