

Yoga, a Bridge to Yourself

Thirty years ago Yoga wasn't a household word, and if you had to track down a class you might look for a bunch of strange looking sandals clustered outside a doorway, (early Birkenstocks) . I walked into my first class at the Ann Arbor Y in 1978, just after graduating from UM with a BS in Biology. I was taking a 'break ' to figure out which direction I wanted to take with my degree. I didn't realize that I had walked into the first Iyengar yoga program in the US (still in it's infancy), and that my real education was about to begin..My teacher was a mother of five grown children. She was funny, grounded, and worked us quite hard. She and the other teachers at the Y studied at the Iyengar Institute in Pune, India. I was the youngest in the class by about 20 years and was more and more impressed with my older classmates.

What was this stuff? It was hard to get myself to class sometimes, until I realized that I always felt better afterward, (kind of like swimming in Lake Michigan, have you ever regretted it?)

Named after B.K.S.Iyengar, a yoga master still practicing in India at age 90, Iyengar yoga employs clear directions for the student to create each pose, called an asana., These allow the practitioner to find a certain alignment in each pose, and through simple actions to continue to work in to bring those benefits to all levels of their being. The concentration it calls on is one of the benefits, and the stability and body awareness bring a sense of wholeness. It becomes a sort of moving (and then still)meditation. Whether you come for flexibility, balance, fitness or for a meditative practice, yoga has something to offer to help you find your balance. As a 22 year old it grounded me, helping me be comfortable in my own body, but it also made me more receptive to my world. I found I was less spacey, more attentive, stronger, more flexible, and was finally able to relax. When I became pregnant a few years later my teachers knew how to adapt the poses as the pregnancy progressed. In fact Iyengar yoga is wonderful for adapting to special needs or

limitations. The use of mats, blocks and belts and blankets was all pioneered by B.K.S. Iyengar and his teachers to help students adapt the poses to their bodies. (Can't reach the floor in this pose?, Put a block under your hand.until you can.).You do NOT have to be flexible to start yoga!

As a mother I found yoga gave me patience and helped me recover my own sense of self, so I could be more generous, and it has helped me in some way with all the stages of my life. I began teaching in 1982, and since 1987 have studied at the Iyengar Institute in Pune , India myself numerous times. My students at North Woods Yoga range in age from 15 to 80, and their dedication to their practice of yoga and their stories of how it has changed their lives lights up my life. We talk of it like it's a thing, a noun: yoga. But really it's an invitation to take off your shell, to be yourself more fully and not shy away from life's great invitation. Walking onto the bridge to yourself begins with one step!!

Mary Reilly is a certified Iyengar Yoga teacher, her studio, North Woods Yoga is located on the third floor of 316 1/2 East Mitchell, above the Grand Traverse Pie company and welcomes new students. Go to www.northwoodsyooga.com for the schedule.