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SUN AND MOON STUDIO YTT PROJECT, 2016: ESTABLISHING AND RUNNING A YOGA STUDIO

Teaching Yoga

It doesn't matter who or what set in motion
the wheel of stars across the sky, a divine spark
resides in each of us. If you've ever blown on embers
and watched them flare, you know what it is

to teach yoga, to see the spark catch and burn
in every student. The earth and all its beings
abide in each of us – the moon's pull on the tide,
the ebb and flow of our shared breath.

How can we not be humble when in any moment,
we are as much student as teacher?

- Nancy Allen

I own a yoga studio in Lynchburg, VA called James River Yoga Studio, and have been teaching here in town since late 2006, early 2007. Currently, I teach 7 classes a week, and we have 9 teachers offering a variety of yoga classes – including Holy Yoga, Yin and Restorative Yoga, as well as meditation, and STOTT Pilates. This paper will describe my journey, and the yogic lessons I have learned along the way.

In 2006, we moved from Washington, D.C. to Lynchburg, VA on a whim after my husband was abducted and robbed at gunpoint a half block from our home. In her workshop at Sun and Moon Studio in February 2016, Kira Ryder stated that all change is inspired by desire - usually love. That resonated with me, since it was entirely love - a direct connection to the heart - that precipitated my decision to

move (it was more my decision than Dan's initially). I remember thinking, once I picked Dan up from where his abductors dropped him off, "this is never going to happen again if I can help it." It was an impetuous decision by any purely rational standards, and impetuous decisions would become a theme for my teaching yoga and opening a studio as well.

We left behind – besides our jobs and my hometown – our beloved teachers and large yoga community at Willow Street Yoga, where I had graduated in 2005 from the 200 Hour YTT Program. At the time we moved, both Dan and I were taking 3 classes a week at Willow Street. We were also part of a large mindfulness community based upon the teachings of Thich Nhat Hahn. Every Sunday night would find us at the Buddhist Vihara on 16th Street in Northwest D.C. for seated and walking meditation, dharma talks, discussion and socializing.

My first ever yoga teacher was Suzie Hurley, the founder of Willow Street Yoga. I had never studied anywhere other than Willow Street; besides regular classes, I took workshops there with John Friend, Desiree Rumbaugh, Betsy Downing, Doug Keller, and Amy Ipolitti, among others. Thus, my idea of yoga was the alignment-based practice I knew at Willow Street – a spiritual practice grounded in John Friend's Anusara Yoga "universal principles of alignment" (developed in partnership with Doug Keller).

One of the first things Dan and I did once we moved to Lynchburg (a town on the James River in Southwest Virginia, population 76,000 in the city and 250,000 in the metropolitan area) was to track down the one yoga studio in town. It was located on the main drag in an old building that had previously housed both a

secretarial college and a morgue (the casket elevator still functions and you can find pen nibs embedded in the floorboards). Mind Body Studio was on the top floor in a big open space with wood floors and huge windows that rattle in a strong breeze. The studio overlooks the Blackwater Creek nature area – a 300-acre swath of woods and streams, and an 8-mile system of hiking and biking trails cutting through the middle of town.

The studio had been founded only a few years earlier by Mike Cundiff – a Lynchburg native who had worked as a park ranger out west and probation officer in Lynchburg. He had been overweight and a big drinker when he discovered Rolfe Gates, Dave Swenson and the practice of yoga, and changed his life. Mike, as I came to learn, is a multi-faceted character. He is a terrific massage therapist. He leans toward end-of-the-world preparedness, lives on a farm, keeps horses he won't ride (“horses weren't meant to be ridden”), is attracted to a sort of Native American spirituality (despite said reluctance to climb on a horse), and has a huge arsenal of firearms stashed in his home – and I think a Glock in his desk drawer at the studio. Mike makes a lot of plans he has neither the attention span nor the resources to bring to fruition. He is a kind and generous soul as well.

Dan and I started attending Mike's classes – pretty much “power flow” without much instruction. Mike would do the class in front of the room along with the students, a group of regulars who had been studying with him for years. It took about two seconds taking his class before I went into full judgmental mode – no alignment instructions? Doing the poses along with the students and with his back to them? I looked around and saw students dropping their shoulders in chaturanga,

collapsing into their low backs, winging their shoulder blades off of their backs, rounding in the spine – everything we had learned in my teacher training to look out for and adjust.

Mike did not appear to notice. The one time I observed him make an adjustment, he approached a novice student whose entire Virabhadrasana II pose was out of whack from the ground up; his feet were completely askew and improperly placed. Mike wandered over and shifted the student's shoulders a smidge, to no avail. Inside, I was screaming, "HIS FEET, LOOK AT HIS FEET!" and from that point on kept my eyes closed whenever I attended a class with Mike. I just couldn't bear it.

Finally, I decided I would need to teach yoga (something I had not actually intended to do when I took the teacher training). I realized how unique and valuable was the instruction at Willow Street and I also realized that yoga in Lynchburg was stuck somewhere in the 1950's. Indeed, at least twice since I have lived here, some pastor will hold forth in the local "newspaper" about the Satanic evils of yoga! It seemed such a shame that Dan would never take another Anusara class, and that people in Lynchburg would never know the physical integrity and amazing spiritual benefits of the yoga I had been taught. I also feared that, if I didn't teach yoga, I would forget everything I ever knew!

Anyway, Mike was enthusiastic about my renting studio space and I began teaching a Sunday afternoon class attended by exactly 3 people, including my husband. I also led a meditation group (donation-based) attended by pretty much no one. As I was new to Lynchburg, I started heavily promoting my classes with

fliers and emails and special discounts. This was pre-Facebook, so I did a lot of walking around from one business to the next, introducing myself, explaining yoga. Most people had either never heard of it, or had some vague misconception about it.

I joined a Masters Swim Team and worked with a Community Supported Agriculture project so met people that way and encouraged anyone I met to try yoga. In fact, most of my first fliers were headed, TRY YOGA – it was a safe assumption that few people in town had. It seems like I had the same 3 students for months, but gradually the classes became popular, mostly through referrals and word of mouth. Eventually, I started offering beginner classes in conjunction with the Parks and Recreation Department in town, so benefited from their advertising. Many of those early students still come to class. The separate meditation class pretty quickly went by the wayside, although I incorporated meditation into the yoga classes, and began (and still begin) every class with a centering practice and focus on the breath.

I kept Mike's rudimentary website updated with not only my class information, but with his; I entered names and email addresses in his archaic, dial-up computer database. I offered one fundraiser workshop after another, benefiting the humane society, a homeless women's shelter, St. Jude's Hospital, local Head Start and education programs, and other non-profits around town. I also raised money for medical expenses of local people who were suffering illness and did not have health insurance. One such workshop benefited Robbie Wells, a well-know local fiddler and music teacher who contracted an aggressive prostate cancer. During the workshop, I played CD's of his music and gave away CD's as door prizes.

One of my favorite workshops – instituted just in the last couple of years – is Yogatry: a fusion of yoga and poetry. I teach that with Laura-Gray Street, the director of creative writing at Randolph College, co-editor of the *Eco-Poetry Anthology* and author of the book, *Pigment and Fume*. This year we followed the workshop with a wine reception. Laura-Gray and I split the workshop up into 20-minute increments, yoga followed by poetry prompts and readings, and back and forth for 2 hours. We try to link the yoga and poetry sections with a common theme: the breath as a way to focus the mind and body (centering and alignment basics with emphasis on full yogic breathing); recognizing emotions and memories buried in the body and visualizing healing (hip openers); and opening the heart and taking risks (upper back and shoulder openers).

I taught at Mind Body Studio for about 4 years and had developed a pretty big group of regular students in 4 or 5 classes a week. I thought Mike and I were getting along just fine, and then he abruptly threw me out (!), via email (!). His email was so indirect and vague, I had to forward it to one of my students and ask, “am I being thrown out?” Yes, apparently. I didn’t argue with Mike about it – I got the sense that he felt threatened by the number of students coming to my classes, but really, to this day, I’m not sure. I decided I wouldn’t make an issue of it or hold a grudge (holding a grudge requires WAY too much energy, and I keep forgetting what it was I was supposed to be mad about); I also continued to go to Mike for massages.

I started looking for another venue. Back then, there was Mind Body Studio and a recently opened Bikram Studio, and that’s it. There was no ready-made yoga studio to slip my classes into. There was a yoga studio about a 45-minute drive from

Lynchburg run by Dora¹, and housed in a tiny old church. I had attended a couple of classes out there, and had gotten to know Dora somewhat. I could see that she cared about her students and had been trying to nurture a yoga community, offering workshops and hosting the occasional dinner after class. She also taught an undergraduate yoga class at Lynchburg College. I did not know Dora well, but I called to tell her that I was looking for studio space. She misunderstood me to be asking if she wanted to partner with me in opening a studio in downtown Lynchburg. I didn't correct her and thought, "well, why not?" Thus, just as blithely as I moved to Lynchburg in the first place, did I commit to starting and running a business with someone I barely knew (cue the horror movie music here).

Dora and I zeroed in on the Riverviews Artspace downtown – one of Lynchburg's industrial buildings – now converted to studio spaces and loft apartments. We rented a 1300 square foot space on the ground floor with its own entrance for \$1200/month including utilities. We set about getting a business license and bank account, registering our trade name, incorporating, and building a website with an online registration component. The space was a bit rough, so we had the walls painted and got the floors patched as best we could (the floors were beautiful and wooden, but also tilted, splintery and gouged in spots; some of the sections were repaired with metal plates). We did a lot of dusting and window washing as well, since dust and soot had collected on the big ducts running along the ceiling. It was an exhausting and time-consuming process.

¹ Some names are changed in this paper.

Fortunately, my swim coach was a website designer, so he worked with us for a nominal fee. The current site is much the same today as the one he helped us to create, at www.jamesriveryoga.com. Dora's husband is a software engineer, so was able to incorporate the Mindbody software (online registration) into our website. And Dora, scribbling on a bar napkin one night, came up with our logo – the same one we use today. I asked a couple of people if they wanted to teach in the new space – Paul had a 200 hour teacher certification from Kripalu and Becky was a local doctor who had done a weekend Yogafit training.

Dora invited several teachers (who I would not have chosen, but I didn't protest). She invited Gilda, who had been teaching a version of yoga in Lynchburg to private students for about 30 years; Maladuka, who fancied herself some sort of guru and taught yoga on blankets; Lizette, who taught a sweaty and intense power flow class at the YMCA; and Garth, who has a heart of gold and kept our computer functioning, but who just invented stuff peripherally related to yoga and taught that.

We opened to a tremendous surge of students – we actually had to turn people away from one of the first beginner classes. Literally, there was nowhere to put them. The studio was popular, and we were able to pay the rent and pay the teachers as well. It was a regular business model – I issued bi-weekly paychecks based upon class attendance which I monitored online, and produced 1099's. There were some glitches: the walls and floors were sieves so the studio was loud with noise from other studios – the photography place upstairs, the chalk paint place below; parking was pretty awful as it is everywhere in downtown Lynchburg; snow, along with organized runs and events, would close the city streets for blocks around

our studio and people would have to make a real effort to find parking and get to class.

Dora's chosen teachers proved to be unreliable and I often had to sub for their classes at the last minute (Dora was available to sub as well, but her trip from home took nearly an hour). Lizette's car was forever breaking down and she complained generally about the lack of students (she was accustomed to 40 plus students at the Y, where no one had to pay for class); Maladuka disappeared for two months to help her daughter with a newborn; and Gilda could not wrap her mind around having to teach *every* week (we had a fairly contentious discussion one day where I had to explain that, if her class was listed on our website, then the class had to occur. That concept, for some reason, was both alien to her and unwelcome news).

The studio was beautifully decorated, our logo was effective, and our advertising was compelling – all due to Dora's artistic sense and attention to detail. Her husband was able to keep our online registration system functioning and was always cheerfully available to help me out (it seemed that every new session required a complete re-working of the system with many, many details to attend to). I am not very tech-savvy and the computer stuff both scared me to death and bored me – ditto the paychecks, 1099's and record keeping in general. When I was teaching at Mike's, all I did was take cash or checks from students and pay Mike rent. Those days were gone!

Dora, as I came pretty quickly to learn, was both artistic and creative *and* emotionally unstable. About 3 months into our lease, she announced that she was

working on an “exit plan.” She told me that she was fine teaching the small group of students who were loyal to her, but dealing with strangers who she perceived as less caring or even gruff, completely undid her. I also came to learn that she sat in her car and smoked pot before every class she taught. Eventually, I realized how odd it was that her friends appeared to be mostly college students (Dora is my age). And, significantly, her list of friends with whom she was angry and no longer speaking was longer than my arm. I was not aware of any of this at the beginning of our business.

Her announcement of an exit plan worried me, and I spent many, many long hours over wine counseling her, suggesting therapy (a suggestion that made her bristle angrily), and coming up with modifications to her class plans and teaching hours. I would talk her off the edge, return home with my stomach in knots, and then have to talk her down again a few days later. Dora did eventually leave the studio after about six months, and I was left with the rent to pay. By that time, it was a relief to have her gone, as I was stressed and worn out with the effort of keeping her on an even keel. I managed for two years in that space, even though I sometimes had to work for free in order to pay the teachers and the rent. I finally ended up on Dora’s list of people she no longer speaks to and I haven’t even seen her in a couple of years. I am sorry about that; when she was on the upswing, no one was more fun to be with or had such a quirky sense of humor.

Running a yoga studio in the typical business fashion became an albatross around my neck and a huge time suck. I found that I did not enjoy it, even though I loved teaching yoga. As I mentioned before, I had remained friendly with Mike

throughout this whole time – he would ask about the studio and I would see him pretty regularly (significantly, Mike had had his own falling out with Dora, and they had not spoken in years). At some point, I became aware that the owner of the building in which was housed Mike’s studio was upping his rent significantly. It would be the first rent increase in ten years, so it was big. I saw this as an opportunity, and asked Mike if we could move James River Yoga back to 311 Rivermont Avenue. We would rent space from him and he could pay his back rent to the owner of the building.

He was very enthusiastic about the idea, and we figured out a way to incorporate my business back into the studio space – both Mind Body Studio and James River Yoga Studio are on the sign out front and we share the single studio. I moved back with several teachers, and we each made our own rent agreement with Mike. I maintain our website (Mike has his own site) – without the online registration component – but the James River Yoga teachers now operate as a collective. I am no longer anyone’s boss or cutting any paychecks. Students who drop in to class pay the teacher directly, and those who sign up for a session do the same. So, for example, if someone signs up for a 10-week session with Anne, the check would be made out to her, not to James River Yoga (half of the teachers teach session-based classes, and we have agreed that students can do make ups with any teacher in any session-based class). We sub for one another as needed. Each teacher carries individual insurance, and both Mike and I have studio insurance as well.

Most of the teachers do not teach solely at James River Yoga Studio – Paul teaches at the Pearson Cancer Center; Jan teaches at Peakland Pilates; Anne teaches at the homeless women’s shelter where she is president of the board; Maureen and Becky teach classes at their church; Leslie teaches a class at Genworth Insurance Company downtown. I am often asked about providing yoga or meditation instruction to office groups, girl scout troops or wedding parties, and I send out those requests to see if teachers are interested; negotiating the details is up to the individual teacher, although I ask them to bring along some James River Yoga fliers. I get a number of calls and emails every week asking about yoga and am able to direct people to appropriate teachers and class levels and the most convenient class days/times.

This business model has been working really well – it requires a loose grip and a low-ego approach that doesn’t elevate my classes over anyone else’s. Our website lists our schedule, describes the classes, and has teacher bio’s as well. A local filmmaker created a promotional video for us, and the link to that is on the home page of our website. One of the teachers set up our Facebook page, and he and I are administrators. We post articles of yogic interest, advertise classes, and announce workshops on the Facebook page. I often “boost” posts to attract more viewers and that has been successful in drawing in new students.

We have been back at my original studio space now for at least two years, and things are going smoothly. Mike teaches his class Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings from 6 to 7:15 and all the other classes on the studio schedule are taught by James River Yoga teachers – a total of 20 JRY classes every week. We

continue to offer workshops and to add new classes – most recently, Maureen offered a free Introduction to Holy Yoga Workshop that was attended by 34 people (a big group for us here in Lynchburg), and has started a Saturday afternoon Holy Yoga session-based class.

I attribute the success of the studio and the lack of stress involved in running it to my letting go of the reins somewhat and seeing where the ride takes me. Back when Dora was talking about leaving the old studio space, all my energy went to preventing that from happening. I couldn't imagine her dropping our shared project and couldn't visualize what might happen if she did. I felt like I had a handle on how to run things and could keep Dora from decompensating and, while that effort was completely draining and no fun, at least it was a known evil. Interestingly, just as our move to Lynchburg was precipitated by something beyond my control, so was my move back to Mike's studio space. I've been learning that not being in control of everything is not the disaster I once feared it would be – the same way that in a yoga class, you can't predict or control how you might be moved and changed by the practice. If I resist change, it doesn't do any good: change happens anyway, and resistance just creates unnecessary tension.

Right around the time we moved from the Riverviews Artspace studio and back to my original space with Mike, a world famous yoga-celebrity teacher moved to town (she was dating someone who came here for his job). We offered her studio space and enthusiastically promoted her workshops and classes. Unfortunately, she did not share our collective-based attitude, and expected "services" in return for her rent. For example, she had a student come to class who was not clean and had a

strong body odor smell. After class, she set aside the blankets he used with a note: “these need to be washed before the next use.” We don’t have a janitor. Any other teacher would have just brought the blankets home, washed them, and returned them. Famous teacher refused to tidy before class (we have a policy of arriving to class a half hour early to Swiffer the floor, wipe out the cubbies, and check that the bathrooms are clean and stocked with toilet paper), or even arrive on time. She often made an entrance while her students were waiting outside the locked door.

I came to realize that from *her* perspective, we were lucky to have her and should have been catering to her. From *our* perspective, we were trying to welcome her to town, endorse her classes and include her in our studio – knowing that it is not always easy to blend into the doings of a small, southern community.

This teacher eventually opened her own studio downtown, and I think we are getting even more students as a result of the publicity yoga is getting in Lynchburg. In the ten years I have taught here, more and more people understand that yoga is a beneficial practice that does not involve demonic possession!

My teaching style has certainly evolved over time, but it has always been based upon the advice of Moses Brown, one of my Willow Street teachers and YTT mentors: “love everyone.” I am able to set aside my tendency to be judgmental whenever I am in front of a yoga class. As a *student* in a class taught by someone else, the show-off, or the needy and klutzy student who is demanding too much space, energy and attention might annoy me. As a *teacher*, that is my favorite student – that is the student brave enough to attend a yoga class, when everything about his or her behavior and body language broadcasts: “I am terrified and I don’t

think I'm good enough." It is my goal to be especially encouraging to the students who were ready to give up before they even rolled out their mats. When the students are in savasana, I make a point to sit in meditation and to join in the energy of their collective breath, to wish them well. For someone who "grew up arrogant," as my husband puts it, and who naturally gravitated to the adversarial climate of the courtroom,² I am so happy to have tapped into the compassion of a yoga teacher.

As far as asana practice, I still base my teachings on the Anusara system of loops and spirals – an interlocking set of physical principles designed for optimum alignment. But, over the course of ten years, I have learned to give many different instructions to achieve the same result. I do demonstrations in class, make individual adjustments, and try to provide clear verbal clues. I find that different students respond better to different modes of communication, so I try to mix it up and not use the same instruction over and over again. For example, Dorothy never understood what I meant by "external rotation" of the arms until I described the action as screwing a jar lid to the right with the right hand and to the left with the left hand and letting that movement translate all the way up into the shoulder blades.

Likewise, I have been giving the instruction in adho mukha svanasana to push the hands and feet away from each other isometrically. This is an instruction that I never heard John Friend give, but I find that students thereby lengthen through the spine, stretch the calves and hamstrings, and move the weight forward into the hands and out of the wrists. And I know from experience that when

² I have been a criminal defense attorney for 25 years and now handle mostly homicide and violent crime cases from the D.C. Court of Appeals.

students are in a deep hip opener and holding the pose that I should remind them to note the thoughts, sensations and distractions that inevitably arise and try to tether the mind gently back to the breath – I have seen the emotional impact of hip openers and I know that a reminder to stay with the breath is beneficial. I think my teaching has evolved as I learn from watching my students learn.

I began teaching focused on the physical body – the muscles, bones, ligaments and tendons. I emphasized yoga’s benefit in increasing both flexibility and strength gradually over time. This was partly because, as a new teacher, I was not as comfortable conveying the deeper layers of the practice and I was not confident that my students would be open to much more.

I did manage to introduce a pranayama practice at the beginning of each class, as we centered, found equipoise and followed the breath. So, the physical practice and a centering or meditation practice went hand in hand from the start. Gradually did I start introducing deeper pranayama practices, and more successfully teaching students how to link their breath to movement. As a new teacher, my tendency was to hurry through the poses, to misunderstand concentration on the faces of students as boredom or lack of engagement, and to want to keep them occupied and interested. It took the development of confidence over time to slow down and to watch that breath and movement are integrated throughout the class – not only in the students, but also in my own teaching. I could start to sense the flow of energy in a particular student and feel the macro flow of energy within the room, but that took some experience teaching.

John Douillard, an Ayurvedic practitioner,³ offers an explanation of the Koshas, described in the Vedic tradition as the layers or sheaths of human consciousness that exist around the Self. He writes that we enter the world as heart-centered beings – safe and content. At some point, we inevitably suffer a hurt, a betrayal, something that teaches us that the world is not safe and that we have to shield our hearts and protect our feelings. It is at that point, according to Douillard, that we start to employ our minds, the manomayakosha, to protect ourselves. The mind, however, can do *too* good a job at defending the fragile heart from all invaders, including ourselves. Thus, from a natural desire to create protection from hurt feelings emerges an impenetrable barrier of self-protection that cuts us off from who we really are – that shields us from our own hearts. The result, according to Douillard, is depression.

Once the mind takes over, it works hard to ensure that we don't notice we have lost access to the heart, to our true self. The mind diverts our attention with powerful emotions, outward sensations, and finally fear. We begin to build a personality based upon this protective shield – the personality we reveal to the world to protect our heart. As a result, we start responding not to our own true natures, not to the dictates of our heart, but to the whims and needs of others. As Douillard puts it, “soon we spend most of our time disconnected from our own happiness and juggling responsibilities to make everyone else happy and okay with us.”

³ Kripalu online blog.

Thinking back, the decision to leave D.C. was one of the few decisions I have made entirely from the heart and without interference from the calculating mind. It wasn't a breakthrough really; it was just a moment. I, like most everyone else, have created a personality to guard my heart. Douillard explains that the patterns set up in the mind affect our energy sheath, the pranamayakosha, where prana or life force moves. The pranamayakosha is just outside the mental sheath. Thus, when the mind, rather than the heart, has the reins, prana does not flow freely and the entire energy flow of the body is affected. Pranamayakosha is also the support system for the body sheath, or annamayakosha. In order for the body to be functioning properly, prana must be flowing freely. In other words, according to Douillard, "the effects of the initial crackdown of the mind radiate outward, gradually shutting down all the systems that support life."

Douillard writes that the only roadblocks to our healing process are our fears – the last illusion of the control of the mind. But once you confront a fear, once you are willing to do the thing you are most afraid of doing, you can move through its illusory barriers toward fearlessness and freedom. Once we are fearless and free, then we are empowered by an interactive flow between the koshas: the body, energy, mental, and bliss sheaths. Stephen Cope writes that "[i]n the entire path of yoga, there is really only one lesson . . . whenever we relinquish our craving, clinging and grasping, whenever we stop the war with reality, whenever we are totally present and undivided, we are immediately in union with our true nature." *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self*, p. 292. This is where my yoga practice comes in and

continues to teach me, as I attempt to teach others, and learn from my students as well. It has been a process of unveiling the heart.

For example, dealing with the famous yoga teacher was and continues to be a challenging learning experience. She is the most insecure person I have ever met - turning every conversation back to herself at the first available opportunity and bragging constantly about this or that celebrity or famous Buddhist teacher with whom she is close. The refrain I hear is "I don't feel good enough, look at me, love me, love me" and in that regard, my heart aches for her and it made it easier for me to cope with her being so hurtful. However, the way she deals with her own issues involves bullying and gossiping and creating a lot of animosity; she has managed to cultivate a number of enemies here in town.

So, while I wish her well, I am getting better at recognizing an unstable personality before I get sucked into another maelstrom. Heart and head are starting to inform one another, and I attribute that to my experience with Dora, but also to my own yoga practice - my effort to listen to my own heart, to stay grounded and to try not to let myself become discombobulated and swept away by every passing hurt. I am trying to follow my heart more than my head, so that my decisions will be based upon who I actually am, rather than who I am pretending to be.

I have seen the benefits of a long-term yoga practice over time, not only in myself but also in my regular students. It was through my own yoga practice, I believe, that I was able to transition from an energy draining yoga business model to one that allowed me to feel more positive, and it was through the practice of yoga that I was able to recognize that the famous yoga teacher's energy was not healthy

for me, and that I could no more accommodate her needs and desires than I could accommodate Dora's, without doing violence to myself.

As yoga teacher Tara Fraser puts it, "yoga is essentially a practice for your soul, working through the medium of your body."

Stephen Cope reminds us:

Most of us consider the physical body to be our true body and think of the subtle levels as more or less imaginary. But yogic practice holds that, in fact, these less tangible levels are just as real as the physical body, and, indeed, we cannot connect with our true selves without a full identification with all of the sheaths simultaneously. This is emphatically not to say that the body must be denied. Rather, the gross body must be experienced in its holistic connection with the energy bodies, the mental bodies, and the bliss body.

Yoga and the Quest for the True Self, p. 69.

The difference between an upper level class and a class of beginners is not just about the ability to perform the physical poses properly. An upper level class *sounds* different – you can actually hear the pulse of breath in class (sometimes it's like standing at the ocean shore) and you see that, with each exhalation, students are softening into the poses. Upper level students are finding the balance of effort and surrender in each pose, with each breath, while new students tend to focus on the physical practice – looking to see what everyone else is doing, and trying not to fall over.

It seems like the upper level students are tapping into feelings of love, compassion and joy through their regular practice and that is one of the benefits of sticking with a yoga practice. It is why I teach in sessions and encourage students to commit to a regular class. I can sense a community growing amongst the students over time – friendships forged in the studio, and a welcoming vibe and feeling of

support rather than competition on the mat. I can see students begin to deepen in their awareness, begin to make more connections, to dissolve differences between themselves and others. I certainly feel that in my teaching I am not the star of the class; it's not about me; it's about sharing the practice and allowing each student to develop his or her own understanding of it.

There may even be moments for each of us – student and teacher alike – when we feel entirely at peace, and can bathe in the one-ness of all that is. And it might be a fleeting moment, and it may return and it may not return. Hopefully, our yoga practice has prepared us to appreciate its veiled dance – now here and now gone - has prepared us to greet whatever arrives, not to cling to it, to let it go, and not to obsess over its return. Stephen Cope describes “ordinary moments of mystic union, which seem to happen when . . . we're neither grasping at experience nor resisting it; when for some reason we surrender to the way things are.” *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self*, p. 38.

Adyashanti wrote:

When you rest in quietness and your image of yourself fades, and your image of the world fades, and your ideas of others fade, what's left? A brightness, a radiant emptiness that is simply what you are.

The Sufi poet Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi wrote a poem called Two Kinds of Intelligence that I think captures the evolution of both yoga teacher and student over time. The poem is a fitting way to end this exploration of opening and running a yoga studio and becoming more of a student the longer I teach, and of balancing all of life's interesting manifestations through a regular yoga practice.

Two Kinds of Intelligence

There are two kinds of intelligence: One acquired, as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts from books and from what the teacher says, collecting information from the traditional sciences as well as from the new sciences.

With such intelligence you rise in the world. You get ranked ahead or behind others in regard to your competence in retaining information. You stroll with this intelligence in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more marks on your preserving tablets.

There is another kind of tablet, one already completed and preserved inside you. A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness in the center of the chest. This other intelligence does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid, and it doesn't move from outside to inside through the conduits of plumbing-learning.

This second knowing is a fountainhead from within you, moving out.