

Heaven on Earth Yoga

Acknowledgment

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I truly appreciate each and everyone of you very much.

Thank you for all your support.

Namaste.

Marianne Steenvoorden

Heaven on Earth Yoga

Yoga stories
his/her story does make
"history"

One of my favorite quotes:

A master in the art of living draws no sharp distinction between his work and his play, his labor and his leisure, his mind and his body, his education and his recreation. He hardly knows which is which. He simply pursues his vision of excellence through whatever he is doing and leaves others to determine whether he is working or playing. To himself he always seems to be doing both.

—Anonymous

When people share with me how they came to yoga and how they got to know me, I am amazed by the stories that I hear. They are so wonderful and sometimes unexpected. I believe that there is a Divine synchronicity happening all the time. Everything that happens and everyone we meet is no accident. It is exactly how life is supposed to be at that moment for all involved. Not everyone looks at it that way, and it is great to shine some light on that. When we become more aware, everything is perfect, even if it is not pleasant at times. I find it very interesting when people are telling me “their” stories, of how they got to meet me. I got inspired to document all your stories. Here is my own “story”, how I got interested in yoga and when it all started.

Place your self in a small town Rickenbach, Switzerland, a little town by Will in the “state” of St. Gallen. Well, to be correct, Rickenbach is in “the state” or “canton” of Thurgau, where I was living at that time.

In the seventies I was teaching jazz dance at a studio that was owned by a friend of mine, Elsbeth Erne. In fact, I was taking her classes in rhythmic dance. I loved it, but also liked jazz dance. When I asked Elsbeth if she would think about teaching jazz dance, she said, “Why don’t you teach a class in jazz dance? Oops, and so it happened. After more discussion with Elsbeth, the thought manifested. Shortly after that conversation, I was teaching 1 class, then 2 classes, and soon after that 4 classes a week. The people loved it, and so did I.

Some years passed and I felt like I wanted to take a yoga class. I wanted to do something different, and I also wanted to do something where I was not in charge. Rita Nägeli was a well respected yoga teacher in town, and when I start taking her

classes, right from the beginning it felt so good. I noticed that my dancing improved as well. I was more centered and more flexible. That was such an eye-opener for me. It is fun to dance and get a “work out”, so to speak, but the slow moving pace at yoga class came to me as a gift from heaven. I loved taking the time to be in a pose and observe the breathing, noticing how calm the mind became and the effect it had on the body and mind. Rita was a great teacher.

Forward to 1983 when I journeyed to the States. Every time I saw yoga advertised I went to a class to check it out. I met wonderful people and great teachers, but I (or my body) did not really like the yoga. I was not aware at that time that there were so many different styles of yoga. So I just kept on trying, staying here and there a little longer, but I was never totally committed to it.

I met some other teachers along the way: Louise Hay, Dr. Deepak Chopra, Wayne Dyer, Eckhart Tolle, Adyashanti, Gangaji, Ohriah Mountaindreamer, Byron Katie, Carolyn Myss, Barbara Ann Brennan, Jean Hayner, and many more. Each one in their own way brought me to the point where I am now. And I keep learning and evolving.

When Deepak Chopra had just opened his center in La Jolla, CA, in the nineties, I had to go to La Jolla for another business, so I brought his address with me. (Remember this was before I-phones or “BIP”). Deepak’s center happened to be on the same street as the Hotel where I was staying.

When I visited their facility, they showed me all around their beautiful center. It was perfectly designed according to Ayurvedic architecture and placement known as Vastu. It was a very harmonic and beautiful healing place. They offered the use of the meditation room to me while I was in town, which was wonderful. I asked If I could participate in the yoga classes as well while I was visiting there. They told me that the yoga teachers came from 2 doors down the street. So I went there to give them a visit. It was called Master Yoga at that time. They had many classes going each day. I had the pleasure of trying a few classes while I was in town. I loved the style. I loved the way my body felt and I couldn’t stop thinking about it,

even when I was back home again. Those yoga classes had made quite an impression on me, but there was no teacher around the Chicago area that was teaching this style. I liked it so much that I flew out to La Jolla 2 times after that first experience, for a weekend, just to take some yoga classes.

The last time I visited, I lingered in the store a little while. A lady who worked there started to talk to me. When we discovered that we both came from the same country, The Netherlands, we switched to our mother language. She asked if I thought about taking the teacher training. I answered, “Oh no, I am so busy with my skin care business, I wouldn’t know how to manage that.”

When I was back home again after that second weekend, I went back to my clients and did what I had been doing since 1977: facials, reflexology, Shiatsu etc. One day in the middle of a facial, the thought came up that I can do the Yoga training for myself, I don’t really need to teach it at all. It was like a lightbulb went off, sure I could do that. And so I applied for the course, was accepted and started the training. It was intensive, very long days and transforming to say the least.

When it was time to go home after the training, I did not wanted to leave. We had such a great group of people, 28 of us. I would miss them so much and I loved the way I was feeling. Would I be able to sustain that state? But all comes to an end, and I went back home.

It was hard to get back into life as I knew it. I did the best I could. I had to learn to integrate back into life after this kind of intensive training. You just do it. One of my clients asked me when I am going to teach yoga? I told her that I was not planning on that. Well, that was not the answer she expected to hear. She said, “You really have to share this with us.” She knew that a local Hospital was planning to open a fitness center close to my house. They needed a yoga teacher, so here I was in December 1998 teaching 2 classes at the Palos Community Fitness Center. It was great, 20-30 people in the class. It was a good start.

When I moved to Oak Park in 2000, I still came back to Orland Park to teach for a while. It was about a 40 min. drive each way until I found a studio in River Forest on Lake Street. On November 15, 2000 I opened “Heaven on Earth Yoga”. I started with 4 classes a week, which soon turned into 8 classes. Plus many people liked the yoga so much that they went for training themselves. It was, and still is, a great journey. We had many intensive trainings along the way with Master teacher trainers coming to the studio to teach, I loved hosting them all. It was a special time. Several of my students who went into yoga training, at some point started to teach in my studio. It helped them to get their feet wet, so to speak, and then they went on their own journey.

Now forward to 2021. I am still teaching, although things have changed a bit. From 2 studios, back to a home studio, and now since COVID 19, I am teaching only on Zoom. It has been a wonderful journey. So many wonderful people joined me on my path and are still walking with me. And, believe it or not, I am amazed by the technology. From taking some online classes, I have met new people that now join the yoga classes on Zoom. Some “old time” students, that moved away from the area, also joined again in on Zoom. So, from a physical studio address, the address has changed to “Any location in the world”. This was unthinkable several years ago. I just love it. You can connect from anywhere. Even when you are on vacation, you still can tune into the class. When you know the basics, you can accommodate and get creative with different props. Of course, the blankets we use are a great support for your body and a wise investment; however, for one time or another you can substitute a chair or cushions for the props.

Connecting to the body has always been an important part of my life. And the more I learn, the more I understand. The more I feel, the more I know.

Marianne Steenvoorden E-500 CSYT, CSYT, CPYT, CYNT. (Orland Park, IL.)



Here's a brief "story"

I've been doing yoga for over 20 years. Initially, I took some classes at a local gym, then one of the teachers had some group lessons in his home. Because of some of my physical problems--I have post-polio syndrome-- and especially earlier when I carried even more weight than now, I've always needed some special support to adapt poses to what I can do. I did find some "gentle yoga" classes and have appreciated both the physical and the more general philosophy aspects of yoga. Working with a therapist she suggested a yoga ashram, as an alternative to an intensive inpatient experience. While I never did that, I did attend some multi-day retreats.

When one of my yoga teachers moved on to go to medical school, I began a search for a new one. There was an ad in Yoga Chicago for Heaven on Earth Yoga, I called Marianne and we discussed what we could do together. This must have been in about 2003 or so--definitely when the studio was on Lake Street in River Forest (the first time). I came to class and found that the approach was exactly what I needed. Shortly after I was able to bring my partner Mel as well, and for many years we attended in whatever location Heaven on Earth took us to, including Bliss classes and even an Ayurvedic cooking event at Marianne's home. I was able to do my daily practice--mostly the "Magic 4" even when I lived in Ethiopia in 2006 and during my many travels doing work on social work, HIV and families in several African countries. When we had visitors from these countries some even came to class with the rest of us.

Yoga has been with me as I've moved twice, retired, had two marriages, cared for my husband through his illness and death, as well as various health issues of my own. All of this was enriched by the yoga experience.

Marianne is not just a teacher, she is a mentor and a real friend to us all. When she "retired" I was able to continue with another teacher but the advent of Zoom classes when the current pandemic hit us has allowed us to continue our journey back again with Marianne and our yoga community. At one point I was not coming very

regularly, and Marianne with her gentle but firm approach made it clear that I need to commit to yoga to get the benefits, since then I've tried to do some yoga every day and attend every week, at least most of the time. I try to achieve the balance yoga offers and I'm very grateful that it's now incorporated into my life every day.

Nathan Linsk (Chicago, IL.)



After my 2 daughters graduation from High School and my Mom was diagnosed with Vascular Dementia, I had the realization that I needed to find time to take care of myself. I was looking for opportunities to follow this new awareness when a friend mentioned contacting Rita Vahling for some Reiki sessions. Rita suggested I consider trying yoga and encouraged me to contact her yoga teacher, Marianne.

I was very hesitant to try yoga at first. I could not sit in a lotus position or place my foot behind my head, not then, not ever!

I was concerned about what other's would think about my lack of flexibility. Rita mentioned that Marianne was offering a beginner's yoga class at Heaven on Earth yoga in Oak Park. I got the courage to sign up, took my first class, and the rest is history. I believe my first yoga class was in 2004 at the studio on Lake Street.

Among the first things I learned was the importance of one's breath. I grew in awareness of my own body as I attended more sessions. I quickly realized that my lack of flexibility and impressive poses was of no importance to anyone else but me.

Living in the present moment was a foreign concept when I first started. This idea became valuable to me.

I still need to be reminded of this concept frequently. I continue to grow in all of these areas. The last few years I've been practicing more gratitude and meditation. What a great addition to my life.

Marianne's newsletters have been inspiring to me. The reading list opened me up to the writings of Louise Hay, Wayne Dyer, and Deepak Chopra to name a few. Reading books written by these authors offered me a different way of looking at life, different than ideas I was taught as a child, in school and in my family.

My physical challenges continue to be present but the options I have and the way I choose to address them have changed.

Although I'm not always able to attend class, I do some breathing and yoga poses almost everyday. The blankets were a great investment! Yoga and Marianne have been a huge part of my growth over the last 17 years. I will be forever grateful to yoga, Marianne, and the friendships I have made while participating in the yoga community. Meeting people of like mind in the yoga classes has been enjoyable and supportive for me.

Although yoga has made a remarkable difference in my life, I often remind myself...I'm still a work in progress!

Namaste, Jan Jawor (Westchester, IL.)




My Marianna Journey...

... began in 1994 when my first born son was a year old. My sweet mama noticed how tired I was between working a big job and taking care of a little one, no time for me. She was so supportive always, helped care for both my boys over the years, and she wanted to do something for me that I would never do for myself back then. She said a friend of hers told her about a woman that did facials from her home studio in Orland Park. I had never had one before. It was close by, highly recommended and my mom booked it for me. She was the best, I miss her.

That first facial began my journey with you, Marianna, 27 years ago.

As we got to know each other during the course of regular facials, we talked and connected on many levels, personally and professionally. We just didn't talk about skin care and Babor products, but also family, children, and the mind-body connection. You told me about a man named Deepak Chopra who I'd never heard of before, and gave me a book he wrote on Quantum Healing. This opened up a whole new world for me. I wanted to home-school my sons for world religions and spirituality, so my discussions with you during an impromptu first facial, began my journey into the world of Hinduism, Buddhist studies, as well as other global religions...and ultimately, yoga. Oh by the way, the facials were wonderful!

When you moved, we lost touch. You know, the years go by, the job becomes more demanding, the boys grow up. Then about 10 years ago, during some difficult personal times, I felt my mind and body calling for a reset. I needed to focus on me with serious emotional healing needed. Instead of doing my standard cardio, weights and gym, I don't know why but I decided to try yoga. I googled it in my area. To my surprise, I saw a familiar face next to a yoga studio named Heaven on Earth. It was you! I saw Marianna!!

I called and that was the beginning of my yoga life. I started going regularly. It was hard at first, especially the Shavasana at the beginning and end of the class. Laying still for more than one minute is pretty hard for me!! We were connected again and have been ever since! I brought my sons and other family members to class at the Orland Park studio. My athlete son introduced it to his teammates and it became part of their workout regimen. They found that the stretching and strength made a huge difference in their performance. See how many lives you have touched! And it all started with a mama-suggested facial. 

I now have a yoga space in my home and I practice daily. Yoga has centered me. It balances my busy life. Circling back to 1994 and the Deepak Chopra book you gave me, I am eating healthy foods, Ayurvedic cooking, practicing yoga, meditating, using homeopathic medicine and working on being more present. That one for me is the toughest. I am by nature a high energy, type-a personality. You have always had a way of gently reminding me to breathe and enjoy the now. I remember our walk through the arboretum fondly, talking while enjoying the beautiful nature around us. There was the Ascension church visit around Christmas time that offers a Taize service with candles, praying and singing for world peace. We had asian food together, the geometry drawing class, yoga in the park, and other events that opened my mind and creativity. You easily transitioned us to zoom

classes and we didn't skip a beat. It became even more important now to connect and eliminate the negative COVID noise which your zoom classes effectively do. So many wonderful memories!

Marianna, over the years, while you are a great yoga instructor, you have taught me so much more than just yoga poses. You changed my life. You taught me the power of the body-mind connection and I am forever grateful for your friendship, kindness and teachings. I appreciate you and hold you close to my heart.

With Love and Friendship Always,
Lynne (Orland Park, IL.)



The first time I went to Heaven-on-Earth Yoga I was practically dragged there by a friend. I had tried yoga in the past and knew it wasn't for me. I'm not terribly flexible nor am I one to sit cross legged chanting Om as I contemplate my belly button. I had already seen the yoga teacher mentioned in a novel written by a local author, Elizabeth Berg. She was described as a "tall, elegant, Dutch woman". Well, she was tall and she was elegant and she did have a charming Dutch accent, BUT no one mentioned that she was a witch! She reminded me, albeit not physically, of my sixth grade teacher, not fondly remembered as Big Bouncing Bertha. This witch called me out on my very first (and last?) day for not holding my head between my arms as though between two panes of glass. Embarrassed? You bet! I left that Tuesday morning thinking I would never return...until Friday, that is. I have no idea why I was drawn back but drawn back I was, week and week, year after year. The witch was not a witch at all nor was her criticism anything less than helpful. I now cannot live without my 2 yoga classes each week and look forward to those three hours with great anticipation. Those three hours are my favorite time of the week and the yoga teacher has become one of my favorite people. Now we are in 2021 and I started 2000, Happy anniversary to me and my body.

Carol Steinfeld (Chicago, IL.)



The year is 2015.

I had just arrived in the USA and was given Marianne's phone number by someone we both know.

My attention was caught when Marianne told me about her yoga classes.

I had taken classes before in The Netherlands and it didn't take long before I took my first class with her. I loved this type of yoga, the best I have ever experienced.

After a few years I bought my own props, so I could make this yoga a regular routine at home. I moved back to Ireland in 2019 and was very pleased with the possibility to attend classes via Zoom.

Despite the different time zones we're in and except for an occasional glitch with my internet connection, I couldn't be happier for being able to take Marianne's classes from the comfort of my own home.

Yoga has helped me in a lot of ways, I have seen physical changes such as better posture, better sleep and less headaches.

As well as that I feel that I approach life differently, with less expectation, at ease in (almost) any situation. Life is a constant learning curve, I learn something new every day.

Thank you Marianne!

Karin Erne (Ireland)



My Journey With/To Yoga

I first started doing yoga about 60 years ago with a TV program called, "Lilies, Yoga, and You". I started the class when I was pregnant with my first child, feeling I needed to keep my body healthy. There was no such thing as a "fitness center" at that time so doing it at home was the only choice and I loved that it was gentle enough to not hurt my expanding body in any way. At times I added another exercise program with a man named Jack La Lane. So that was my truly beneficial regimen for about 5 or 6 years.

When we moved closer to Chicago I was excited to find a yoga class that was being given at a YWCA in Highland Park. My husband laughed at me when I said I had to hurry and sign up before the class was filled. He was quite certain there would be no rush to join this "weird" class. He was right. There were very few people at the beginning, but enrollment increased slowly over the years.

When that teacher moved away I went back to the TV classes, until a friend opened an exercise studio and I started to do more strenuous type classes. Yoga was intermittent and in the background during these years.

Then - YAY! - a college friend, who was taking classes from Marianne in Orland Park, introduced me to her shortly before she opened Heaven On Earth Yoga in River Forest/Oak Park, about 20 years ago. I started to take her classes then, and have continued with them ever since.

I am forever grateful to my friend for bringing Marianne and her incredible classes, and being, into my life! The benefits, the healing and the learning have been, and continue to be, immeasurable! An enormous gift!

From "Lilies, Yoga and You" to Marianne, Yoga and Me! Hallelujah!

Joanne Cimbalo (Glenview, IL.)



Like so many, Yoga came into my life during a time of yearning and self-discovery. My first yoga instructor taught Hatha Yoga and in his care my body, mind and spirit thrived.... over 25 years ago!

Lots of life happened in those 25 in-between years. And the more life happened, the more my yoga practice slipped into the background. At some point along the way, I joined a gym and tried their Beginning Yoga class. I'm sure it was a very good class though I was disappointed by the speed of the postures and the quickness of the movements. It felt more like Beginner Aerobics rather than Beginner Yoga, an insight to how much the style a practice of yoga had changed as the practices became appropriated into new interests and methodologies. I didn't search for a better Yoga fit and stopped practicing altogether.

Many years later, a friend at the time often mentioned how much she loved her Yoga classes. One can learn a lot about someone, especially an instructor, through the enthusiasm of a student's description. I was all ears and asked for an introduction. The friend began to vacillate. "It's a very different kind of yoga. More like sloooow yoga." she said. Perfect!

Homebound due to Covid shut-downs, I had two of the most necessary ingredients for a successful practice readily available: interest and time. Lots of time! I reached out to Marianne and she gave me the gift of her time, enthusiasm, clear understanding and generous explaining. I was delighted!

It was such a relief to once again find myself in a style of yoga that best suited the rhythm of my body-mind and the nature of my awareness. Slow and mindful, intentional and deep. And to be able to practice virtually from home was a silver lining; not everything about the challenges of the pandemic have been negative.

Working with Marianne has made a most wonderful difference in my body; it was time. I came to Heaven On Earth Yoga like so many of us do, by way of another's enthusiasm. I stay because it is exactly what my body, mind & spirit needs. Thank you, Marianne!

Sabine Morgan (Montana)



My story begins early 1990's. My sister Barb told me about a woman who does facials in her home and thought I might like her. She gave me Marianne's name. I made an appointment and went to see her. I was hooked on facials. Being an Esthetician and Massage Therapist as well, we had a lot in common. One day she told me that she taught yoga and would I like to come. So I joined her class in her home at that time and was WOWED at how my body was feeling. I felt so loose and flexible. "I was a full, all out health club person for 30 years now and my body was in tip top shape, so I thought!!" About a year went by when Marianne suggested that I go through the Svaroopaa training and become a yoga instructor. I thought that would be great, I would give it a shot. Little did I know what journey would lie before me. Doing yoga once a week is one thing, but doing yoga poses for 10 days straight for 8 or 9 hours was totally a different experience. While I was in the best shape physically, yoga brought up a lot of emotional baggage. What I mean by that is our bodies take on our life experiences and of course at the health club while I appeared to be in good shape; what was happening is that my tail bone was so tight and that made it difficult for me to recognize where the pain in my body was coming from. I'm blaming the yoga training and Marianne for my misery. What has she done to me. I thought she was my friend. Rama, (now called Swami Nirmalananda) the founder of Svaroopaa yoga, had explained to me that while your yoga practice will open up the body, if the tailbone is so tight, the body can shut back down and create pain, emotional outbreaks, headaches, you get the idea. I reached out to Marianne and we talked in length about my experience and she helped me realize just what I was doing to my body from the health club. She told me "if I continued with yoga and gave up the health club, I would be stronger and still in shape". My mind would be open and when I needed to make decisions, they would be more accurate because my body was open.

Soooo, I continued to see her for yoga and eagerly awaited for her wisdom to pour forward as she would give us tips on why something was happening or not. At that point, I didn't want to disappoint her or myself by giving up, so I continued with my training until I finally graduated 5 years later. It was a long haul. However, I finally understood what having a fluid body was all about. And so my Yoga journey began. Marianne offered to teach at her studio "Heaven on Earth Yoga", so I could put in practice what I had learned. I also subbed for Marianne as she was traveling, this way the students didn't need to stop their practice. That all was a great start of my Yoga life as I know it now. Of course I have never gone back to the health club. I realized how much Marianne had actually helped me to understand what living a

life without pain feels like. I find solace in doing yoga daily. It is so interesting that I did not have a ping or pang of anything going on in my body, an extraordinary feeling. Yes, my tailbone does tighten up a bit because I'm still working, but I also have continued to teach yoga 3 days a week along with my own practice that keeps me in balance. No matter where my life takes me, I will always be grateful to Marianne and yoga. I owe all of this to a woman who came into my life with an amazing gift to share her knowledge with others. I am so grateful for her guidance and hints of staying truthful to myself. A heartfelt thanks to you Marianne

Blessings,
Anna Smith, CSYT, CCPYT. (East Hazel Crest, IL)



Marianne, I think of meeting you as a "grace" moment. I had practiced yoga for years. I started in 1983 at the Temple of Kriya Yoga in Logan Square where we were living. I moved to Oak Park and practiced with Mary Louise Stephanie, a Hatha Yoga teacher here, from 1987 - 2010. But I developed a herniated disc in my lower back which required no surgery thankfully but months of physical therapy to help the disc recede and stay put. During that time, I could do no movement which required forward bends at all. This therapy worked well for me. But I could not return to a 'regular' yoga practice, and I dearly missed it.

I was holding this desire to find a yoga practice that my body would like for a couple years, and then there you were in Robin's writing class. After talking with Robin and understanding what your form of yoga was like, I decided to come and try a class. Voila! It was perfect. And I have been coming ever since. The focus on the pelvic region keeps my pelvis open, relaxed and flexible which helps that disc stay in place. And I love the breathing and meditation. Heaven on Earth Yoga nourishes by body, mind and spirit. You are an excellent teacher, Marianne. Thank you for your dedication to this practice.

With love, Margaret Burk (Oak Park, IL.) Storyteller, Writer, Producer.
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In 2011, a year after my youngest daughter was born, my doctor recommended that I take a yoga and meditation class. I was tired, stressed, and not feeling well. I read an article in the Orland Park Prairie about Heaven on Earth Yoga and I decided to give it a try. I met Marianne on the first day of class and she was so warm and inviting. Immediately I became hooked. My family knows that Tuesday night is my “me time”. It is 90 minutes to slow my body down and relax from everything that is going on in the world. I am so grateful for Marianne and her yoga practice. It has been the single most thing that has improved my health and wellbeing.

Beth Colby (Orland Park, IL.)



A friend told me about Yoga classes with Marianne at Heaven on Earth Yoga so many years ago, I can't remember the exact time. I think I was in my early 60's; I'm 81 now and still a regular. Yoga classes have continued through extremely cold and icy weather, students newly joining and others moving away, through illnesses and operations (even including Marianne), the recent death of a beloved student, the inspiring presence of one student who stayed through her early 90's, the Pandemic, and multiple locations. We've moved from a storefront on Lake Street in River Forest, to two different second floor locations on Madison Street (a Yoga studio and a space over a printing business), to a dance studio on Harrison in Oak Park, and currently to our newest iteration – online through Zoom. The constant through all these changes has been Marianne and her amazing work. She has demonstrated flexibility and adaptability, creating each location as a sacred Yoga space where she brings her commitment to be of service, her amazing teaching

skills, her enthusiasm, and her passion for Yoga. Clearly, I/we would follow her anywhere!

Deep bows,

Robin Sheerer (Oak Park, IL.)

October 16, 2021



I first became aware of yoga as a preteen in the early 1960s because of my infatuation with the musical group the BEATLES. The British music invasion brought with it a new sound, fashion, and lifestyle/cultural change.

It became the hippie era in the United States and it was very counterculture and cool to talk, dress, and act differently from the mainstream. At that time the Beatles were into all things of Eastern philosophy and practice. They traveled to India and even changed their style of dress and had new musical influences etc.

As a super fan it was natural to learn about and want to copy what they were into. Their second movie Help showed that influence. That is when I started doing Yoga.

From then on, I did it intermittently throughout my life with many different teachers and styles and types of yoga with different degrees of finesse. As my life changed, so did my body, free time and energy levels. My time commitment to the practice varied.

At times I did yoga with my students, with fellow teachers, on my own, and in class settings with friends. I was not always consistent and would do it in spurts as my life priorities changed. It was different for me at different times but generally in later life I would go back to it because it brought me relief and comfort for physical pain and pleasure for general health.

I took the first level training in Svaroopo Yoga because of Abby's encouragement and seeing how sessions with her helped me to function in life in a more active and positive fashion. I wanted to know more about the practice and do the positions correctly so they would have the greatest positive impact.

It has been my pleasure to have you as an instructor at this time in my life. You are experienced and demonstrate your expertise in a patient and thoughtful manner with just the right touch of humor and delight.

Shelly Quade (DeKalb, IL)



When I move from Italy to USA back in 1998 I have just a vague knowledge of yoga and it was more the usual stereotype of strange people contorting their bodies.

My sister in law gave me for Christmas 2000 a gift certificate for a facial with Marianne. I went for the facial in January of the following year and we connected right away. As we both came from Europe, we had a kind of understanding as foreigners.

Marianne didn't introduce me to yoga that first encounter, but I saw a picture of her in the Oak Leaves- an Oak Park journal/newspaper- soon after. She was in a beautiful side stretch pose photo and the article was about her recently opened studio and I wanted to check it out. After the first class I was hooked! I have been in her classes since then and through the different studios.

Yoga has done wonders for me both physically and mentally.

I remember when I started I had very often an atrocious knee pain that with yoga practices has gone away and hasn't returned. I feel also generally pretty good.

But even more important, mentally, yoga has brought me balance in life. I used to like “drama” but not anymore. I learned to look into myself and get a (limited) grip on my thought process so not to get pull down when things don’t go exactly the expected way.

The icing on the cake.... Twenty years of great friendship with Marianne!!

Iole Cappiello (River Forest, IL.)



I can't remember the exact year but it was probably around 2005 when I met Marianne and attended my first "Bliss" yoga class. At the time, Marianne was teaching in Forest Park and I was living in Chicago.

My co-worker and I were talking about all things spiritual and I mentioned to her that I loved the word "Bliss." A few days later, my co-worker found Marianne online and in whatever she was reading, she mentioned bliss and yoga together. I had to try it.

I attended my very first class and was hooked. The experience of mySelf in that very first Shavasana was magical for me - I definitely experienced bliss - the bliss of my own Self. I knew then it was the real deal. While I attended a class or two after that, I decided that I didn't have enough time to take these classes and my "hot yoga" classes to stay in good physical shape. So....I opted for exercise over bliss. However, I couldn't stop thinking about that transformative moment in Shavasana. It was a moment in time that I will never forget.

It was about two years later when I decided that I wanted to commit to my yoga classes with Marianne. I haven't looked back. Now, it is hard to believe I have been taking classes with her for nearly 15 years.

I am beyond grateful to have met Marianne, to take her wonderful classes, to call her my friend, to share all these years with her and my "yoga community." It has definitely shaped the trajectory of my life!!

Much love all around! And, thank you Marianne!! Kris

Kris Risley, DrPH, CPCC (Ashland, OR)

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My Yoga Story:

The idea of yoga - the mind-body connection, the seeming peacefulness of it - fascinates me, but it wasn't until a friend of mine told me about Marianne's classes, in 2002 or 2003, in River Forest, that I decided to try it for myself. She assured me I didn't need to be an athlete to do the poses and enjoy the relaxation.

How right she was! And now, nearly 20 years later (and 20 years older) I still find pleasure in moving my body into the yoga positions. Marianne has facilitated this growth by incorporating the use of blankets to aid in proper positioning. In other words, age is not a hinderance to practicing yoga. It's a practice I plan on continuing the rest of my life.

Along the way, I have learned to use breathing to release tension and to maintain flexibility, despite arthritis in my knees. Marianne continually explores breathing techniques with the class to deepen understanding.

Yoga is my peaceful place.

Carole Batlivala (River Forest, IL.)



YOGA - When I first heard about yoga sometime in high school, I think it might have awakened in me an awareness of something that would be important in my life. The word seemed to resonate in me. When I was in high school my sister, who was taking yoga classes, taught me a “progressive relaxation” practice, which we know as Shavasana. I felt the effects of the practice as deeply relaxing. A few years later when I was in school at DePaul University in Chicago, a classmate handed me a flier about yoga classes that were being held in a studio not far from my dorm. I signed up, and that’s where my active yoga journey really began. In practicing yoga over the next few years, I released bodily tension that I had not been aware that I was holding. I also found my center, that I had a center. It was a profound part of the huge transformation I was going through at that time.

Soon after graduating from DePaul, I enrolled in a Hatha Yoga Teacher’s Training Program that was being taught by my teacher through the Temple of Kriya Yoga. I began to teach shortly after that. I also studied with teachers of other styles of yoga. I found it was fun and intriguing to try poses that I had never done before, but it was also exhausting and my body was often quite sore. At a particular time of intense stress in my life, my body became ill with rheumatoid arthritis. Gentle yoga helped me to recover from that original flare, but It took me a few more years and a second, longer flare to realize that I had to stop doing yoga, and teaching yoga, because the way I was practicing only increased my swelling and pain.

During those years (1980 - 1997) yoga also became the core of my spiritual path. I was initiated into Kriya Yoga, developed a meditation practice and was ordained as a swami in 1994.

After my arthritis healed I started to go to yoga classes again, but my body still hurt afterwards. I didn’t know what I was doing wrong. One day, in the Spring of 2005, a friend, from whom I was receiving private Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy sessions, told me about Marianne and Heaven on Earth Yoga. She said, “You might want to try this yoga.” I called Marianne and went to a class one Tuesday morning, and that opened up a new world of yoga for me. When Marianne sponsored teachers from Svaroopaa Yoga to teach Foundations, I took the course. When she later brought Kim Orr to Chicago for a weekend, I took the classes and was drawn to enroll in her course to become a certified teacher of Contemplative Practice Yoga

(CPY). Subsequently, I also became certified at the first level of yoga therapy with CPY. Marianne was very supportive in allowing me to teach through Heaven on Earth Yoga and to substitute for her when needed. Yoga with Marianne has been wonderful for my body, mind and spirit. I still get sore sometimes from yoga, but I now have the awareness and knowledge to adjust and modify the poses for my body. In Marianne I have found a teacher, a partner and a friend. I am so grateful for for all that I have learned from yoga and for all the wonderful friends I have met through yoga over the years.

Kathleen Lahiff CPY, CPYT (Chicago, IL.)



HOW I CAME TO “HEAVEN ON EARTH YOGA”

I became interested in yoga as a result of illness. In 1992 I began seeing a Natural Therapist, Grant Woolven, in Brisbane, Australia to help me with health challenges.

In 1993 Grant told me he had a Yoga Teachers Training Course beginning in 1994 and thought I may like to join.

I began the Teachers Training Course in February 1994 having never attended a yoga class in my life. **The very first weekend began my LOVE of yoga and a whole new life.**

In 1998, wanting to do more yoga study, I began investigating many other styles of yoga. My husband and I were visiting La Jolla, California at that time.

So it was there that I visited the Deepak Chopra Centre where I attended a yoga class. It was when I was lying in Shavasana (and aligned in Shavasana), that I experienced the gentleness and comfort of Svaroopa Yoga. I said to myself, “this is the yoga I am looking for.”

Master Yoga, where Svaroopaa yoga was taught, was just a couple of doors down the road from The Chopra Centre.

Making two trips to La Jolla in 1999, I completed the Teacher's Training and became a Svaroopaa Yoga Teacher. My students loved the yoga and many students were interested in becoming a teacher. I hosted "Foundations of Svaroopaa Yoga" and assisted Rama Berch, the founder of Master Yoga, and so the spread of Svaroopaa yoga began in Australia.

I continued my training with Master Yoga and travelled to the US twice a year. It was in 2001 during a training, "Yoga Business Skills" that I meet Marianne and heard that she had called her business "Heaven On Earth Yoga". We instantly became friends and our friendship continued to grow emailing and talking on Skype regularly.

Not only is Marianne a fabulous, inspiring yoga teacher, she is a trail blazer, beginning to teach yoga on Skype and later on Zoom. I joined her classes on Skype becoming a member of her "Heaven On Earth Yoga" family a few years ago.

Margaret Howard-Smith (Brisbane, Australia)



“Yoga is a highly evolved science. It is composed of a series of steps that begins with mastering the senses and culminates in the final reunion of the mind with supreme Consciousness.

Yoga is meeting and merging. Yoga is a concise term that expresses the vastness of the practices a seeker must perform.

Yoga is the seed, the beginning; it is also the fruit, the culmination. Yoga, when properly understood, involves the experience that lies far beyond the borders of your familiar world

Yoga is discipline, not in the sense of being crushed under a boulder that is rolling down a mountain, but of being in the presence of the Seer within.

Yoga is to know the Knower, to know the Witness, to know the One, who watches your waking state, your dream state, and your state of meditation.

To know this Knower is yoga.”

Gurumayi Chidvilasananda



We first met Marianne at a wedding reception for Kathy Miller’s daughter, Jennifer, and were enchanted by her zest for life. Soon thereafter, Nina joined the newly opened Palos Health & Fitness Center, then located on 94th Avenue in Orland Park, and discovered that Marianne was teaching yoga classes there, (each time unloading many yoga blankets from her car for her students!) Frank was having terrible low-back pain at the time, and Nina encouraged him to try a class, which he did. After the first class, his pain completely disappeared, and he became an immediate yogi. If the pain recurred, he was able to control it by doing several poses at home, which provided wonderful relief.

When Marianne left the Fitness Center and Orland Park, we followed her for classes at her studios in River Forest. Several years later, after her return to Orland Park, we continued to attend classes at her studio on 143rd St., then in the basement of her home — until the arrival of Covid-19.... Marianne then began our current Zoom classes, which we looked forward to and attended every Tuesday evening.

Within the past year, however, Frank had to have both left and right hip revision surgery, and more recently, Nina had total hip replacement surgery. As we recovered, Marianne invited us to come to the beginning of class for Shavasana and

Meditation, which we found extremely helpful: peaceful, calming and keeping us focused in the present moment.

We are now able, once again, to attend the entire class, which is continuing to help in our full recovery, improving our balance and flexibility, and enhancing our mindfulness, openness and spirituality. The classes and poses are varied, and new approaches are often introduced.

For all of this, and for your encouragement and support, we are profoundly grateful, Marianne, and we thank you for enabling and sharing our wonderful yoga journey!

Frank and Nina Thorp. (Palos Park, IL.



Eric's Yoga Story

After a harrowing car crash I went to see my chiropractor for treatment. When she was finishing up she said “ you need something more done but I can't give it to you.” So she consulted her list of resources and while using a muscle-testing technique landed on the name Marianne Steenvoorden. She said “ you need to see her for treatment most likely reflexology.” That was over 25 years ago and was the beginning of not only a close and special friendship with Marianne but a new phase of spiritual and personal growth for me of which yoga was a big, big part.

I was very fortunate to start learning and practicing yoga with Marianne at the beginning of her teaching career in her beautiful River Forest studio. At first, I remember being a bit skeptical, cynical and frustrated with some of the poses and practice philosophies and had to wrestle my ego for quite a while before I could

immerse myself into it more fully. Nevertheless, I stuck with it and attended class once a week and did home practice five days a week. Over time the changes that occurred were undeniable.

At the time I was working in Chicago at a marketing firm in a high pressure job and playing pick up football every Sunday morning six months out of the year. After a couple months of having started yoga I began to feel a significant transformation in my body. To describe it in detail is almost impossible but what I experienced was a deep and sustained kind of peace and harmony that would resonate within me and last throughout the day. There was also a type of physical buoyancy that occurred that I could feel in my walking and daily movement. Mentally and emotionally, stress and decision-making, were met with greater inspiration and confidence – less stuffiness more clarity.

Finally, I noticed while playing football that I ran and cut with more ease, didn't get as tired throughout a game and recovered far more quickly from post game soreness than before. Actually, sometimes there was barely any soreness. For those of you who have ever played you know how rare that is. Through yoga I was releasing tightness and tension and gaining flexibility and endurance which maximized my physical ability.

I have often said to friends and strangers alike that yoga is the most beneficial thing I have ever done for my body and overall well-being. To this day it still is.

Thank you, Marianne, for being such an exceptional teacher and friend.

With gratitude and love,

Eric Boyajian (Palos Heights, IL.)



My Yoga Journey

I have been practicing yoga with Marianne for over 15 years! My journey began several years after my back surgery. My surgery was successful and after a year I was able to regain most of my activities. In an effort to avoid tightness and pain that would periodically occur post surgery, I decided to look into yoga. A friend of mine said her esthetician, Marianne, had started holding yoga classes. I contacted Marianne, and as they say, the rest is history. Early on Marianne's "Yoga for your back poses" were powerful. I learned the true meaning of the mind body experience. Marianne taught me how to breathe into the tightness in the body. This was life changing. In the past when I felt tightness in a specific area of the body I would avoid that area. This resistance created tightness. I had no idea until I attended Marianne's classes how to breathe, how to feel the breath in the body, and how to take this practice outside of classes into everyday life.

Marianne's classes include 'lengthening' poses through breath and movement. In class we also learn different types of breathing techniques. We start and end each class with Shavasana, a relaxation pose. Marianne's 90 minute class is a non negotiable in my weekly schedule. I try to do 2 classes weekly when possible. The class has helped me focus and sleep better. It has provided me with a tool kit of poses to do on my own especially when my body is tight and/or my mind is overactive and stressed.

My yoga journey extends beyond the classes. Marianne has had book groups, retreats, and interactive cooking classes. I am very blessed to have met Marianne and benefit from her passion for yoga and life.

Moira Daley (Orland Park,IL.)



Margaret's Yoga Story

Almost 11 years ago, I suffered a most tragic loss. My 33 year old daughter, Beth, passed on very suddenly. I was devastated, and truly didn't know if I would, could, or even wanted to survive this. The fact that my husband and I were the legal custodians of Beth's only child, 14 year old Kitra, was really the only reason I even got out of bed.

Human beings are amazingly resilient. I instinctively began to realize my survival would never happen alone. I was going to need help, and lots of it. I had practiced yoga for over 20 years, and found it along with breathing and meditation to be very helpful. After some months, on one of my daily walks I noticed Heaven on Earth Yoga. I lived a few blocks away, and taught for over 20 years at Park School across from the studio. My instincts kicked in, and I felt this was a place I should explore. As I said, I had practiced yoga at lots of great studios with wonderful instructors, but Heaven on Earth, Anna, and especially Marianne were different. I began attending classes several times a week.

God has blessed me with a strong faith, a beautiful family, and many loving, supportive friends. Practicing with Marianne helped me to see beyond my pain and recognize these things again. Very slowly and with many setbacks, I began to incorporate my loss into my life, and establish a new relationship with Beth. Almost 11 years later, I feel I am a more loving, aware, and compassionate person and Marianne's talents and passion has helped in no small measure to get there. We don't have a choice of many things that happen in our lives. We do, however, have a choice in how we deal with them. I am grateful I choose Heaven on Earth and Marianne. God Bless You!

Margaret Gallagher (Palos Park, IL.)



The Reluctant Searcher

My path in movement has always been seeking the dopamine and endorphin release through rigorous cardio movement consisting of running, Jazzercise, step classes, aerobics, tennis.....well, you get the picture. I still love all of those methods of moving toward 'flow'. This idea coined by University of Chicago psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who described this as the "concept of the mental frame of mind known as flow, or a state of happiness when a person is performing at optimum level." (Chicago Tribune 202) I could not imagine that happening in yoga.

Truth be told, I had tried 'yoga' various times in life, primarily through vacation resort experiences where I would stumble across the spa menu offering classes, one of which would inevitably be 'yoga'. Sadly, I took those experiences as the measurement of how my mind and body could not enjoy 'flow' as I contorted my body in unimaginable configurations, mentally saying in my mind, "just hold it, what will it look like when you can't do it,". You get the picture, yoga by the ocean is great but it became a competition for me to not be judged by others.

Marianne and I had known each for many years. Since my now adult children were babies. We connected through her skill and expertise as an Esthetician and massage therapist. I never felt more glowing or integrated than after her sessions. She offered more than just beautification. She provided a respite from my busy mind and life. One could say she was providing mindfulness. And yet, when my good friend Moira suggested I try the contemplative yoga classes, I would brush aside these suggestions with "It's not for me", "The time is not right", "How can I engage in my rigorous cardio and take the time for yoga". Hmmm...as Marianne often reminds us, "When the student is ready the teacher will appear." So true.

I'm not sure of the 'moment' when I acquiesced to Moira's urging and joined her in my first yoga class in Orland at the studio on 143rd street. I only knew I was there, seeking my place (in the back) and opening myself to the first glimpse of 'flow' through mindfulness and contemplation. I was a blanket folder disaster. I often looked at Kris to emulate her blanket folding. But that did not dissuade me from coming back. I think of the many personalities who blended as the yoga experience

unfolded until it felt as if we had become one. I felt loved in the gentle adjustments and unconditional suggestions to “move your heels just a little more out” and felt the ‘aha’ of that movement.

And so, thirteen or so years later, I continue to commit myself to the ‘flow’ of yoga with my teacher and other souls who journey together. As my body changes, my yoga becomes ever so much more important for my physical self. But it is not about the body. For me, it has become a rare moment in my world of integration of body, mind and spirit.

Namaste,

Chris Nolan - Dado (Orland Park, IL)



Here is my story:

In early 2021, I decided to place an emphasis on self care to better both my mental and physical health. My Aunt Chris invited me to try a Heaven on Earth Yoga class with her while I was staying at her home over Memorial Day weekend. I remember being hesitant at first because I wasn't sure what to expect. That worry continued for the first few minutes of class, but then my nerves settled some time during the opening Shavasana. By the end of class, I remember thinking, "Hey, I'm going to try this again." Marianne was so incredibly welcoming and she had made me feel comfy and confident in my ability to successfully follow along.

Yoga balances out the parts of my life that are fast moving and busy. My day-to-day very much revolves around "What's next?!" Yoga healthily interrupts that cycle. Each session provides a dedicated block of time for me to wind down and be

deliberate about what I am doing and how I am doing it. After class, my body feels much more open and ready to take on the day.

Alyssa Nolan, (Bartlett, IL.)



I met Marianne in 2005 when she hosted a Bliss Weekend at Dominican University. Rama Birch, the founder of Svaroopa® Yoga was the teacher (she is now known as Swamiji). Over ninety students, including local teachers, attended.

The Midwest teachers brought all their blankets, props and students to the event. My teacher, Jennifer Sebastian, was also there. At the end of the weekend, I knew Svaroopa® Yoga was life changing. I recall being extremely calm and feeling wonderful after two full days of Bliss Classes. I wanted more.

In 2007, I took the Svaroopa® Foundations course when it was offered in Antioch, IL. I had no intention of teaching but I was taking 5 yoga classes a week in DeKalb and it was getting expensive! I decided to take the course, start a daily home practice and attend 2 yoga classes a week.

In 2008, the Foundations course was offered in DeKalb so I took it again! I had no intention of becoming a teacher when I signed up. By the end of the training, I realized it would be healthy for me to retire when I became eligible in two years. I decided that I would become a yoga teacher and a yoga therapist. I wanted to share what I was experiencing with others.

The next month, I started attending the Midwest teacher support group and became a substitute teacher for Jennifer. Marianne was a leader, a mentor, in the Midwest Teachers Support Group. She often hosted the meetings at her River Forest studio.

I attended one of her classes. I would drive 60 miles one way to attend a Saturday morning or Sunday Bliss Class. Her Sunday Bliss Classes were marvelous. Occasionally I brought along a friend to share the wonderful experience.

In 2010 and 2011 Marianne and I attended Yoga Teacher Training in PA. I felt blessed to be Marianne's roommate for 9 nights! Marianne was retaking these trainings even though she had successfully completed them years before! Over the next decade we attended many trainings and conferences together.

Last year, I read Marianne's newsletter and learned she was teaching online. I was delighted as I moved to Colorado. Taking the online yoga classes with Marianne has been a blessing. When I hear her sweet voice in Shavasana I dive deeply into myself.

Since meeting Marianne in 2005, my life has taken a better course. The therapeutic style of yoga she teaches, and the information she shares, has enriched my life both mentally and physically.

Abby Chemers CSYT, CPYT. (Fort Collins CO.)



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