

# Yoga Saved My Life

As a new mother I was desperately unhappy. Post-natal depression would have described my fragile condition, but I don't know as I ever heard that expression in the late 60's.

I don't know whom I would have talked to then about my anxiety, irritability and crying bouts. Not my mother who was deceased, not my older sister who was struggling with her kids, and not my younger sister who was in a big learning curve with her first-born. I was ashamed of feeling so bad and, at the same time, I felt I had to be responsible and keep up appearances. Jeff worked long hours and when we were together we argued frequently. I felt utterly alone

Then there was Mary Lou Mullins, a perfect mother, a perfect homemaker. She was married to Jeff's boss, so we saw a lot of each other socially. Mary Lou was as inviting as a brown loaf steaming-hot out of the oven. Good-humoured and accepting, I trusted her completely and wanted to be her. Being Mary Lou would have surely fixed my brokenness.

She was a little plump, like me, the residual adipose of recent pregnancies. Mary Lou came up with the idea we could lose some weight and learn to relax by participating a 10-week yoga course at the local YMCA.

It says a whole lot about my relationship with Mary Lou that I would try on something called yoga even though I knew absolutely nothing about it. If I had investigated what yoga was about at this time, I might have found references to the Beatles and Mahreesh Mahesh Yogi, Ram Dass and psychedelic drugs, and TV programming with women in lycra leotards and boufy hairstyles.

Mary Lou picked me up in their family car, a two-door station wagon, and off we set to Phoenixville, Pa., on what felt like a big adventure. Arriving at the YMCA hall, Mary Lou and I took up cross-leg seated positions on rather grimy gym mats. I sneaked a peak at the 15 or so other students, not a man in sight.

Seated in front of us was a slim, lively, yet calm mid-sixties woman. Dorothy Tomarelli introduced herself by way of telling us that her husband had died a few years previously. As a result of the grief, Dorothy had gone into a rapid emotional and physical decline. Her muscles gradually began to atrophy and she lost her strength. Her doctor, seeing her depressed state, advised her to take up yoga. Dorothy decided that she had nothing to lose except her misery and searched for a class. It turned out to be so much of a lifesaver that she decided to learn to teach yoga.

As I listened to Dorothy, something stirred in me.

Both my parents had died relatively early deaths – my dad dead at 43, my mother at 53. They had ruined their health and destroyed any chance at long life with addictions and illnesses.

I saw a glimmer of hope in Dorothy's story- the faint possibility that health, happiness and maybe even longevity could be mine.

That first yoga class was so much fun! Dorothy did something that as a yoga teacher now I would never do with a raw beginner; she encouraged us to stand on our heads. Up I went. I stayed up with perfect balance.

The tumbling child and teen-age gymnast in me came alive, and, if the truth be told, the show-off, too.

I discovered yoga was something I might shine at. At 27, I never imagined it could help make me whole.