

I came to my yoga mat in January of this year by way of a dear friend who knew that she needed me to bring me to the mat. As I look back on it, the Sacred Ones (as Ana calls them) were speaking through her. My individual yoga instructor who studied with Ana told me that I must read her book "Fierce Medicine". I knew nothing about Ana Forrest and Forrest yoga. He told me that while her story is more 'fierce' than mine, there were many parallels which he knew would touch me. There were many beauty moments that happened for me while reading Fierce Medicine and a lot of 'emotional pus balls' were brought into the light. When I heard that Ana was holding a Master Class in Boston, I knew with all my heart I was meant to be there.

I went into the class with an open heart having no idea what to expect. As we came into the practice with a stunning meditation by Ana, and as we began the beginning pranyama exercise with breathing in through one nostril, holding and breathing out through the other, I could initially feel my breath flow. Suddenly I found myself in what I call 'trauma mode'. My breath was not making its way all the way up and through and every part of my being was tense and shaking. I realize that Ana's healing spirit, the heat and energy in the room and my strong desire to heal brought this out in me just like the Native American healing ceremonies in the sweat lodge. I feel so blessed and grateful that the little girl and adolescent who was tormented and terrified within me was able to make herself known in the sacred space that Ana created.

Ana's amazing intuitive assistants worked with me. We put our names and injuries we are working with on the front of our mats. I found the courage to share the truth of my injuries both physical and emotional which helped to guide the assistants in how they assisted me. Three words: post polio, cervical spine and trauma. One of the assistants, Cat, could see my body speaking and came over to help release the bound energy through touch and breathing with me. I did not have a flashback or any image associated with the tremors or with the caught breath. I simply allowed my body to speak. I allowed it to experience the healing. The image that comes to my mind is of my labor and delivery nurse when I gave birth to twins. Cat was helping me through this process of rebirth. I began to find my breath and my rhythm in the practice. Another assistant Sarah, called me by name and asked for my permission to move my leg and help to realign me in the pose. Once she knew that it was okay to touch me, she laid her hands on my head and told me to relax my breath and just let it flow. After class I thanked her for her assist and she told me she could just feel the frenetic energy coming from my nervous system through my head as she placed her hands on my head when I took a breath. But she noticed as did I how I calmed after she laid her hands on either side of my head. She told me that in my daily breath work I can place one hand on my heart and one on my head and breathe taking a 5 count inhale and a 5 count exhale. She said this will help to reset the neurological connections that had been activated by the trauma and create new pathways while gently building the strength of the diaphragm muscles.

The combination of the hands on assists, the poses that we held for what seemed like forever and Ana's guidance created for me extraordinary moments on the mat. She offered poses for beginners and her more advanced students. I felt nourished, loved and supported throughout the practice while there was an attitude of no bullshit allowed in here. I felt myself transform from my trauma

self into a strong warrior with open heart and flowing breath. While my legs have lightly trembled in other yoga classes, I have never experienced a full on trembling shaking of my legs and ironically enough it felt incredibly empowering. Ana's loving humor and cutting through the crap observations left me no choice but to bring myself right to the edge and a step beyond my physical capabilities. It was a trembling of strength rather than fear and cowering. It was a trembling of energy surging through me. During the practice I made what Ana calls a commitment to be fully present and to not allow distractions to take us away from the work. However I showed up during each moment of the practice, that's where I worked and it was a magnificent experience.

During the practice Ana had us periodically check in with our spirit. How did spirit feel? Was there a color associated with it? I could feel spirit like Tinkerbell going through my body tracking and chasing out trauma. During the practice I observed where spirit was blocked without judgment. I have never in my life poured sweat as I did in that 100 degree room with 100 fellow yogis and yoginis. It felt so natural and wonderful to have everything pour out of me.

During the book signing I shared my story with Ana and how her work has had such a profound effect on my journey. To look into her eyes and feel a spirit of love and compassion is a beauty moment which leaves an indelible imprint on my heart and soul. She told me to allow spirit to go to the places that need healing. She said often we keep the two separate (spirit and the places injured by trauma) but we can invite spirit to come heal. In my book Ana wrote, "Dear Mary, Breathe your exquisite spirit into every cell. Daily. Walk in Beauty, Ana T Forrest". Aho Amen