

## AMBER SHUMAKE: Warrior Crying Buckets

During my Foundation teacher training, at one of the first morning meditations, Ana said, “If you’re one of those people who has been holding it together all the time, you’re going to need to cry buckets and buckets.” During that morning’s intensive, I would cry a prophetic bucket, and throughout the rest of my training, I worked up the courage for my second bucket.

On one of the first days of training, during the energy work, I was lying in Pigeon, and one of my fellow trainees said, “I can’t stop staring at your feet, even though they’re not really active or anything.” I listened rather objectively as she continued with her perceptions until she said, “Amber, the word that keeps coming to mind is,” she paused and I held my breath waiting for her to continue, “Soften...you’re so strong.” I think we had known each other something like 3 hours, and in that moment we became closer than people I’ve known for almost 30 years.

The conversations we had during teacher training do not remotely resemble the superficial banter that, as Ana says, lubricates our society. We shared our passions and fears and hopes and dreams; we wiped away sweat and tears and even snot and other people’s hair. Yet, we knew very little about what others did for a living or even each other’s last names.

Ana spoke at some point during training about how addicts progressively need more and more to get the same high. How as an alcoholic, bulimic, and druggy, she got to the point where she had to jump off cliffs and drive fast down mountains just to feel. How now – having walked in spirit – she needs very little to feel high. “Many of you have mastered the art of numbness,” she said. “Mastery is good,” she paused before the punch line, “Now it’s time to move on to something different. I knew she was speaking to me.

During one of the final morning meditations, the intent was

embodying spirit. As I sat there, I felt my feet start to buzz. I touched them to see if they were asleep, but they were not. They felt like feet. Except on the inside, I felt like someone was playing maracas. Instead of moving, I breathed deeply, in an attempt to get my breath to my feet. I wanted nothing more than to feel that sensation in my abdomen, my chest – somewhere more visceral than my feet.

“Let me tell you something that was helpful to me this morning,” Ana said. She and her team of assistants always take the class she has prepared before the morning meditation, which means they are basically nocturnal creatures. “Don’t try to force your spirit to another place in your body.” This woman has always been able to read my mind.

I breathed for a while longer, until I transferred the sensation up into my calves. By the time that the intensive began, I was so excited to do yoga with my spirit in my feet that I could hardly contain myself. By the second pose though, I was crying because my right knee hurt so badly.

Inez, one of Ana’s assistants, came over to me during abs with the mat that I was talking myself through while I chewed on my jaw.

“Taking your abs seriously today?” she raised an eyebrow.

I unclenched my jaw and changed the inflection in my voice, “I’m just worried about my knees,” I said before I could filter myself. I have never been one to complain about pain and definitely not to people other than my closest family.

She grazed her hand across the back of my knee. “Your hamstrings feel angry,” she said.

“I think maybe it is my hamstrings and not my knee,” I choked out as I curled my tailbone up and pulled my belly down for the final round.

She coached me to move my feet in a number of ways inquiring whether any of her directions relieved the pain, ordering me to keep a bend in my knees and eventually I did find some respite.

Throughout the class, I continued flexing muscles in my legs and activating feet, trying to take the strain off of my hamstrings, listening as Ana said, “Hamstring injured people,” and “Knee injured people.” Sinhee, another assistant, came over and instructed me on how to turn on the tendons underneath my knee in Warrior, which caused my inner thighs to burn fiercely, but relieved the searing pain.

At some point when it was time to come into Pigeon, I just sat on my mat befuddled. I had never *not* been able to do a pose. The assistants likened my work ethic to that of Jesus Christ himself. Doing anything less had always felt like failure. That was how I lived my life, too. On that morning, however, I simply could not figure out how to work Pigeon in a way that didn’t cause searing pain to shoot through my legs.

“Amber, what’s going on?” Ana said from across the room.

I immediately tried to muscle my way into the pose. I am not a quitter.

“Wait,” she ordered.

“I can’t figure out a way to do it,” I said.

“Your knees,” she said and walked over to my mat. She placed her hand on my back and instructed me to breathe because I was not. She turned her microphone off and said, “Let me get them into the next pose.”

Carefully, as I watched everyone else move toward Queen Pigeon with a strap – one of my ultimate favorite poses – she said, “When does it *not* hurt?” and “Can you do *x*?” and “What if you backed off and did

y?"

Finally, I found myself in some semblance of Pigeon with one hip propped up on a block and a blanket under my knee.

"Breathe here," she said placing her hand where my collarbones meet, empathically brushing her palm across the collarbone I broke skiing as a teenager.

I breathed my deepest snottiest breath.

"Hmph," she said unsatisfied, "Again, push me away."

I breathed an even deeper snottier breath and pondered whether I put on deodorant this morning.

"Better," she moved her hand to the middle of my spine. "Breathe here," she said, "Get some of that numbness out."

I sobbed. No longer in pain, but in feeling softened.

"Cry as many of those tears as you can," she said.

And I did.

At the end of class, a number of people asked me how I was, invited me to go jump in the ocean, have lunch, etc. I felt my old shielding come up, the one where I lie about how I am – and often, who I am – to make others feel more comfortable.

"I'm just really moved to tears," I said. "It's pretty intense."

Sinhee came over to me and hugged me in a way that I had rarely hugged. "Amber, make sure you work Warrior pose that way."

“I know,” I said, “I need to work it that way from now on,” as I watched another tear stream down my face.

“You are so beautiful,” she said and I could tell she meant it because people here don’t give empty compliments. “It’s a pleasure to watch you practice.”

I smiled and thanked her and I meant it.

As I was rolling up my mat, an older gentleman who had taken several intensives said, “You are a warrior.”

Except, I heard, “You are a worrier.”

I shook my head ambivalently, not wanting think of myself as a worrier.

“It’s such a pleasure to be here,” he said. “I’m not sure how you do it.”

At that point, I realized he had said ‘warrior’ not ‘worrier,’ and I shed another tear in the metaphorical bucket because he was right. I am a warrior. A softened one. Who cries. Buckets and buckets.