

My Evolution Through Forrest Yoga

By: PATRICIA MASSARI (patricia_massari@hotmail.com)

My life started in my late 30's. At 45, I finally feel free and good within my own skin. My life has purpose, joy and power.

The journey from despair to joy started when I was 10. That's when I discovered how to torment myself with self-mutilating thoughts, worry and fear. Depression and worry seemed ever present in my very compassionate and sweet, yet overprotective, brooding Italian father. Whether it was genetics or modeling, I too soon began to worry and feel as if I could not control my frightening and demeaning thoughts. From age 10 through 22 I stuffed feelings, shopped and worked on pleasing others...Put bluntly: I basically didn't know what the fuck to do or if there was even really a problem.

After I abruptly quit law school at age 22 and verbalized my deep grief for the first time, I began to try to heal. For the last 20 years I have tried medications, talk therapy, and read countless books in the effort to shake thoughts and actions that kept me sad and feeling small. Yet with all the self-analysis and wisdom read, I still spun in an all-too-familiar spiral of self-loathing and fear of the world around me. I was terrified of my choices, and of never being adequate, let alone vibrant!

One thing that did always "work" for my bleak moods and shitty thought patterns (at least temporarily) was physical activity and movement. From age 18 to this day, I performance train, bike, swim, walk...moving took (and still takes) me to a clearer place in my head and brings me into my body. For many years, I would tell people I felt like "just a big head". I was so cut off from my body and feelings (feelings were for denying, undermining and rationalizing) that I could not seem to connect to my joy and power, or manifest my dreams in any meaningful or lasting way.

Twelve years ago, I started practicing yoga. After 2-3 years of other styles of yoga, my teacher, Forrest Yoga Guardian Cheryl Deer, stopped teaching the Ashtanga class I was devoted to and began teaching a Power yoga class. She had just trained with Ana and was beginning to radically transform and speak her truth.

I remember going to class and getting pissed off! What? Not starting class with suns? The first 20-30 minutes on the floor! I was livid and so fearful of change and bound with anger that I stopped going to her class for at least a few months.

In time, I went back and began to see the wisdom of it, but was still not completely convinced. Eventually, after a couple years of pretty consistent lower back pain and a pulled hamstring attachment from practicing Ashtanga, I did more and more Forrest Yoga. I finally felt the intelligence and depth of the system and could not get enough of the practice. For someone with a closed chest and a heart full of grief, combined with tight hips from athletics, this practice offered me a safety and depth that no other practice did.

Being warm and open enough in the chest, shoulders and hip flexors to get into a deep backbend was something I had not experienced going into backbends in other practices. It wasn't about me and my tight, grieving body being defective!! There was a way to move with the breath, with intelligent sequencing, with adequate time in poses and with the intention of moving deeply into the intensity versus running away from it...there was a way to approach poses that were difficult for me (and the old holding patterns and attitudes they largely represented in my body) in a way that was meaningful and healing; both plenty tough, yet compassionate.

As my resonance with Ana's system grew, my healing accelerated. The depression largely lifted. I moved to Denver and got a job I liked, but swamps of fear still resided in me.

It finally became necessary for my progress and to honor my Spirit to take the Forrest Yoga Foundation Teacher Training. I did the FYFTT in Chicago in 2010. What a ride! It definitely pushed me to my limits. My "racket" was not bought or accepted by Ana (or Steve or Talya). I needed the FYFTT on a profound and intimate level – more than I knew or even understood at the time. It resulted in life-long friendships and was one of the most transformational experiences I have ever had.

I didn't quite realize how altered I was when I rolled out of Chicago after training. The changes, the power, the delight, hearing the voice of my Spirit and honoring it more...this is daily wonder for me. Of course fears and lousy victimizing thoughts still come around, but now I am much more adept at sitting with them instead of pushing them away. Still much work to be done, but now I am evolving through regular practice at yoga, and truth speaking with myself and others.

It was an incredible privilege to witness for almost a month, 10 hours a day, every day, the degree to which Ana is present in the moment. She is accurate and intuitive about what she witnesses in your energy (and thankful for her students, more than willing to share her opinion on how to optimize your energy to heal and evolve!) Listening to her no-bullshit truths and formulas for healing changes you whether you like or not. I not only liked but loved it...finally someone speaking the truth and demanding the same from me. Truth-speaking has become a necessity and a soul pledge.

I will complete my RN degree in December. In the clinicals I have witnessed (especially in Psychiatric nursing), the limits and shortcomings of current conventional "Western" therapy. Prior to nursing, for 10 years I worked with kids with autism and learning challenges. When I threw in a handstand or a crow every now and again, I consistently got them to work harder, focus better, and elicited some joy in these students.

An essential part of my Spirit walk that brings me great joy is teaching Forrest yoga to those who want to learn, heal, and move head on into what holds them back from manifesting the fruits of their individual, essential Spirits. My future intent is to explore and help Ana continue to pioneer non-medication based healing for "mental" and "somatic" illnesses through guiding people into the depths of the pain and/or fear they are holding and showing them with breath, pose and attitude how to let these holding patterns go.

Other Spirit pledges that are evolving through my Forrest Yoga practice are: activism for justice and fairness for the disenfranchised/marginalized; helping educate others about the cruelty of factory farming and other injustices done every minute of every day to the four-legged (and thoroughly sentient) people. Often this means taking a hands-on approach to helping those who desire to establish plant-based diets by cooking for them and teaching them the tools necessary to make the change in a balanced and healthy way. I now allow myself to envision the dream of weaving the various paths of my Spirit walk through the creation of a therapeutic farm. My vision includes Forrest yoga, rescued farm animals and sustainable farming. Those struggling with addictions, mental illness, autism, and trauma could come and practice Forrest yoga, and care for the animals and plants under the open sky. They would find healing through observing the natural Beauty and being washed by the paradox of simplicity/ complexity of how the cycles of Nature ultimately mirror our own natures.

This much vitality, life energy and desire to serve is something the last incarnation of myself could have never imagined. Every day I am thankful, energized and productive like never before. I am ever thankful to Ana for transforming her hurts, pain, addiction and abuse into a practice of such beauty, healing and into the shining example of her magnificent life and to Cheryl for teaching with such love, compassion, humor and wisdom.

Let my journey amongst the Forrest tribe and the authentic walk of my Spirit continue!
AHO!