

Interview mit Ana T. Forrest am 24. Mai 2012 in Berlin

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1. Fierce medicine is your first book. One can feel how much energy and spirit you have put into it by its complexity – this strong personal note from an incredibly painful childhood, the motivating exercises that helped you to heal. Are your batteries empty now or are you already thinking about a new book project?

Something like this book needs an inner call. I can tell you out of experience that you know when it arrives. Certainly it was also of importance that everyone kept asking me when I'm going to write down what I teach in my workshops. Honestly, it wouldn't have been any problem at all to publish a book about my work myself. People know me. I have a name in the scene. I've been teaching for forty years now. It wouldn't have been hard to find readers. But I wanted more. The book should touch people beyond the reach of my work. So for the sake of the best logistics for such a project, I gave it to a big publishing house – Harper One in New York. That way I could be sure that it won't stay in the yoga scene. In the bookshops it really wasn't in the yoga corner. Many booksellers had taken it on the general list. It is about – and I want to emphasize that – my experience and offerings (I don't to call them messages as that sounds religious) can reach as many people as possible. Because I can see through the diversity of my students and in my surroundings outside of the yoga world, that all of us –and I'm not excluding myself- suffer from the same things that are so easy to heal. That's the reason for this first book. I haven't yet felt an inner call for the next one.

2. In German we have a saying that as an author you „lets your pants down“, you make yourself naked. It wasn't until I read your book that I found out about your very personal history which is at some points hard to handle. So the writing of this book must have been an incredibly hard process for you, right?

It was not so hard to write it down. The hard part was to distil this mass of memories and experience to a limited number of chapters, to a sensible book length. Every author works differently and I'm actually a healer and yoga teacher. I let myself flow, processed each inspiration that I received. And there must have been about four hundred. How would all this fit into a book? What do I omit and if I did is it then lost forever? Finally, it all had to be brought into a logical sequence. And so I decided to do it as the Native Americans: I laid a path. And the reader has to follow it to understand everything. How I went stalking for my fear and then faced it. How big of a challenge that was in my life. And I had to keep saying to myself – never waste a good trigger. Through all this fortunately I received support from my surroundings. My editors brought my manuscript down to eleven chapters, three hundred fifty pages. And I had such a fear while I was writing that I worked with an attorney the whole time. Thanks to him I didn't include all of the bad experiences from my childhood in the book. That's ok because on the one side I'd have to fear all sorts of legal charges, on the other because it was not about shocking or scaring people. Even if I would have sold many more copies, if the book was even more shocking and uglier. The part that is in the book about it is totally enough. It conveys to my readers that if you've had such an unfortunate start in life, you just straight *have* to make an even greater life out of it. And that's what I'm trying to show: this book is about the inner beauty and the success

of a person. It encourages you to change and acts like a guide. My students are grateful. I called this process – the „letting the pants down“ - dancing with writing.

3. Not as a question but as a fact: for someone like me, that doesn't do yoga and probably won't start...

Oh you will! You will! *I want to have you on the mat.*

...so for someone who doesn't usually buy yoga books, I practically swallowed your book.

That's because it's not a typical yoga book. It contains the tools that helped me change my life. And a really big topic in the book is fear. Everyone has fears, no matter how brave they seem. In my fear workshop we're going through a process to find out where that fear begins. We learn how to stalk that feeling. It's like a change of gears and a completely new way to use your Spirit. It's about fear tracking, getting a hold of your fear. There are hidden fears in every part of life. It's so sad that so many of us have to learn how to think in an emotional way and feel. Because we already carry all that it takes inside of us, it's a part of our intelligence that we don't use. Why? Because it sounds weak and like a failure when we decide in an emotional way. But that's totally wrong and it makes our lives harder. Emotion and intellect have to work together. We're just not using the right gear to make it work. That's why I teach in my workshops: get to know your feelings! It's brave to let yourself feel. It blocks you when you feel fear and try to hide it. That's why it's already a first step to look at yourself in the mirror each day and say "are you proud of what you're doing?". My book had to go out to the people. That was my greatest aim and the job of Harper One, or I would have done it myself. This book is the spiritual legacy of my life. It contains the treasures of my life. I want to give the tools that saved my life to others as well, because I know they work.

4. What is the difference between FY and the usual Hatha Yoga?

I created Forrest Yoga to master the challenges of the modern lifestyle. The old Gurus are dead. Their ideas don't belong in our time. They didn't address many of the deeper questions at all. It was an absolute necessity to create Forrest Yoga. And it was my duty because I received the talent and was taught by the Native Americans how to be a healer and master of therapeutic practices. It's about the process of asking yourself "What's happening with me and with our society?". Many of the daily problems in life are a consequence of abuse. And that's what I wanted to address with Forrest Yoga. It was the Native Americans who helped me dissolve the old paradigms inside of me in the first place. I didn't learn what it means to be connected with the higher self, the Spirit, until I was with them. I have been searching for it and chasing it for long years myself and today I train my students how to get in touch with their Spirit. The Spirit is not a result out of any religion. It is something you do and not something defined by parents, fear or church. If you feel fear you shouldn't ignore it, but react to it.

Forrest Yoga contains a very special form of healing that is preceded by purifying our toxic blood (changed by our eating habits, smog, nicotine). That's why there is a strong focus on breathing. If I have problems with my belly, with the right breathing technique I send fresh energy exactly there. The body intelligence is trained by doing this. The belly has to digest all that we put into it, has to put

up with all that we do to it – that’s exactly where we should be breathing to inspire the intelligence of our body.

FY works with the image of a wind horse, the breath plus intention. Here you embark on a journey in your inner world. That’s where you discover your own truth. It is the quest of a hero, because it takes you to mysterious places, makes you face dragons and other magical creatures – and all this on the yoga mat. After the journey you will be wiser. The wheel of your healing will start turning. You won’t be living behind a façade anymore. In FY all asanas have one purpose. And I place a great value on the fact that the classes are carefully sequenced and designed along a fine system. There are whole classes only for the handstand or the wheel pose. You need a long warm up process for these asanas, after which all energy channels are open. In FY I teach how to feel and start challenging your own personality. That’s what I call a true challenge. My teachers are trained to take *everyone* there. My teachers were trained by me how to be a healer. FY has many positions that are entirely new in Yoga. For example the abdominals. That’s where the digestion takes place. If the intestines, this foot long digestion tract in our body, are blocked then the whole body is blocked, stiff and that is reflected in our behavior and our impact on others. All that actually has to go out, which is literally shit, stays in and closes everything. Even after a diet you still don’t feel better, because the “pipe” is blocked. That’s why the blood is toxic as well.

Nowadays we have more food than ever at our disposal. In a similar fashion, we have an incredible amount of information permanently shooting down on us. My approach is: everyone should take whatever they need out of it. That way everyone can build up their own, internal defensive system in their own body. I have internet and TV 24 hours long at my disposal and mindlessly consume all the news while stuffing myself with similarly useless food ...stop doing things that make you dull, with which you are wasting your lifetime. FY awakens the passion for life. What are you living for? Definitely not to pay your bills. The body of your mother has done an unimaginable work to bring you into this world – and all this is wasted in such a way? What are your talents?

It’s a waste of your Spirit if you don’t use your talents.

5. Which specific yoga experience led you to changing your life?

(This question is answered by Griffin, Ana’s partner, who is in the Forrest Yoga team as well)

I learned how to love. I was married several times. I’ve put children into the world. But love? Actually for me that was just a word that I would use, but there wasn’t any emotion to it, I was lacking the own experience. And I mastered my alcohol problem.

(Ana)

My specific yoga experiences: that you can learn how to breathe, how to feel, that the pain can be suddenly gone and there is finally peace, that the pain can come back all of a sudden in a loud feeling, that I can always discover something in yoga and experience a breakthrough, that you can actually drink pure water and still taste it.

6. Can you put the spiritual experiences relating to your work into words?

Being connected to my own spirit. I can feel that connection myself while I'm teaching it: it is sometimes hard, there are moments of emptiness and dullness that are still in me from the daily routine. So I feel myself along towards being connected. For long years I've been missing the courage to go after my Spirit. How could I give to others what I didn't have myself? So I learned myself from people, who were living the experience of being connected. And so I could open up the door myself for the ones that came to me to learn.

7. In your yoga classes people have huge respect for you, almost fear. Can you feel that? How do you feel about it? How do you deal with it?

My students usually hear about me by word of mouth. Often people talk in advance about the passion with which I teach my classes. I don't allow people to bring their own techniques and asanas in so that they distract the other students— my general feeling is “don't do your own bullshit here”. Often people are simply afraid to be seen. I recognize people right away. Because I never waste my time to find out what is real about somebody and what isn't. In my classes it is safe for everyone. The students are in good hands, but they're also confronted with themselves. I give all I have and that's exactly what I expect from them. Some have the feeling that the Ana T. Forrest that they are facing is “bad”, but it's actually the fear in them that is bad. I only put some power and energy into that. In the moment of transformation – and I experience that with my students all the time – something beautiful happens. Suddenly the fear is gone, because they managed to get the pressure off of themselves. All of a sudden you can do it and you're being guided through that process. I work with fat, thin, old and young people, with wounded warriors in air force bases, with people whose limbs have been removed!

8. You call yourself Ana Tiger Forrest – where does the tiger come from?

When I was young I used to dream a lot and the animal that appeared in almost every dream was a tiger. I saw myself as an ugly, crippled child. And the tiger in my dream was the one who was protecting me in my horrible home. It became a part of me, a companion. Moreover, my first breathing teacher was a tiger. I was in an animal shelter for exotics, a wildlife rehab center for sick and wounded wild animals. Every one of these creatures was afraid of humans. Humans had tortured them and held them as a luxury in small cages until they had enough of them.

In one cage there was a huge tiger with a huge head. He was lying with his back towards me leaned against the grid. His fur was like a carpet waiting to be touched. And I did exactly that stupid thing. I petted this almost 400 pound giant. I love cats, I love wild animals. I sidled up to the cage so I could scratch underneath his chin that he would majestically turn my way. It's incredible, but he really started purring. In a body that big that's like a medium earthquake. He kept pressing into my hand, I could feel the pressure, the power, the pure pleasure that this tiger was having in that moment. And I felt him breathing. He was breathing with his entire ribcage. I started imitating that. And today that's how I teach breathing in my classes.

9. How does a regular day in the life of Ana Forrest look like?

A regular day is often a day on the road. I am not home that often, but rather touring around with my team. It can happen that we are up and practicing at 3 A.M. (it would be hypocritical to teach yoga during the day without having practiced yourself.). Classes start at 6 A.M..

If there are no workshops or classes on the plan, I get up around 8, have breakfast, do my yoga and go out to explore the location where I am currently. I look for the nature even in big cities. When I think of Cologne for example, I remember the Cologne Zoo that I enjoyed visiting. If I'm at home then I drive with my motorcycle in the mountains. Every tour is different!

Dear Ana, I thank you for that conversation!