

Several longtime members of the Friendship Yoga Community have been working this fall to establish a non-profit organization called the Maitri Yoga Education Fund. Maitri (pronounced "my-tree") is the Sanskrit word for friendship. Its purpose is to support Iyengar Yoga Education in the Iowa City/Coralville/Johnson County community and to provide access to classes, workshops, and supplies for individuals of limited financial means.

To that end we have created the Theresa Semel Memorial Scholarship. Theresa Semel was a longtime student at Friendship Yoga who passed away after a long illness in November 2003. I was honored when Theresa asked me to speak at her Memorial Service and what follows is the text of my remarks.

*Theresa was my friend, yoga student and a fervent supporter of our yoga community. I know that she badgered many of you, her friends and colleagues to try a yoga class, and maybe her inviting me to speak today is really her one last attempt to get the word across to you. In fact, I can not help but think that she would probably be delighted for me to turn the sad event around, now that I have you all here as a captive audience, close the doors and turn this a yoga class, but I will pass on that opportunity.*

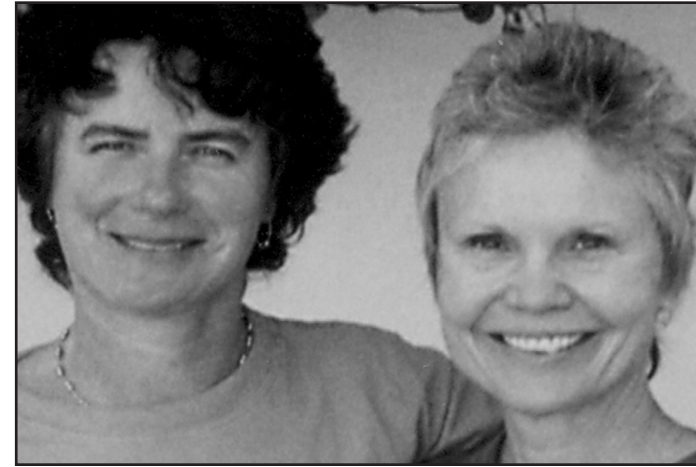
*Theresa started attending classes at Friendship Yoga approximately 6 years ago after studying on her own for many years from a book. For those of you who are unfamiliar with yoga, it's an art, a science of health, and a spiritual practice. One of Theresa's favorite poses was sirsasana or headstand. Unlike many of us, she had a natural inclination to stand on her head, and in fact, from what I hear, had been standing on her head at parties for years going back to her graduate school days. However from what she learned in class and from her own practice, her headstand was transformed from a party stunt to something far more sublime. Every yoga posture is supposed to exemplify two qualities: the sanskrit words are sthiti and sukka, steadiness and delight. Theresa always seemed to radiate those qualities.*

*B.K.S. Iyengar, one of the foremost practitioners and teachers of yoga in the world today, describes the benefits of practicing headstand in his book Light on Yoga. He writes: "regular practice of headstand develops the body, disciplines the mind,*

giving me adjustment or correction, when I am sure I am invisible in such a big crowd. There is also joking and storytelling, and by the end of the class, although I am usually completely spent, I am also amazed at how fast the time has gone. It never, ever, seems easy, but I come away feeling stronger and with a whole new sense of possibility.

Since I spend most of my time in Iowa practicing by myself, going to India gives me the opportunity to practice with others. We are expected to practice every day, but Sunday. If our class time is in the evening, then we go practice in the mornings. I had an apartment almost directly across the street from the Institute, so I could practically roll out of bed

and into the studio. I think most people feel a little self-conscious at first practicing among strangers, but once I get over that which usually takes a day or two, I am always fascinated to observe others in their practice. In August, there was a woman from Germany who was totally blind, and her practice was incredibly beautiful to watch: it was all about grace and self-assurance. There was also a woman from England with a very pronounced hump in her upper back, but she practiced with incredible determination and I was amazed to see her dropping back from tadasana into backbends. Both of the women taught me so much about where the definition of having a "handicap" can begin and end. The other wonderful thing



*and widens the horizons of the spirit. One becomes balanced and self-reliant in pain and pleasure, loss and gain, shame and fame, and defeat and victory." Theresa proved him right.*

*Not all of my students embrace the notion of going upside with Theresa's enthusiasm. I have to cajole those who feel more fearful that the perspective gained from studying the world from an inverted position will prepare them to face with courage and confidence the inevitable events in life, which turn our worlds up side down, and unhinge us from what seemed settled, secure and fixed. Theresa exemplified this in her ability to maintain grace and equanimity with the tragic onset of her illness, and throughout its course. Although at times I honestly was not sure it was the right thing for her to do, she insisted on continuing with class over the past four years and did so consistently until the beginning of this fall. She resisted any attempts I made due to her illness to modify her practice and remained a resolute and unwavering participant throughout.*

*We were all inspired by her determination, friendliness, exuberance, and compassion for others, especially in the face of her own struggle. Even as her illness progressed and her health deteriorated we were awed by the clarity and beauty of her spirit. She was a truly an inspiration to us all.*

*If you are interested in making a contribution to this fund please contact Craig Willis at the Willis Law Offices. Our Articles of Incorporation have been filed with the State of Iowa, and we are working toward securing the status necessary to guarantee the deductibility of donations.*

about practicing with other more experienced people is observing all the inventive ways which props can be used. There is a spirit of sharing and cooperation, so people would help me out if I was unfamiliar with how to use a prop, or if I needed assistance getting into some kind of set-up I was unsure of.

The camaraderie extends outside the studio as well, as friendships are formed we go out for meals together, share notes from class and go shopping together. From my three trips I now have an international mailing list, so if you ever planning a trip to Europe, Canada or elsewhere, let me know and I may be able to hook you up with an Iyengar teacher where you will be visiting.



NEWSLETTER

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"The beauty of Iyengar yoga is the revelation that there is a living architecture in each of us that only needs unveiling...the goal is to tie the mind to the body and the breath, not to an idea. His philosophy is Eastern but his vision is universalist."

Michael Richards, actor and Iyengar yoga student

Save the weekend of June 3-5, 2005 for the 7th Annual Friendship Yoga Retreat at Prairiewoods in Hiawatha, Iowa. Laurie Blakeney will be returning as our guest teacher.

## How I spent my summer vacation

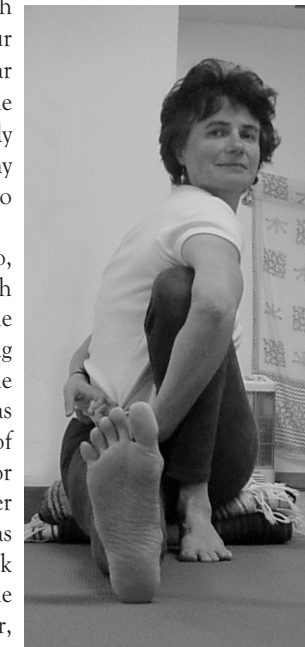
Nancy Footner DIRECTOR, FRIENDSHIP YOGA

On July 30, 2004 I flew to Bombay, India from Chicago, with a brief stopover in Frankfurt. It's a very long trip and one arrives in the middle of the night with one more leg to go, a four-hour drive to Pune where the Iyengar Institute is located. By the time I finally arrived I could barely crawl into bed, put in my earplugs, and hope to be able to sleep well into the next day.

This was my first trip solo, as I had traveled before with my teacher and friend Francie Ricks who has been making this journey regularly to Pune since the early '80s. I was familiar with the logistics of getting there, arranging for accommodations and after my two previous trips I was prepared for the culture shock that is distinctly Indian. The Iyengar Institute feels familiar, and I was pleased to find that they had made some nice improvements to expand the existing studio space.

I was assigned as before to study with Geeta Iyengar, for most of my classes, with one evening class with Praschant Iyengar. They were both in good form and although their teaching styles are different from each other, they each have such a deep understanding of yoga from a lifetime of study, and from learning from their father. I always feel very humble and shy in their presence. They are formidable individuals. Mr. Iyengar is often

in the studio practicing when the students are practicing, as well as during class time. He practices 4-5 hours a day and in his 86<sup>th</sup> year,



still works very intensely. Geeta has cut back on her teaching load and now senior teachers teach the two Womens classes, which take place on Wednesday and Friday mornings. This turned out to be a very interesting experience for me, as Mr. Iyengar, (who supposedly was practicing on the side of the room,) could not seem to restrain himself from getting involved in these classes. I was able to observe how he worked to train these teachers and directly experience his teaching myself for the first time. (He has been officially retired for at least 5 years except for special occasions, but clearly has not lost his love of teaching.) He was also working with a granddaughter, who is

about college age and now is training to be a teacher as well. She is the first grandchild to show a strong interest in carrying on a family tradition, and it was delightful to watch the two of them work together.

The classes, 75-100 students, are about 2/3 Indian, (this is their "home" studio) and 1/3 international. In August, there were surprisingly few Americans, only about 8, several Canadians, and quite a few Europeans, English, French, German and Spanish, some Polish, Africans and Japanese, and a sprinkling

of other international guests including two women from Iran, (who unfortunately I never got a chance to talk to). The classes are conducted in English, so English becomes the spoken language in conversation as well. The classes run for two hours and are very intense. You have to know the Sanskrit names of the poses. The pace is quite rapid, and one must listen carefully, not only because their accents are thick but also because they are giving such detail and nuance in their instructions and one doesn't want to miss a word. Often references to the Yoga Sutras and yoga philosophy are brought into the class. Sometimes Geeta will get impatient with students who aren't paying attention and lagging behind. She's been teaching since she was a young girl and she is about to turn 60 in December. I am always amazed at how sharp her eye is. She really sees everyone, and I am always surprised to find her

*Continued on back page*

Sandford Jaques a long-time student and occasional teacher at Friendship Yoga is currently studying in India. His visit there marks a milestone in our studio's evolution. To be accepted as a student at the Iyengar Institute, one must have studied for eight years with a certified Iyengar teacher. Sandford is the first from our community to qualify and to be accepted. He arrived on November 1st and will be attending a special weeklong workshop celebrating Geeta Iyengar's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday from December 6-13<sup>th</sup> and returning home on December 14<sup>th</sup>. He has been taking a few side trips away from the Institute including a visit to some ancient Buddhist and Hindu temple sites.

*"In our spiritual quest, it is required of us that we develop our body in such a way that it is no longer a hindrance, but becomes our friend." B.K.S. Iyengar*

“Why?” Lee asked me about my lack of composure.

I mentally formed a long response, something about Halloween, Election Day, how tired I felt, my relationship to my father and the psycho-transference of anxiety I always seem to feel toward authority figures in classroom settings, but somehow, I knew this wouldn't cut it...



## First person

by Ellen Buchanan

When asked why I practice Yoga, the first thing that comes to mind is not increased flexibility, strength, and balance, but rather being in the moment. Yoga is one of the few things I do that allows me to not think of anything else. This is especially true in attending a class—my mind can't wander, for Yoga requires one to attend to the asana that is being taught. This has been a hard lesson for me, as I'm by nature a multi-tasker, one who tends to constantly live in the future, plan ahead, and cross items off my list. However, practicing Iyengar Yoga compels me to live in the now. Yoga's "big three"—being flexible, getting stronger, and learning to balance—keep me on the path.

I've been a student of Yoga off and on for about six years. It has been frustrating, rewarding, heartening, and disheartening. As we all know, our bodies can turn on us in a blink of an eye. Most of us have (or have had) injuries, ailments, and personal issues that affect the practice. There have been days when I've said, "Enough! I'll never get my knee to bend enough to sit on my feet in *virasana*." (Due to a large staple in my knee, it just won't go there.) But then Iyengar Yoga provides props, bolsters, blankets, straps, and rolled sticky mats, and—voila!—I can get into a modified posture. I can get frustrated if I compare my body and its capabilities to others people's bodies, but



those kind of thoughts lead to a dead end. As a wise person said about practicing Yoga, "Kiss your ego and allow it to be still."

In the past I've taken the classes too seriously. Nancy steps in with a good admonition when she says, "Lighten up!" She's right. To be light both in thoughts and body aids in the various asanas. It is good to remember that B.K.S. Iyengar wrote the ultimate book for this discipline, *Light on Yoga*. There is that word again—light.

Right now I'm dealing with a fresh injury (not caused by Yoga) and so it goes. However, I feel fortunate to have dedicated teachers who teach and inspire me. One such teacher, Suzie, wrote me these words: "Life is difficult and is imbued with suffering. For me, the Yoga practice frees me moment by moment with vacillations and oscillations and undulations. The will to go on and continue is all we must pursue." So I "hang in there" and go on.

## (About) Facing the Camel Jen Dutton

It was October 31st, and day three of the workshop with Lee Sverkerson, a visiting instructor from Minnesota who had been invited to come to Friendship Yoga to lead a workshop on *Asana and The Yoga Sutras*. Midway through the class, we were directed to take *ustrasana*. The last time I was asked to do *ustrasana*, I had the convenient excuse of being several months pregnant. The time before that, I hid in the bathroom until it was over, and the time before that I tried it, but broke out in a cold sweat and ended by going into *adho mukha virasana*, a sort of a fetal position. I don't know why *ustrasana* freaks me out so much. Maybe it's the process of tipping my head back toward my toes with no place to fix my gravitationally rearranged eyeballs, or maybe it's that my shoulders want to throttle the breath right out of my neck, or maybe it's that my feet go all weird and rebellious. It's a beautiful enough looking pose, but it is named after a camel, which gets more at its essence, if you ask me.

The workshop had started out congenially enough. On day one, Lee told a couple of

Henny Youngman jokes to warm us up. He reminded me of a bear, not just because he had a kind of bear-like agility, but also because he instantly seemed warm and ferocious at the same time. He explained some complicated stuff about the Sutras and the inward quietness we should aspire to in the *asanas*. We began the standing poses with *tadasana* and he asked us what we looked for in the pose, and the strategies we used to find balance and ease. Laurie, a fellow student, had the insight to wear a striped shirt, so we were able to check out lines of direction in *utthita trikonasana* using her back as a guide. The three consecutive days of yoga had felt like kind of a daunting endeavor that first night, but on my way home, under a sky of splitting lightning and rolling thunder, I felt pretty confident. The bad guys in movies always seem to feel this confidence just before their day of reckoning.

Day two was longer and divided into two parts, beginning with a three hour morning class in which we ran through a recitation of five lines of the first chapter of the Yoga

Sutras in Sanskrit and in English and then proceeded to some more work on the *asanas*. Lee gave a concrete explanation of what the Sutras meant and described ways in which to blend them into our practice. He explained some of his studies with B.K.S. Iyengar and the affection for his teacher resonated in his voice. Spiritual discussions can make me uneasy, but Lee was honest about what he did and didn't know, and that the surrender of the external watcher to the inner self was important. He insisted on careful enunciation of the Sanskrit, which can be sort of like *asanas* for the mouth to somebody who isn't a native speaker.

The hardest part of the afternoon session of day two for me was sitting in *swastikasana* (simple cross legs pose) for an extended few minutes. Lee explained that the direction of this *asana* was inward and that this has the potential of making a person feel claustrophobic. We also worked on supported (rope) *sirsasana* and while we were upside down, Lee told us to "do absolutely nothing," but like everyone else I was getting tired. My ears itched and my



attention wandered around the room, checking out all those other upside down heads. When the time came to pull up from *sirsasana*, I accidentally dropped the slant board I was using to hold me in the ropes onto the ground and I could feel a collective wince for the studio floor. I may have been becoming more prescient, but maybe not more at ease, and let's face it, with Halloween and Election Day around the corner, inwardness and nothingness can be scary.

On Sunday morning, the final day of the workshop, Lee came out fighting, prepared for our *styana*, described in *Light on Yoga* as a "languor or lack of mental disposition for work" and one of the nine obstacles which "hinder the aspirant's practice of Yoga." Mine was so deep that I had thought about employing the old tenth

grade girl's gym class excuse, but with some reflection, I thought better of it. Backbends were around the corner and I had a feeling that *ustrasana* was coming. We started with standing poses, and it was during *ardha chandrasana* that things began to fall apart. I was standing in the front of the class, listing toward the person behind me, trying to get the balance I needed to support myself on one foot. There was a moment, then, crash, the last of my composure. It was only a matter of luck that I didn't take out the whole row. When we finally did come to *ustrasana*, I was feeling kind of jittery.

“Why?” Lee asked me about my lack of composure.

I mentally formed a long response, something about Halloween, Election Day, how tired I felt, my relationship to my father and the psycho-transference of anxiety I always seem to feel toward authority figures in classroom settings, but somehow, I knew this wouldn't cut it, and I knew it would take way too long. I didn't say, "I give up," but I did give up, not trying, but going through that long explanation of why I didn't want to try. The pose found itself for a brief instant and something kind of rose in me. Lee explained that B. K. S. Iyengar in his eighties manages his *asanas* first by strength, then by intelligence, and then by will, rotating between the three to sustain his energy. It had been an interesting three days and I'm guessing more interesting days are to come. The main thing I learned from Lee, from his discussion of the Sutras, and from taking myself and this study of Yoga seriously, was that it's easy to be OK with the world when the world is OK. The true discipline is finding that moment, that composure, inside the heart of the wayward camel. At the end of the workshop, I biked home under a sky full of sunshine.