

# Firefly



# STUDIO

et al, LLC

## *The Stretch*

*By Stacy McKenna*

I had the privilege of embarking on an intense 4-month leadership program in Manhattan earlier this year. As part of the program, I 'got to' create and commit to a contract with myself to dream big and stretch in every facet of my life. I had the opportunity to shake things up in my relationships, with my health/fitness, in my community, in my career and with my finances. 'Got to' being the operative piece here; as it has become a fresh new way to perceive my life. It is much sweeter than the "have to" and "need to" of days gone before as they have been enthusiastically replaced with "get to", "deserve to" and "choose to". Undoubtedly, this program was nothing short of grueling, and yet, it was one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life. As part of my contract, I inked a commitment to practice Bikram Yoga. Now this may not sound like a big deal for some people, but hear me out. I not only loathe the heat (Bikram studio is set at 105° F) but, my relationship with stillness is much like a 2-yr old on a sugar high, so trust me, this stretch was epic.

I walk into the studio ready to take on my first class. The smell of sweat, the insufferable heat, the mirrors and a room full of scantily clad people all made me wince. "What the hell have I gotten myself into?!", I thought to myself. Then it gets worse. Not only is the room smoking hot, but when the instructor walks in and turns on the bright lights she welcomes the "newbie's" to class and says, "Listen to your body. Just do what you can do. If you feel overwhelmed just take a break, but stay in the room. It's an accomplishment to just stay in the room." WHAAAAT?! People run out of the room? And, just as I realize I'm the furthest point from the door, I hear "Let's begin. "

Although I truly thought I was going to burst into flames halfway through the class, I somehow managed to get through the 90-minute practice. I was not only grateful for it to be over, but also because I had accomplished something that scared me. Just by walking into that studio, I looked fear straight in the eye and by the time I walked out I felt as if I had slayed 'the beast'.

*Note to Self: Do something that scares you! Get out of your comfort zone if you want your life to expand.*

Fast forward 4 weeks...I was about 30 minutes into my Bikram practice and I thought I was going to die. I was dizzy, seeing stars and the nausea was unbearable. For the first time since I committed to these classes I walked out of the room. I wanted to quit. I didn't want to ever come back to this place again; literally and figuratively. As I sat on the floor outside, questioning if I needed run to the bathroom to vomit, I realized what I needed was to simply breathe. I just needed to get grounded in my own power and breathe. I said to myself "You got this Stacy...push through it". I managed to get out of my head and reconnect to the power within myself. It was only by going inward that I was able to find the strength and courage to prevail. I took a few more deep breaths, stood up, walked back in and finished my yoga practice.

*Note to Self: Hell is only in our minds. You are powerful in whatever moment you choose to be.*

After about 6 weeks, the studio and the people started to become familiar to me. There is one woman in particular I've become fascinated with. She is a more mature woman, but has a body that can put a 20-something to shame. While that alone is pretty damn impressive, it is not what intrigues me. You see, we both arrive early for our practice; she to meditate and me to grab a spot closest to the door. (wink.) She sits in silence in the corner of the front row gazing into her own eyes in the mirror. Although it makes me uncomfortable, and sometimes even emotional, to watch her, I'm in awe of her. She sits in complete stillness, staring into her eyes, unaffected by all the distractions in the room. How does she do this? I'm in amazement of her stillness, but even more so in her ability to gaze at her reflection with such peace. It's not as if I have a moral issue that inhibits me from looking at my reflection in the mirror, but this is whole new level of acceptance. This is deep. This is looking so closely in the mirror, without judgment or contempt to want to look away. I swear, sometimes I think she is even wearing a faint smile. She moves and inspires me in ways I don't think I could possibly put into words. She is an expression of Self-Love. Right there, right in front of me. Pay attention...this is BIG.

*Note to Self: Love and Honor Yourself Every Day. Never look into the mirror without smiling.*

From the onset of this journey, I made the decision to check my ego at the door. I dabbled in yoga since my 20's, but trust me, I'm no "yogi". The instructors gently remind us that every class is 'yoga practice, not yoga perfect'. What a beautiful expression on how to live our lives, but like anything in life, we strive to improve. Now, I don't need to be a superstar in the room, but rest assured I want to be better than I was the first time I walked into that studio! Not only would I like to be able to get into all of the 26 poses, but it would also be a nice change to not look as if I'm in a chokehold when in some them. From day one, Ustrasana or 'Camel Pose' has been my biggest challenge. I just couldn't do it or this is what I told myself and thus, believed I could not. For some reason, I did not even want to attempt it. Something about Camel Pose terrified me. As time went on, I would bend backwards, to a

point, and just pause there, but I couldn't bring myself to go all the way back and grab my ankles. It was just about the time when my continued aversion to this pose was becoming a source of frustration that I learned more about Camel Pose. One of the instructors shared that Camel Pose was one of the most vulnerable poses in the series and is known to bring up a lot of emotion. Camel Pose is the pose where you open your heart. So here I am, a life coach, edifying "heart -centered awareness" whilst I defy this pose? Wow. How have I been showing up and is this the way I want to continue to show up? I think not. Upon receiving this insight on Camel Pose, I chose to change the story I had been telling myself. I chose to erase "I can't do this" to "I'm going for it!" I didn't know how it was going to look or that I could even do it, but it would behoove me not to give it my all. I chose to get out of my head and move into my heart. Interestingly enough, exactly what I advocate in my coaching. Well, I'm happy to report that I not only got into a full-out Camel Pose, but tears streamed down my face when I came out of it. I'm still not certain if the emotion arose from the pose or from the thrill of my achievement, but regardless, I found myself in a state of grace that could only be described as... 'my heart was smiling'.

*Note to Self: Believing is Seeing. When you open your heart; trust that miracles will occur.*

Needless to say, this journey has been one of tremendous insight. My commitment of practicing Bikram at least 1x per week quickly turned into 3x per week and just last week I hit the studio 5 days in a row. Granted, Bikram is no picnic, and certainly not for the faint of heart, however, it is a beautiful reflection for life and how we choose to live ours. Practicing Bikram has become a faithful reminder of the light that is within all of us and, if we so choose, we have the power to shine like never before.

Namaste

*One new perception, one fresh thought, one act of surrender, one change of heart, one leap of faith, can change your life forever. ~Robert Holden*