

A Dedicated Home: Chestnut Hill Yoga By Paige Seals

Dedicated: *adj.* wholly committed to something, as to an ideal, political cause, or personal goal; set apart or reserved for a specific use or purpose; devoted wholly and earnestly, as to some person or purpose; offered formally to a person, cause, or the like in testimony of affection or respect, as on a prefatory page. (Definitions from Dictionary.com)



Chestnut Hill Yoga is the new, dedicated home of the Iyengar Yoga Center of Nashville; it is also the new home for the Center's owner, our dedicated teacher Aretha McKinney; and it is a space dedicated to our beloved Geetaji.

In 2006, when the founder of 12South Yoga, K-Lea Gifford, decided to move from Nashville, Tennessee, Aretha McKinney, who had been a student of K-Lea and was a teacher at the studio, took a big leap of faith and purchased the business. Aretha worked to have the studio designated as an Iyengar center, bid farewell to her career as a Latin teacher, and focused her time and energy on sharing the teachings of the Iyengars. Over the years the Center thrived--and so did the neighborhood in which the Center's rented space was located. In 2018, facing skyrocketing rents and uncertainty as to whether the existing lease would be renewed long term, Aretha took another big leap of faith and embarked on a search to find property she could purchase, to ensure a permanent home for the Center.

After an extensive search, Aretha purchased property in Nashville's Chestnut Hill neighborhood, and the long, arduous process of permits, construction, and inspections ensued. As part of this process, Aretha also decided to relocate from the 12 South neighborhood in which she had been living--and to build her new home right above the studio home. We learn in our Yoga practice about the "yoga vitamins" of faith, vigor, memory, concentration, and wisdom. Without a doubt, all of those qualities are required in order to balance managing an existing business all while overseeing a construction project, selling a home, packing, and preparing to move; and Aretha undoubtedly possesses these qualities in abundance. Yes, there were frustrations and setbacks and days it seemed that all was lost, but all of Aretha's hard

work came to fruition, and on November 2, 2019, Aretha conducted a special, inaugural class in the Center's beautiful new Chestnut Hill space.

The studio did not officially open until a week after that inaugural class, and when it did officially open, it was an auspicious start, as we hosted a three-day workshop conducted by Aretha's teacher--senior Iyengar teacher Patricia Walden.



At the beginning of one of our evening sessions with Patricia, she had all the attendees gather around as she played a recording of Geeta Iyengar chanting the second pada of the Yoga Sutras and we all chanted back in call-and-response fashion. It was a magical moment as the room was filled with Geeta's voice--it was as if she were there with us. Geeta was definitely with us in spirit, and soon when students enter the studio, they will be greeted by a lovely picture of Geeta along with a statement from Aretha dedicating the studio in loving memory to Geeta.

In this dedication, Aretha mentions Geeta's focus on giving to your community, and Aretha expresses her gratitude for the support of a community. From a crowdfunding campaign to a ceremonial blessing of the new space, a community of studio supporters showed up to help build this home in so many meaningful ways.



THIS STUDIO IS DEDICATED IN
LOVING MEMORY TO GEETA S.
IYENGAR.

DEC. 7, 1944 - DEC. 18, 2016

Geeta was a pioneer in the study of yoga for women and a passionate purveyor of her father's legacy. She touched the lives of thousands through her writings and teaching. Her compassion for others and devotion to the subject of yoga will remain at the heart of the Iyengar method. Her challenge to her students to be of service in their community planted seeds throughout the world, from which this studio is but one small grateful sapling.

To all the students who have passed through our doors offering your support, kindness, and curiosity, a deep thank you! This studio is a reflection not of one, but of many.

With Gratitude,
Aretha

In the short time since it opened its doors, Chestnut Hill Yoga has hosted a second workshop-- a lecture series by the esteemed professor and author Edwin Bryant. Fittingly, the second day of the workshop coincided with Geeta Iyengar's birthday. Again, Geeta's spirit was with us as we gathered in the lovely new space and engaged in a study of the Bhagavad Gita and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. After the workshop, Edwin reflected that the attendees' commitment to studying the texts over the course of the weekend was a reflection of "Aretha's own dedication and aura in attracting a particular type of student interested in more than the physicality of the asanas" and that "Chestnut Hill Yoga is a testament to the power and appeal of Iyengar Yoga to continually spawn beautiful new centers, and produce the most competent of teachers with real concern about the ultimate goals of life--which, for all the Indian moksha traditions, is about relieving the ultimate causes of suffering."

Aretha is a compassionate and generous teacher, and her beautiful spirit, lovely practice, humor, grace, and humility inspire all who visit the studio. A home is only as strong as the foundation upon which it is built, and Chestnut Hill Yoga is built on the solid foundation of the Iyengars, who have dedicated their lives to the practice and teaching of Yoga, and of the other devoted Iyengar Yoga teachers with whom Aretha has studied. And added to that mix we have Aretha's devoted practice, her skilled teaching, and a loving community of students and teachers that Aretha has nurtured. Chestnut Hill Yoga has the firmest of foundations; it is the most dedicated of homes; its doors are wide open and welcome all.

"It is one of the beauties of Yoga that it keeps its doors open to all." -- Geeta Iyengar (from Yoga: A Gem For Women). "I love those who come to learn from me, I love them from my heart and that is a lesson

that I have learnt from Guruji." --Geeta Iyengar (from "Chit chatting with Geetaji on her birthday," Yoga Rahasya, Vol. 26 No. 1; 2019).

"I'm so grateful for everyone that has helped get our doors open. It has been an epic group effort and I am humbled by the show of support. A heartfelt thank you..." - Aretha McKinney



Aretha McKinney (CIYT-Senior Intermediate I), is the owner and director of the Iyengar Yoga Center of Nashville at Chestnut Hill Yoga.

Paige Seals (CIYT-Junior Intermediate I), took her first-ever Yoga class in the spring in 2004, and the class she happened to attend was taught by Aretha McKinney. Paige has been a student at the studio since that first class and began teaching in 2011.