

IYASE Teachers Remember Geetaji.

Interview with Betty Lewis.

Conducted by Leah DiQuollo, September 2019.

Q When was the first time you met Geetaji?

I arrived in Pune for the first time on November 30, 2000 and officially met Geeta at one of the feasts celebrated at the Institute. Geeta came up to me and said, "I have seen you in class but have never seen this other woman. Who is she? (Referring to my adult daughter)" That was the first real conversation we had.

Geeta's classes were wonderful. Her instructions were clear even to my novice ears. I remember that she told me I should do Tadasana and some of the sitting poses with my feet hip width apart. That small adjustment almost instantly gave me more mobility in the hips and helped with balance.

Q Could you share your favorite memory?

My most memorable time was when she taught me how to work with my stiff upper back. One morning during my third trip, Geetaji asked me to demonstrate Urdhva Mukha Svanasana. She then had her teachers/assistants have me lie down in a semi-prone position with my upper torso supported by bolsters with legs as well as part of the pelvis close to the rope wall on the floor. I was then instructed to hold high up onto the straps that had been rigged up like a pulley. I had to move in toward the wall so that my front torso (chest, ribs, upper abs) were comfortably close to the wall. I then had to keep lifting pulling up, using the ropes. The more length I got the more I could bend my upper back. The assistants helped me keep my lower body stable and lift my ribs off my lower body. The more I could lift, the better came the pose. At one point, I could hear the class gasp. She kept saying to the class 'she can do' she just has to learn to work this way.

Q How would you describe her?

Geeta was the greatest yoga teacher that I have had the good fortune to know. When she touched you, her hands were strong but very soft. They were hands that expertly guided you to previously unknown places. When she asked you go deeper into a pose or do a pose that you had never done successfully, you knew that this time you could do it because she knew the way and was your perfect guide.

Q Why did your practice change after Pune?

Because while studying in India my view of Yogis changed. There were people of almost all shades of the rainbow on the studio floor. There were also all sizes of men and women all doing yoga together. There were also all body types and abilities and a wonderful mixture of young and old. The wonderful thing about the color scale and body type was that they were accepted not just as paying students but also as teachers, mentors, students and demonstrators of poses. I took those images with me and they sustain me still.

Betty teaches classes in Maryland, at YWBF @ Northwest Hospital

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