

***Have you ever thought about Yoga for you and your child? I sure didn't!***

***By: Lisa Calice***

Yoga is something that I discovered quite unexpectedly. At times, I believe that it was yoga that discovered me. One year ago, as I was driving to pick up my children from school, a sign for a new yoga studio that was about to open, caught my attention. I was a stressed-out mom to three special-needs children, looking for a solution. My immediate reaction to the sign, was that I would never have time for yoga, and more importantly, that I could not afford to take classes at a yoga studio. I drove past this sign each day, until I could not ignore it any longer. A few weeks later, I stopped to inquire about the classes. I was a little hesitant and unsure of myself, but the next day after I dropped my children off at school, I attended my first yoga class. I will always remember my very first hour spent in this yoga studio; it was one that was filled with light, happiness, acceptance and peace...and I have been practicing regularly ever since!

When I celebrated my birthday recently, I was made aware of the extremely positive changes taking place in my life. I had been practicing yoga regularly for almost one year, at this local yoga studio, and at home. My yoga practice, which began at first as an occasional thing, had become incorporated into my daily life. I had so many experiences that continued to guide me on this path to yoga, that I no longer had any doubt it was the right thing for me. I was not at all surprised when my birthday arrived, that my sister gave me the most current issue of, "The Yoga Journal", a magazine about yoga, as a birthday gift. Already, my family and friends had begun to take notice of my regular practice, had seen the positive effect on me and were doing their best to support me. What was more amazing about my sister's thoughtful and supportive gift was an article that I discovered amongst its pages. The article was entitled, "Yoga for the Special Child". It told the story of Sonia Sumar, a yoga teacher for special needs children, and author of the book, "Yoga for the Special Child". This article intensified my interest in yoga as a means to help not only myself, but also my three special needs children, adopted three years ago from Ukraine.

My interest piqued, I ordered Sonia Sumar's book, "Yoga for the Special Child", and read most of it the day I received it. As I read the last page of the "The Story of Roberta", Part I in the book, I had little tears stinging my eyes. At the same time, I was filled with an indescribable feeling of joy and hope that came from understanding how the author must have felt when she wrote this narrative about her daughter, Roberta, who was born with Down Syndrome. I realized that I too, love and accept some special children completely; in spite of and in some cases even because of their emotional and physical limitations and challenges. Like the author, Sonia Sumar, I have discovered the immense benefits gained through the practice of yoga. I have learned to love and accept myself and my kids for exactly who we are now. At the same time, I fully believe I can bring about positive change in our lives, and in doing so can help to secure the future happiness and success of my children.

Through the loving support and guidance from a wonderful yoga teacher at The Center for Yoga, I began to develop a daily yoga practice, and I began to do yoga with my children. Whenever possible, I took them to classes with me, because seeing me practice yoga was a positive example for them to follow. They listened to the teacher, but mostly they were following me. As

I gained confidence, I began teaching my kids more yoga at home. It is a process I hope to continue as I hope to become a yoga teacher one day.

To say that yoga has changed, and is changing my life, does not seem to say enough. At times, I feel as though yoga has helped me find the joy that was missing from my life; but more accurately, it has helped me to discover the joy that already existed in my life. What my yoga practice has done most of all, is to change the way that I view my situation and myself. It is like having the sun come out to dispel the dark storm clouds to illuminate the world on the beautiful spring day. The beautiful spring day was there all along, but it needed the sunshine for us to see it.

Does my yoga practice mean I will be happy every day? I doubt it. My children and I will likely continue to have many painful and frustrating experiences, due to the many PI (post institutional) challenges my kids face. However, I now experience more moments of fulfillment with my children...those moments when my heart feels so full of joy and love for them. I am calmer, much more relaxed, and more at peace, even in the midst of my children's tantrums, and any other emotional crisis. I have more strength available to weather the storms that are bound to come. I rarely feel angry now and when I do, it is far easier to let go of my anger - to control it, rather than allowing it to control me. My husband, who is sometimes frustrated, angry and stressed because of increasing demands at work along with our children's behavior problems, is beginning to find it nearly impossible to get into an argument with me. My children frequently look puzzled when they are unable to get a negative reaction from me. I began to notice that I have an increased ability to focus, to concentrate and to remember things. Furthermore, I have discovered, as my yoga teacher pointed out, that I have already influenced my entire family in a positive way through my yoga practice. Through helping and bringing about positive change in myself, I cannot help but affect those I live with and love. The next logical step is to encourage my family members to each develop their own yoga practice. As I have done so, I have also noticed a slow, but positive change in my children.

The most noticeable way in which regular yoga practice has brought about positive change in my children, is that it has helped them to have greater self-awareness and an improved ability to relax. This self-awareness helps them to think about what they are doing and why, rather than to merely react to a situation. Their increased ability to relax has improved sleep habits, and helped them to feel more peaceful. Under my direction, my children can actually lie on the floor with eyes closed, and keep their entire bodies still for several minutes. This is a huge improvement! I believe that yoga has helped my children to regularly release anger and negative feelings that had been stored in their bodies for years. Although difficult for them to face these feelings, the benefit was obvious and relief was inevitable.

Yoga is not some magical treatment that makes doctors, medicine, and therapies obsolete or unnecessary. Rather, I view it as something that improves everything else, something that helps you get more benefit from therapy and other treatments, something that helps you to get more out of life. The benefits of yoga are not something you can gain in a day, or by trying it once. As is true of so many things, one can realize great benefits only after regular, consistent and sincere effort. Maintaining a regular practice is not always easy, especially if painful or difficult situations arise. Sometimes in yoga practice, things get worse, or seem to get worse, before they

get better – especially in the beginning. I discovered this myself when all kinds of painful feelings and memories came up during difficult postures; particularly hip openers, spinal twists, and squats. Yoga practice teaches you how to experience difficult situations through challenging postures, and to remain calm. When the old, “buried”, negative feelings came up, I was able to deal with them and put them to rest. Putting my own issues to rest made me better able to parent my children effectively. When new difficulties presented themselves, I began to be able to face what would have previously been an intolerable situation, in a calm manner.

### ***How Can Yoga Help Kids with Body Problems, Adjustment Issues...***

Yoga is beneficial for special needs kids for so many reasons. It helps to build self-esteem and self-confidence, flexibility and strength. Many PI kids have problems with muscle tone, strength, flexibility and balance – all of which yoga practice can dramatically improve. Yoga practice also promotes greater patience, focus, concentration, and relaxation. The benefits seem nearly endless. When parents create a yoga practice for themselves, the benefits are even greater. It allows the parents to demonstrate a positive example for their children to imitate. The child learns to follow directions from parents in a way that is fun and non confrontational. Parents and children learn to work together for a common goal. The family becomes a more peaceful, unified, entity.

### ***A Little Lesson About Yoga...***

Yoga may be gaining popularity, but it is not a recent invention. The practice of yoga originated in India 5000 years ago. It is not a religion; it has no creed or fixed set of beliefs, and it is not linked to Hinduism, as some incorrectly believe. The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root word "yug," which signifies "union." In its broadest definition, yoga is an ancient science of personal development that cultivates growth through ethical and moral discipline, posture and breath work, mental focus, and meditation. Yoga practice allows us person to achieve our greatest potential. A basic yoga practice includes exercise, breathing and meditation. There are many branches, or styles of yoga. One of the most popular styles of yoga practiced in the western world, is Hatha Yoga. The exercise

### ***Yoga Resources...***

There are many resources: schools, books, tapes, magazines, etc. for learning more about yoga. These resources also include some basic yoga instruction. The following resources are only those that I feel comfortable recommending, based on positive personal experience. I personally tried books and tapes initially, and although I found them helpful, I got much more out of them once I began practicing yoga under the instruction of teachers at the Center for Yoga. Tapes are good for adults if you learn how to use them as a tool or a reference. For kids, watching a tape is often more like watching a T.V. show. It is a good introduction, but I find it can also be distracting, it takes away from what is going on inside their own bodies. Still, I feel it can be beneficial, and so I have included it here. The tape I included below for adults is for women only. I attended a class with this instructor, and it was both challenging and rewarding. Again, I found I could gain much more from the tape because of the instruction I was receiving at Center for Yoga. The books, and the magazine listed below are invaluable resources about yoga. I recommend that parents do all

the reading they can! The second book listed, Yoga for Children, is one even your kids will enjoy reading, because of the wonderful pictures.

***Yoga Schools***

(this is the school I attend):

Center for Yoga (four locations; class schedules can be found on web site or by calling the phone numbers below)

<http://www.centerforyoga.net/>

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CENTER for YOGA  
ROCHESTER HILLS  
3220 ROCHESTER RD.  
ROCHESTER HILLS, MI 48307  
in the Oak Ridge Plaza  
248-844-YOGA (9642)

CENTER for YOGA  
WEST BLOOMFIELD  
6708-A ORCHARD LAKE RD.  
WEST BLOOMFIELD, MI 48322  
in the West Bloomfield Plaza  
248-865-YOGA (9642)

CENTER for YOGA  
SOUTHFIELD  
29121 Northwestern HWY.  
SOUTHFIELD, MI 48034  
corner of 12 Mile Road & N.W. Hwy.  
248-386-YOGA (9642)

CENTER for YOGA  
BIRMINGHAM  
555 OLD WOODWARD AVE.  
BIRMINGHAM, MI 48009  
on the lower level, next to Gymboree  
248-258-1777

***Magazine***

Yoga Journal - online magazine:

<http://www.yogajournal.com/>

Yoga Journal is available at bookstores and at Whole Foods Markets. FOR

MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS CALL:

1-800-600-9642 - in the US or Canada

1-850-682-7644 - elsewhere

Or subscribe online at:

<https://www.neodata.com/ITPS2.cgi?ItemCode=YOGA&OrderType=Reply+Only&iResponse=YOGA.INDEX>

(if you subscribe here, you get a free trial issue - so it is worth a try!)

***Books***

1. Yoga for the Special Child by Sonia Sumar, available in bookstores, and at Barnes & Noble.com for \$17.95

<http://search.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch/isbnInquiry.asp?userid=54JJC&MKCPK&isbn=096580240X&itm=1>

More information about the author, the book and her yoga school at:

<http://www.specialyoga.com/>

About the book:

From the Publisher

An innovative and easy-to-follow program for parents, educators, yoga teachers, and health care professionals. The book includes:

- A step-by-step, integrated system of yoga poses designed to increase cognitive and motor skills in children with learning and developmental disabilities.
- Specialized breathing exercises and relaxation techniques to improve concentration and reduce hyperactivity.
- An early Intervention program to assure the healthy formative development of infants and toddlers.

From The Critics

Library Journal

This book offers one more success story of a parent who refused to believe her disabled child could not be helped. But more importantly, it is a handbook for parents that demonstrates the use of centuries-old yoga practices to benefit the special-needs child. Sumar's program, which she teaches throughout the world, draws on yoga's philosophy that intellect, mobility, and the senses are interdependent and that improved development in one area affects all areas. The book includes a glossary, case reports (including that of Sumar's daughter), and clear, step-by-step instructions with illustrations. It also includes important dos, don'ts, and medical precautions. The success of Sumar's program has been documented in education and psychology journals. An important addition to any special-needs collection.--KellyJo Houtz Griffin, Auburn, WA

## *Yoga for Children*

Mary Stewart

<http://search.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch/results.asp?userid=54JCMKC>

PK&ath=Mary+Stewart> , Kathy Phillips

<http://search.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch/results.asp?userid=54JCMKC>

PK&ath=Kathy+Phillips> , Sandra Lousada

<http://search.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch/results.asp?userid=54JCMKC>

PK&ath=Sandra+Lousada> (Photographer)

Available for \$13.50 at Barnes & Noble.com

My children love this book!

<http://search.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch/isbninquiry.asp?userid=54JCMKC>

MKCPK&pwb=1&ean=9780671787127

From the Publisher

Physical activity is natural to children and vital for their healthy development. But in today's mechanized society--with TV, computer games and competitive sports--it is becoming difficult for some children to get the exercise they need in a natural, healthy, and enjoyable way.

Yoga for Children provides simple exercises and games you and your children can do together that can help your kids:

- \* become stronger and more flexible

- \* develop good coordination and posture

- \* learn how to relax and concentrate

- \* let out their energy in a safe, health-promoting way

Suitable for kids from age three and up--no matter what their physical abilities, Yoga for Children is a safe, healthy, and fun way for families to exercise, play, and grow together.

## *Tapes*

1. Yoga Fitness For Kids Ages 7-12

VHS tape available at Barnes & Noble.com for \$9.98

<http://video.barnesandnoble.com/search/product.asp?userid=54JCMKCPK&EAN=29956800038>

2. Yoga Fitness For Kids Ages 3-6

VHS Tape available at Barnes & Noble.com for \$9.98

<http://video.barnesandnoble.com/search/product.asp?userid=54JCMKCPK&EAN=29956902831>

3. Beauty and Truth - A Daily Yoga Workout for Women - taught by Ravi Singh

VHS tape available at [www.ziplink.net/~ravi](http://www.ziplink.net/~ravi)

If a man is like a cargo plane, a woman is like a jet fighter. She can

go faster and fly higher but a little extra maintenance is in order.

This yoga workout video will help get everything covered everyday so you can look your best and be your best. This video combines breathing, movement, stretching, relaxation and more. It's a great inner/outer workout and will give your life a total boost.