

Student Spotlight

Long, Uninterrupted Practice

This month's focus is on Jerry Maddox, a dedicated student of Dean and Rebecca Lerner for almost 30 years, who is still standing on his head at 84.



When and why did you first start doing yoga?

I started yoga in 1987 at the Center for Well Being. I was 55 years old and suffering from arthritis in my right shoulder and hip and thought I would try it before I went to medication. I didn't expect it to work, but after about six months my arthritis was much better and it has not come back. I also gained a lot of flexibility, especially in my hamstrings.

I understand that you take classes every day? How did that come about?

I attend class six days a week because that way I can focus on my practice without the distractions which are a part of my life when I am at home or at work. I try to get to class a little early so I can spend some time in *Supta Baddha Konasana* to open up my chest and hips, and to clear my mind.

Can you recall the most recent "ah-ha" moment you've had while practicing yoga?

About three years ago I hurt my knee. It filled with fluid and had to be drained by a doctor. My knee and ankle were swollen and I was told that the injury and the pain that went with it were permanent and would never go away.

I worked in yoga class on my knee, mostly in *Virasana* sitting on a tall brick, and in about six months all the swelling and most of the pain went away. Now I can sit in *Virasana* on a brick on the lowest setting - not on the floor yet, as I could before, but getting close. That was my most recent experience of how, if you take your time and don't rush it, yoga can work wonders.

What continues to surprise or delight you in the practice?

That my practice keeps changing with age—due to losing muscle mass in my upper body. I can no longer do full arm balance and forearm balance—but my forward bends keep getting better and head stand and shoulder stand are still my best poses.

If someone had told my 13-year-old self that when I was 50 I'd be wearing tights and asking people to look at my legs as part of my professional duty, I'd have said they were crazy. Do you have any thoughts like that about your yoga practice? Could you have anticipated that you'd be standing on your head into your 80s?

I am not surprised that I am standing on my head at 84, but I am delighted that I can and still have my health to do it. Thanks to yoga and taking care of myself, I hope I will still be doing it for the next 10 to 20 years.



Do you have any words of advice for those just starting on the yogic path?

I have often used this old saying: *Festina lente* - make haste slowly. That way you can get there without hurting yourself.

Anything else you'd like to share?

I want to say that I would never have gotten to where I am in yoga without Dean and Rebecca Lerner. They are two very fine teachers, as are the other teachers at the Center for Well Being, who are all also students of theirs.

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