We Remember Mary
The Iyengar Family, Teachers and Students Salute Mary Dunn with Accolades and Anecdotes, Tributes and Warm Reminiscences

The Life of a Teacher
Mary Dunn, one of yoga’s most gifted, experienced, and beloved teachers, died September 4.

Longtime Senior Teacher at the Iyengar Yoga Institute of New York, Mary was also a founding director of IYNAUS and a founder of the three Iyengar Yoga institutes in the United States, in San Francisco, San Diego, and New York, where she remained a tireless inspiration for the activities of the Iyengar Yoga Association of Greater New York. Her efforts led to the opening of the new Institute in New York.

Mary began studying with B. K. S. Iyengar in 1974; her mother, Mary Palmer, brought Mr. Iyengar to the United States for his first sustained teaching here.

Certified as Advanced Junior, Mary said that Iyengar Yoga was the place where her life interests and life work came together; in her teaching, she drew on her education at the University of Wisconsin in English, history, and philosophy and on her interests in communications, the arts, and music.

As Senior Teacher in New York and a workshop teacher worldwide, Mary brought a unique teaching style—enthusiastic and motivating, grounded in thorough knowledge of the method, intelligent and humorous—to the training of generations of students and teachers.

Mary maintained regular study with the Iyengar family throughout the years. Diagnosed with advanced peritoneal cancer last year, she maintained a blog (www.marydunn.blogspot.com) in which she discussed her treatment and her thoughts.

Mary, 66, died peacefully in her sleep at the home of her daughter Elizabeth Dunn Ingles, in Scarsdale, New York. She is also survived by her daughter Louisa A. Dunn of Wynnewood, Pennsylvania; her mother, of Ann Arbor; her brother, Adrian Palmer, of Salt Lake City, Utah; her former husband, Roger Dunn, of Scottsdale, Arizona; and four grandchildren. Mary’s family held a memorial service at the New York Institute September 27. A celebration of her life in yoga is planned for early 2009, also at the New York Institute.

IYAGNY has announced the Mary Dunn Fund to create a committed pool of resources to continue Mary’s lifelong work for the spread of Iyengar Yoga and excellence in its teaching. Tax-deductible contributions may be made to IYAGNY, 150 West 22nd Street, 11th Floor, New York, NY 10011; please indicate “Mary Dunn Fund” on checks.

Mary touched all of us.
As beloved Senior Teacher to some and colleague to others, as mentor and friend and inspiration during her long teaching career, Mary Dunn touched all of us. Members of IYNAUS and the international community were asked to offer tributes to her. Responses—sad and funny, profoundly respectful and deeply moving—poured in. Grateful thanks to Gina King and Alexandra Anderson for help in compiling and editing the submissions.

When we lose someone as skilled, accomplished, and multifaceted as Mary, only by looking at her from every angle can we fully appreciate her life and work. Maybe in hearing a story from this student and a reminiscence from that one, reading this teacher’s recollection and that one’s anecdote, we can weave these individual glimpses of Mary into a full picture.

Mary was my teacher for many years; for more than a decade we worked together on the Greater New York regional association. Demanding as a teacher and, even more so, endlessly inspiring and nurturing, she led me to refine my practice and teaching.

All who experienced it know how Mary’s already wise, penetrating teaching became deeper and more compelling after she became ill. In a very real way, it seemed, she was telling us, I don’t have much time, and I have so much to teach you before time runs out.

In my own “picture” of Mary, I see her as the day Guruji came to bless our new institute in New York, the “soaring sanctuary” for yoga that Mary had envisioned for all of us, then led us to bring to reality.

On that day, Mary’s wonderful smile—touched on in so many of the reminiscences—seemed wider, brighter, more open than ever. Never have I seen her look happier—incandescent, really, lit from inside with love and pride and fulfillment. That’s my picture of Mary, and that’s the way I imagine her looking if she could read what you wrote about her.
—Richard Jonas, IYNAUS Vice President and Outreach Chair, New York, New York
A TRIBUTE FROM GURUJI

I, being a senior student of yoga and having digested a great deal of its philosophy, do not consider that our Mary Dunn is no more.

No doubt she has left her mortal body, but her immortal soul ever exists. As such, she has moved from her manifested form to her formless unmanifested state for the time being, to appear again in a manifested form. As the soul and life force are eternal, she has to take a form again.

Since 1973, I knew her as an ardent student of yoga until she discarded her garment of her soul—the body.

She had a clean mind and a clear head until her last breath. She has left indelible, virtuous imprints of goodness, openness, and universalness, filled with generous hospitality, on almost all who came in contact with her.

Any expression on her way of living does not express what she was: a charming personality throughout her life who was not only true to her master in yoga, but to her colleagues and students of yoga, and to her parents and children.

Her true partner was yoga and she breathed her last as a yogini, keeping yogic thoughts consciously and conscientiously. She accepted her suffering and carried on guiding and imparting her dear wealth of yoga to her students and colleagues.

Knowing well that her mortal body would consume in space, she gave a farewell visit to one and all at the Iyengar Yoga centre of New York to join her daughters at the end of her life, to express her love and affection in no way less than that to her students.

For us she may be invisible in her mortal form, but her thoughts and action will always remain as an inspiring force in the vibrating centre, far longer than her mortal existence. Though I salute her soul, I do not pray for her soul to rest in peace. I am sure her soul will wear a new garment in the form of a new body, and I greet her soul to come back and serve the yogic community again with the same zeal and fervor in the subject of yoga.

—Sri B. K. S. Iyengar

A MESSAGE FROM GEETAJI

My Dear Mary Dunn,

I am very much sure that you are always with us and we too are with you. Even all these days we were far away from each other distance-wise. Now, we are little more away. We may not be able to shake hands physically, but spiritually we be always be shaking hands with each other.

You were always soft-spoken, tender-hearted, yet courageous. More than yourself, you were always concerned about others’ welfare and comfort. Your soft voice, affectionate looks, noninterfering nature, placid temperament, and inspirational presence conveyed a lot to us. You spoke less but did more. Your silent devotional yet discriminative approach to yoga-sadhana, the balanced state of mind while confronting the fatal disease and courageous embrace to death, are beyond the praise where the words are inadequate.

We are missing you but we have not lost you. Your presence will be always felt mutually if not factually.

Yoga is union. The soul unites us. Spiritually we are united, though in mundane life we are separated.

You will always be in our hearts. Yours in yoga,

—Geeta
**Our Guiding Light.** When you lose someone important, you try to analyze what he or she meant to you; you try to understand the loss and allow that person’s influence to settle.

I find myself thinking about Mary a lot. She pops into my mind, uninvited although always welcome, on and off throughout the day. I first met Mary in Pune—I think the year was 1976—and throughout the rest of the 70s and 80s, we were fellow students at RIYMI. After moving to New York in 1990, I attended practically every advanced (or teacher’s) class she taught; when illness dictated that she stop teaching these, I went to every level III class. At the time I didn’t think much about this, but I am allowing my heart to “think” about it now.

My head can try to wrap itself around what she meant to me, but I have now stopped trying to intellectualize the contradictions, paradoxes, and ups and downs of this unique relationship. I was not close to Mary in the sense that friends are close, but she had a profound influence on me. She inspired my teaching. She provided an underlying support in my life that is hard to define. I realize now that she will always have a place in my heart.

So—how to define what makes a truly great yoga teacher?

Two things come to mind when I think of Mary: the sheer intensity of her conviction—she lived for Iyengar Yoga and was the guiding light for our institute, and indeed throughout the Iyengar Yoga community—and, most importantly, the spontaneous magic and connection that occurred between herself and her students as soon as she stepped in front of a class.

Mary Dunn’s long experience as a teacher and her devotion to her teacher, B. K. S. Iyengar, go without saying. Her teacher-training program in New York created standards throughout the United States. Her influence within the community will remain for years to come.

We will all miss her.

—Bobby Clennell, Intermediate Senior I, New York, New York

**Teaching was her passion.** Mary was a great yoga teacher—teaching was her talent and her passion. She excelled, inspired, and set the standard for many teachers to follow.

She was a friend and colleague for 30 years. I miss her; I know we will all miss her. What most stays with me today is that I am very grateful for her enthusiastic and dedicated work in building up the New York Institute. More than my affectionate friendship, she also had my respect.

—Lindsey Clennell, Intermediate Senior III, New York, New York

**That Megawatt Smile.** Since Mary died, I have been reconnecting with friends here in Southern California who remember her from her days here in the 80s. And every time, we talk about the first time we met her.

My first encounter with Mary was in a workshop in 1979 at the Center for Yoga in Los Angeles. At the time it was one of the only yoga studios in the region. I remember that Mary was invited to come from San Francisco (she lived in Berkeley then). She swept into the enormous hall of the center, smiled that megawatt smile of hers, and told us we were just going to have the best time! And the fun/work began.

At one point she stood in front of me, almost nose to nose. I have a bit of a twist in my hips and she adjusted me so that I was “straight.” I’d had no idea I was crooked, but when she said, “Now isn’t that better?” I said, “Yes, much better.” I realize now that I became tethered, completely and irrevocably, to this practice in that moment. It wasn’t just that she had physically aligned me; she had moved something deep inside of me into rightness.

In one of my last conversations with her in August, she spoke about a question she is often asked about her teaching (and this was taped so everyone will hopefully be able to hear her exact words at some point). She said, and I paraphrase: People want to know how she is able to teach the philosophy of yoga so seamlessly with the asana. She said it’s because she knows why. Why it’s important in a particular...
moment to pick a particular instruction for the body that will open the practice to more. Why it’s important at a particular moment to let go of very important ideas about a way to practice in favor of another. Why it’s important to take the journey. And how together we can find our way.
—Anna Delury, Intermediate Senior I, Studio City, California

That night we became friends. Years ago Mary and I were staying in adjacent rooms of a hotel in Pune. I called for room service, not realizing it was 2 AM. I stood at the door of my room, frustrated, trying to explain to the boy from room service that I wanted “tea with milk and sugar aside.” When I returned to bed, I realized what time it was. Then I heard Mary at her door ordering “tea with milk and sugar aside.” I went to the door and we both laughed. That night we became friends.

It became a routine for us to get together after intensives. We would alternate cooking, eating together, and taking notes. Mary was always positive; she would never say anything negative about anybody, and she was never angry or upset. She had the ability to look at the positive side of everyone in any situation and to share her enthusiasm with those around her.

The first time we worked together was in Tepoztlan, Mexico, at a workshop organized by Herta Rogg. It was a great experience for me because I realized how well we collaborated and blossomed together. Mary’s way of articulating was one of her great skills! However sometimes, it was difficult for me to understand. One time she made an analogy about a washing machine, but I was totally lost in the spin cycle.

Mary came to Italy three times. While teaching she corrected with great care, then assisted the people who needed it even while I taught. During meals she would sit with different students and speak to them about family life as well as yoga. She was interested in everybody. She was caring, fun, light, and always humorous in her approach.

I will always remember Mary, not only for her creativity in practice and teaching, but for the enthusiasm she transmitted when she discovered something new.
—Gabriella Giubilaro, Advanced Junior I, Florence, Italy

A teacher for all of us. Mary was a colleague and a friend to many, but she was a teacher for all of us. When I think about Mary, I think of her generosity of spirit: that was an inspiration to everyone. Rebecca and I visited her a week before she left us. Mary was on the couch in her pajamas; she had a IV hooked up. She said, “Dean, go get a blanket. I’ve learned something about Baddha Konasana.” Frail as she was, she had this eagle-eyed gaze that said, “I still have a lot of show you.” She lived so well, and she was teaching us, with courage and a deep peace, even to the end. When Mary called to say goodbye, she told me how she appreciated the love and support she felt from our community. She said it was like an ocean of love that supported her, lifted her, and gave her more time.

Anyone who studied with Mary knows her wonderful, creative analogies. Mary definitely taught the method—it was dear to her heart. She could articulate the philosophy in a very practical way, and her teaching, while very precise, was also so original that she made the work fun! And then we have the famous Mary smile…

I taught at Feathered Pipe with Mary for more than 15 years. We’d get up at 5 AM to practice, teach a morning class, have teachers’ training, do another class, then have dinner. It was very intense, but somehow, every single year, Mary found time to rewrite the lyrics of a song from a Broadway musical and perform it at the end-of-the-week Follies.

On our last trip to Isla Mujeres, Mary and Rebecca would watch the sun rise every morning. Then we’d all watch the sun set, with Mary and Rebecca swimming in the ocean. Mary really felt in touch with the rhythms of nature there—fresh air, water, yoga of course—and coconut ice cream.

Mary touched so many, even people who only met her once. She gave people her full attention, held them by the hand, looked them in the eye. Almost everyone connected with Mary in a special way. Steve Jacobson, a teacher in Atlanta, told me, “Mary’s loss is like losing one of the brightest stars in the sky.” But when a star goes out, the light goes on for a long time.
—Dean Lerner, Advanced Junior I, Lemont, Pennsylvania
ALL DIMINISHED BY HER LOSS. Mary Dunn was one of the founders and cornerstones of the world’s modern yoga community. She personally spread the word of this noble art to thousands of practitioners. The big story of her contributions is easy to tell, but the effect on individuals, which was profound for so many, can never be fully revealed because of its magnitude.

On a personal note, Mary helped me in my early years of teaching by allowing me to substitute for her when she went to India to study with B. K. S. Iyengar. She also had me teach her classes when I would first return from studying with Guruji. I co-taught with her on many occasions and found her knowledge and slant on the subject to be most inspirational.

We are all diminished by her loss.
—Manouso Manos, Advanced Senior I, San Francisco, California

THE YEAR WITH MY TEACHER. A year of living in the moment. A year of staying in the present. A year of humor. That’s what I’ve lived this last year.

There was constant learning about living in the moment. The future kept changing; as soon as a plan was made, it would change. We couldn’t go back… it was the past. We had to stay in the present: the situation taught us that. Riding the ups and downs without being pulled into the drama of the roller coaster ride that we were on, staying neutral: that was the only way we could know which way to shift, how to rebalance, to truly remain in the present.

Teaching meant the most to Mary. She loved it and it loved her back. She always planned to teach her class; she always left that option open. No matter how badly she was feeling, she was still planning the class. “Let’s see, tomorrow is… standing poses, forward bends, backbends, inversions.”

Through it all, she lived as she always had done. She always wanted to be positive, and so it was with her illness. She always thought of others and was well-mannered. If someone sent a note or flowers, she’d want to send a thank-you; sometimes she’d send a thank-you for a thank-you card! She always thought positively, acted positively, and stayed positive. Even at the end, she knew that it was important to keep moving, so she wanted to sit up and stand up by herself and make positive decisions about each day, hour, moment of her life, even as she accepted that it was ending.

Because I was with her, there to help, I tried to get myself out of the way and assist with anything she wanted. And you know Mary: she wanted things just right. So I could help when she wanted to have a piece of furniture moved one direction or the other, so it was centered. Visual order was important to her and she was teaching me that art. As always, making things right was part of her journey, and I was grateful to be there to support her.

Even in the most difficult of times, if we could laugh, it helped so much. We talked about the medical devices as “bells and whistles.” My job increasingly was one of keeping things light when they became difficult.

The week before she died, with Mary watching from her bed, her four-year-old grandson Matthew and I performed a magic show. He was the magician; I was just his assistant. Mary loved it. She loved Matthew’s fun and her daughters’ delight in his joy. My role with Matthew was my role with Mary. I began as her assistant and was fortunate to be able to continue in that role until the end.

The true teacher–student relationship is unique. It is a very strong bond, different than that of a marriage or family. It is a relationship of deep love, enormous respect, and good humor. Over the years, our teacher–student relationship evolved into a deep friendship that was protected by the framework of our teacher–student relationship. Now it is a love that is eternal. We’ve all been blessed by knowing Mary. She will always be in our hearts.
—James Murphy, Intermediate Senior I, New York, New York

FIND SOMETHING POSITIVE IN EVERY DAY. My first encounter with Mary Dunn was at the Ann Arbor Y yoga camp. As I sat uncomfortably with my legs crossed and kept changing positions during an orientation, Mary sat comfortably in a pose called, I was to find out later, Upavistha Konasana. I
was absolutely in awe! And for the more than 30 years since that day, Mary kept me in awe with her infectious enthusiasm for life, her humor, and her fortitude.

Mary Dunn moved through life with grace and poise, at the same time accomplishing a great deal in her short 66 years. I knew her as my teacher, my colleague, and one of the dearest friends anyone could ask for. Her enthusiasm for the subject of yoga, for her teaching, and for spreading the teachings of Iyengar Yoga led her to teach thousands and establish yoga communities of students and teachers wherever she lived and in many areas where she was invited to teach. She never stopped giving willingly and freely of her time, her energy, and her knowledge.

Mary lived yoga every day and taught us by her example. What I learned most from Mary was to find something positive in every day and every experience. Mary looked forward to something every day, even when facing months of chemotherapy with little chance of remission. She remained positive and enthusiastic about any small accomplishment. She never complained, she fought the cancer as long as she could, and, when she no longer had the strength to fight, she surrendered with dignity. There isn’t a better lesson in practice and detachment than Mary gave to us through the process of her death. Her death is a great loss, but her essence will live on in our hearts. To have known and loved her has been my good fortune, one of the great pleasures of my life.

—Chris Saudek, Intermediate Senior III, La Crosse, Wisconsin

It was all yoga to Mary. I met Mary on my very first trip to Pune in 1981. I can’t say we became fast friends at that time. I was a new kid on the block, and she was clearly a senior person. She stood out because she answered questions Guruji put us (which nearly everyone else was afraid to do) and because he often called on her to demonstrate.

I came to know Mary gradually. We spent time together at conventions and crossed paths at Feathered Pipe Ranch in Montana. The first time I spent any extended time with Mary was when she accepted my invitation to teach at Unity Woods. Then we had a chance to really get to know one another.

Mary was one of the finest teachers I have ever studied or worked with. Of course she understood the asanas very deeply, not just in terms of technical excellence, but more importantly, in their potential to awaken us to the inner dance of our own life and consciousness. And Mary, who loved to talk and was so good at it, was able to express the subtlety, grandeur, and humor of that dance with wonderful articulateness and unbridled enthusiasm. When I close my eyes and let Mary come into my mind I see her smile, which could light up the dullest room, and hear her exclaim, “Now isn’t that what yoga is all about?!” Mary was a yoga teacher in the fullest sense because she embodied the teaching in her life. She saw and experienced the world with yoga eyes and a yoga mind. It was all yoga to Mary.

She was a very special person. I, like so many of us, am very fortunate to have had Mary in my life. And even though she will always be with me, I miss her.

—John Schumacher, Advanced Junior I, Bethesda, Maryland

A friendly face for Iyengar Yoga. The lesson Mary taught us is to put a friendly face on Iyengar Yoga. It is a method defined by exploring our inner nature; one has to be present to do that. As it is not an easy journey, students may be put off by our continually asking them to be aware and in the moment. Iyengar Yoga encourages students to explore. Many people may perceive this as a method that is harsh. The difficulty of looking inward may be exacerbated by not being ready for it. Mary had a gift to challenge and promote the exploration inside the body with a smile! I remember something Mary said about one of her times in India. She was there with her mother, Mary Palmer, for a three-week intensive course. After the first few days, the two of them were in their room, lying on their beds, moaning about all the different parts of their bodies that were aching. Mary told her mother that the only place that didn’t hurt was her eyelashes. The next day, Guruji started to teach about the space between the eyelashes!

—Lois Steinberg, Advanced Junior I, Urbana, Illinois

Create space for joy in your heart. We were privileged to have Mary come to South Africa and do two weeks of intensive teaching. Her generosity of spirit and eloquence of language made her loved by all. Her keen observation of nature and the use thereof as a metaphor for our journeys in yoga touched the hearts of many. After visiting the Kruger National Park, our largest game reserve, roughly the size of Belgium, her teaching flowed with beautiful natural metaphors that inspired us all.
She said: “Just change, find the wonderful chameleon we have within us,” “Think of the hippopotamus yawn—broaden your lumbar,” and again, “Hippopotamus yawn across your upper shoulders,” “Find the river of your spine,” “Uttanasana—giraffe drinking,” “Pocket full of dreams,” “Breath—impossible to explain something infinite,” “Create space for joy in your heart.”

She was a beautiful poet of the spirit who deepened our experience of yoga. We will miss her deeply. But her presence remains clear in our hearts and inspires.

—Brigitta Tummon, Intermediate Senior III, Johannesburg, South Africa

**SHINING EXAMPLE OF A GRACEFUL EXIT.** When I think about Mary, I think about *Graceful Exits*, the book about spiritual beings from Zen monks to priests and the way they met death. Mary is a shining example of a graceful exit.

Mary could—in the worse possible circumstances—find that one positive thing. In June, she was having a hard time with chemotherapy, but she said that every day she was able to pull that one good thing out of the hat. That embodies who Mary was. She's always been able to do that, against all odds. I'm now doing more of that myself. When someone dies who is dear to us or inspires us, one of the ways to stay close is to try to embody one of their qualities you admire.

Mary followed in the footsteps of her teachers, especially Geeta. A few years ago, Geeta gave a talk at a church at Harvard. Introducing her I said, “Geeta, your life is yoga in action.” Mary's life became yoga in action. She was a true *karma yogini* (*Action is said to be the means for the sage desirous of yoga.* —Vijnanabhiksu) Like Geeta, Mary always had four or five projects going and gave 100 percent to each one.

About 10 years ago, we were with Guruji somewhere. We were all coming up with one word to describe one another. It was Mary's turn, and two people at once came up with the same word: *indefatigable*. When everyone else was down on their knees barely awake, Mary was still going. Mary acted, and she inspired those around her to act because of her enthusiasm for life and for yoga. Safe in her vision, she was able to stir people to join with her to make things happen. She never asked anyone to do something that she wasn't willing to do herself. That is a true leader.

The example of her graceful exit has helped many of us to face our own mortality without fear. Sutra I:15 speaks about nonattachment. Mary reached that state. The closer she got to her death, the more she moved into a place of nonattachment. She was present with her own death—absolutely in the moment. And because she was, when I was with her, I was too.

Beloved Mary, treasured friend, I will miss you dearly.

—Patricia Walden, Advanced Senior I, Cambridge, Massachusetts

**THAT SPARKLE IN HER EYE.** I've been thinking of times I shared with Mary, little vignettes. Once we were working on assessment issues. We were both being good, eating well and practicing nonattachment. Suddenly, Mary looked at me with that sparkle in her eye that said: “We're going to do something bad!” She pulled out a basket of leftover Halloween candy, and the two of us just fell on the York Peppermint Patties—Mary's favorite. We sat there, eating and laughing and talking about how hard it is to lose weight.

Mary and I taught a fundraising workshop at Columbia University and raised $9000 to buy an ambulance for Bellur. I like to observe people from the bottom up, and Mary looked at people from the top down, so together, we got a really good picture and were able to help people. We shared a wonderful feeling of camaraderie, and laughed about how well we co-taught thanks to our different perspectives.

I remember shopping with Mary and her mother at a fancy store in New York, watching them try on strange clothes by Japanese designers. Shopping with Mary was an adventure!

During a very early trip to India, Mary, her mother, and I spent a wonderful hour together talking about the big toe. Mr. Iyengar had said, “God is in the big toe,” and the three of us sat after class looking at our big toes, wiggling them around, marveling about all the possibilities we hadn't been aware of before!
One of my last memories of Mary was at the Las Vegas convention. She brought Geetaji a pair of MBT shoes. She helped Geeta put them on, then gave her a great big smile—a “Mary smile.” Taking hold of Geeta’s arm she said, “Now, Geetaji, you have to get used to walking in these. Let’s take a few steps together.” It was very touching, a very special Mary moment that I will always remember.

Another time, Mary and I worked together on a difficult problem. We worked out a compromise letter that I then read aloud. Mary responded, “Now that’s going to be wonderful.” I remember Mary using that word wonderful on so very many different occasions. Hearing her say it—I’ll miss that.
—Joan White, Advanced Junior I, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Captured from the start. Mary captured you right from the start. The smile, the vitality, the fabulous blend of serious intent with warmth and humor. Mary always commanded and expected your complete attention. She also gave her complete attention to whatever she was doing or whomever she was with. Mary was present.

I knew quickly that Mary was a mentor who could guide my development as a practitioner and teacher. I took her words to heart and tried to implement the wisdom she shared so generously. One year at the airport, on the way home from teacher training, Mary took me aside. She said, “Karen, I think you have the potential to become a fine teacher.” I swelled with happiness. Then she added, “And there is something that I have to tell you.” She told me my teaching was tense, forced, and singsong—that I sounded like a kindergarten teacher. This was not easy to hear, but I knew it was true. As my eyes filled with tears, I nodded. She told me that she had seen me more relaxed and at ease in other situations. Could I be more like that when teaching? She leaned into me, rested her hand on my leg and said, “Now, Karen, you know I’m telling you this because I love you.” And I did know.

Mary gave this kind of personal guidance to hundreds of students and teachers. She was genuinely interested in each person’s potential, each student’s development, each human journey. Mary believed that yoga could make that journey more profound and liberating, and she dedicated her life to teaching others about that possibility.
—Karen Allgire, Intermediate Junior I, Cleveland Heights, Ohio

My teacher, Mary. Mary was my teacher. Every class was for me. She took care of me, looked out for me, nurtured me, and gently challenged me, all for my betterment as a student and as a teacher. She mentored me as a teacher. A shining example, she showed me what a worthy life is, what a really good woman looks like, works like, moves like, teaches like. She even praised me, right there in class. More than once she said, “That’s the best I’ve ever seen you do that pose.”

She firmly encouraged and supported me. At the very beginning, 20 years ago, Judy Freedman and Peentz Dubble started the first institute. It was one of the earliest places Mary taught in New York (and I’ve since studied at them all). At that time Mary said to me, “Norma, you have to hold the poses longer, build up your stamina.” I felt I couldn’t. “She keeps us so long,” I thought. But I could and I did and now I’m better and stronger, 90 percent thanks to my teacher, Mary.

Oh, how I love her. How she has loved us all, so many of us, all over the world. She didn’t just touch so many lives, she made a huge impact. She informed, inspired, and nurtured us. Yes, some she just touched, but what a touch—they’ll never forget her. But those of us fortunate, blessed enough to have had her as our primary teacher—oh! I must be a good person to have deserved her!
—Norma Colón, Introductory, New York, New York

A light was turned on. I was only in her presence three times but she made such a strong impression on me that I used to tell people: if we had more Mary Dunns, the world would be a better place.

The moment she walked into our institute in Los Angeles to teach a weekend workshop, it was as if a light had been turned on. There was an incredible positive and good energy. It was magic.

That power to bring people together is what Mary Dunn represented, among so many other things. I am grateful to have met her. She is a daily inspiration in my life.
—Adriana de Franco, Introductory, São Paulo, Brazil
Joy radiated from her pores. Mary and I shared a lunchtime meal while I was in New York for a board meeting last October. She was interested in hearing about the Association and was very enthusiastic about the planning of Regional Conferences, certain that they would build community and give teachers an opportunity to gain recognition. Of course, I wanted her to participate. Mary was such a wonderful ambassador of Iyengar Yoga. She possessed a freshness that could not be contained, a joy that radiated from her pores. For me, being in her presence that day gave me the impression I was soaring in the right direction.

Mary always affected me that way. She came to Atlanta a number of times years ago and stayed with me while teaching workshops at my studio for the southeast community. Her energy was contagious. We had no senior teacher in Atlanta and she infused us with devotion and delighted us with her ability to joyfully teach philosophy during an asana class. I felt so completely full and inspired at the end of her weekend workshops. I only wish I had done more.

—Linda Di Carlo, Intermediate Junior III, Cranston, Rhode Island

It was like magic. I loved studying with Mary. She was my teacher since I first met her in 1994, and continues to be now. She taught me how to practice. She showed me how to find space and move and open. There was always a sense that she had this great concept that she wanted to share, and she embodied a kind of joyful creativity. There’s nobody like her. She could teach a room full of raw beginners in a way that they would experience integration right from the start. It was like magic.

At the teachers’ convention in Minneapolis, there was a woman who was convinced that she was unable to get into Viparita Dandasana the way we were supposed to. Mary got her into the pose—something that many good teachers could have done. But it was the way she did it: easygoing and light, letting this person find her way through letting go. I remember being really moved by the way Mary helped this person completely change her relationship to the pose, from fear and anxiety to happiness and ease. I felt a strong sense of gratitude at that time, as I have many times over the years. These days, I feel Mary’s presence very strongly in my teaching. I call on that sense of joyful endeavor that she embodied. And I aspire to teach in a way that is worthy of the tremendous gift that it is to have studied with her.


A guide to timelessness. When I think of Mary, I am filled with gratitude and the joy of having known her. I learned from the way she lived and died. Her presence, and the joy I experienced in her presence, are with me today and light the way.

Over the years, I collected quotes from Mary to her students during Savasana. Many of these students in Greenwich, Connecticut, were older and had practiced for many years. I wrote these on slips and scraps of paper collected in the poignant moment just after coming out of corpse pose. I would ask myself, “Should I alter the moment by moving to the note-taking function of the brain?” The answer was yes because the state could be cultivated again, but the words were a guide to timelessness that went beyond a state of being. So, I share one with you: ”Move from the language of relaxation to the language of peace and let the parts of you that are not peaceful respond to the parts that are.”


The definition of a guru. Listening to it now, I can’t make out all the words to the song Along Comes Mary by the Association, but a joy in the melody and a rapture in the refrain capture some of what I feel when I recall my first classes with Mary. At that time, my idea of yoga was to go to the studio where I practiced, lie on a carpeted floor with incense burning, and take a nap. And to be fair, it felt great. I came to Mary because a friend who studied with her had gone to Feathered Pipe Ranch, and I, too, wanted to go to this “camp for grown-ups.” I was told I had to study Iyengar Yoga for at least a year first.

When I began studying with Mary, I was taken aback at the hard work involved. Being terribly lazy by nature, I do not think I would have returned if it weren’t for the way Mary communicated her deep and sincere enthusiasm. After one particularly challenging class consisting of standing poses and inversions, there was a by-product of the exertion. For at least three days, I felt an absence of nervousness and strain that penetrated to a deep psychological level, something I had never before experienced. I traced this new feeling of undeniable calm back to that one class with Mary. My muscles told me so, and my nervous system did, too. I realized that this type of yoga, as taught by such a teacher, was a nonnegotiable essential for me.
Later, when I read the definition of a guru—“one who removes the veil of darkness and shows light on the path”—I knew it was Mary who was doing just that for me. That certainty never left me, and probably never will. Oh, I finally made it to Feathered Pipe about four years later.

—Leslie Freyberg, Intermediate Junior I, Redding, Connecticut

**I STRIKE MY “MARY STANCE.”** Mary Dunn was instrumental in my entire experience of Iyengar Yoga for 12 years. She was calling the questions at the Q & A where I first met Mr. Iyengar. Mary’s Tuesday and Thursday classes in New York became the centerpiece of my schedule, in the beginning at Morocco’s Dance Studio and the Jewish Community Center on the Upper West Side. She literally took 34 of us by the hand on a trip to RIMYI. It took us three days just to arrive in Pune. While we were wilting on the long road to Pune in a broken-down bus, she was standing in the aisle singing a song she made up about yoga to a Gilbert and Sullivan tune. Holy cow!

All of us who wanted to learn to teach were her apprentices; forget about teacher training classes. When Mary answered a student’s question or gave an adjustment, we all went on point to learn. There were three years of lunches at Bennie’s Burritos with Mary leading the search committee for the original Institute on 22nd Street. Mary could never find her socks after teaching—and they were always in her purse. Whenever the telephone rang at 6 AM, I knew it could only be Mary Dunn.

I cannot open my mouth to teach without hearing her words come out. I am still “cutting that pie slice through the second crust to find the back of the hip socket.” *Urdhva Hastasana* is “reaching to the top shelf of the closet for that box of chocolates.” Yoga is only known with experience, she told us, like eating an ice cream cone: you can’t tell by watching from the outside that the ice cream is cold, melts, may have bits and pieces inside. When I can’t think of what else to do to solve my teaching dilemma, I give a big smile and strike my Mary stance. Works every time.

—Bobbie Fultz, Intermediate Junior II, Louisville, Colorado

**A GRACE OF SENSE. “…yet surrounded by a grace of sense, a white light still and moving”**

—T. S. Eliot

In 1984 I first walked into Mary Dunn’s class. It was delight at first sight. The teaching was challenging, sensitive, and very enthusiastic. A clear voice of intelligence and encouragement wound its way through me. There was a sense of being surrounded by a sustained and refined sensitivity, a kind of grace, spontaneous and insightful, always and intentionally poised for discovery. I and many others knew our teacher had arrived.

Mary’s light brought profound insight that enabled us, as teachers, to shape our words, and as practitioners, to expand our horizons. Her light brought out the best in us and inspired our community to act together; with courage she accepted the responsibility to lead. With her skillful communication and boundless energy, through countless meetings, dreams came true. The Iyengar Association of Greater New York was born. We all went to India, to the very heart of inspiration, to our Guruji’s house. An extraordinary institute was built, and then our Guruji came to us, to his house, here.

Insight, action, and devotion. Generous, courageous, and compassionate. That was our Mary, unwavering and consistent all these years, with enormous good will and an infectious sense of humor and fun. One Halloween at the old 24th Street Institute, someone said class should be “costume optional.” On that Tuesday, there was our delightful Mary in cat whiskers, tail, and a little black nose, in deep earnestness, telling us, “Now as you go to the side, lift your chest!”

Now with such heavy hearts of grief we mourn her passing and count ourselves among the very fortunate to have had some time with her in this “drift of stars.” She was a true yogi and taught the whole subject from beginning to the end. One morning as we sat for the invocation, she said, “As you lift and open your chest, be there… in the house of elation.”

For me, this is what she taught, this is what she was building. As we set our course for the future and open and lift our chests, this is where we shall always find her.

—Kevin Gardiner, Intermediate Junior III, Budapest, Hungary
**A search for *le mot juste*.** When I first came to the New York Institute (nearly 18 years ago!), urgent with so many sure ideas of what yoga practice is and should be, I went straight to Mary and she listened to me. When I wrote and voiced and even danced my opinions to her with some force, Mary listened. When I came back from my various travels indignant about the yoga of this and that, Mary listened.

In class, she searched for *le mot juste*, and found it. Outside class as well—how to clarify, how to settle, how to unsettle and move the adventure on, but just so—her words judiciously convened, like an asana poised at its balanced and expressive peak. One day, on the street in Las Vegas, she said, “Sally, try the no-ripple effect.” I’m still pondering this, its hidden flow, tracing the unspoken sinuosities of our relationship. Mary, until June 2007, I didn’t know how much I cared, and was cared for. I didn’t know, and then I did.

And now Mary sits in my heart, sweetly established in a steady, firm, and benevolent Padmasana, her smile spread wider than her knees, and I talk to her and she listens. I bow in gratitude and pray that for a moment—as Mary wrote to us on August 30—I, too, may be “content with this beginning and resolution.”

—Sally Hess, Introductory, New York, New York

**Her most wonderful gift.** I knew Mary Dunn for more than 30 years, and before that, I knew her mother, Mary Palmer, who I first studied with in Ann Arbor in 1973. As much as I loved Mary, and as many things as we shared over the years, the thing that comes to mind is that her most wonderful gift was the way she dealt with the cancer, and her willingness to share that with us. And especially the way she faced death. There is so much more, but this is what comes to me now.

—Suzanne Hodges, retired Intermediate Junior I, New York, New York

**She smiled as if she knew.** From my very first yoga class back in 1983, I heard the name Mary Dunn. I had been happily teaching Tai Chi until it dawned on me that I needed—needed—to learn yoga. I got a book with stick-figure drawings and started to “teach” myself. A month later, I started taking class with Aman Keyes in San Diego. From the moment I stepped onto my mat it was “Mary Dunn says…,” and “Mary Dunn taught….” And it was Mary Dunn from that class onward. Two years later, I was living in New York and got an excited call from Aman. The one and only Mary, who I had never met but who in my mind was near yogic sainthood, was moving to New York!

I called the moment she arrived, ready to start *immediately*. Mary, direct and unflinching as always, replied: “Do not call me for two months.” I was crestfallen. Alas, I thought, “Maybe, to study with Mary, I have to be a teacher.” As any encounter with a true teacher does, this first encounter with Mary gave me that spark of an idea: “Maybe I should become a teacher …” Years later, I recounted the story to Mary. She laughed and said, “When I took your call I was knee-deep in water in the basement of my new house. I was sure it would take me two months to fix, and you wanted to take class that very moment.” Two months later I called her back. And the rest, along with much imparted wisdom from the one and only Mary, is history.

I went to visit Mary in the hospital and took my son Jackson. I told him, “We are going to say goodbye to Mary because she is sick and we will probably not see her again.” At first he said he was sad and would miss her, but then he added, “But I am not so sad because she will have many other lives.” Leaving her room, I told Mary what Jackson had said. For a flash of a moment tears welled up in her eyes, and then she smiled, as if she knew.


**Like a pebble dropped in a pond.** I hear Mary’s voice encouraging my bones to lengthen and strengthen in standing poses and I hear the inspiration in my blood as I balance in *Adho Mukha Vrikshasana*.

Since my first classes with Mary on Grand Street in New York, at Judy Freedman and Peentz Dubble’s studio, she has been a major influence on my yoga practice and my yoga teaching. She has been like a pebble dropped in a pond: the reverberations reach to the very edges of my life and consciousness.

Mary has illuminated many, many lives, making them brighter and easier to live. She lives on in her students.

**A Teacher of Abhinivesa.** Mary lives in my heart, resonating as a teacher’s teacher of life. She was also a teacher of abhinivesa, the big letting go, in the generous way she shared her moving toward acceptance of death. Mary, my first yoga teacher, inspired me on this yogic path, sharing the details of her journey but never getting lost in the details. The details were merely a vehicle to get to the big picture, which she shared with enthusiasm and joy. She was a teacher, philosopher, guide, and friend and I miss her dearly.

—Nancy Kardon, Introductory, Scarsdale, New York

**A Vibrant Force of Energy.** Mary was a vibrant force of energy propelling us along the beginning of our yoga journey. Her joy was so evident in her teaching. In retrospect, I realize that her joy of life, her joy of words, and her joy of teaching were what was so compelling, such an inspiration in my own practice. At the time, I was only beginning in yoga practice, and her teaching of asanas was what I was interested in. I did not realize that she was teaching me so much more.

Mary taught a Wednesday morning yoga class for teachers. She supported our personal practice as well as answering questions we had regarding our students. Aman was a new yoga practitioner as well as a new owner of a yoga studio. Mary took his dedication to practice and teaching very seriously. She would answer all his questions. Of course, instead of just telling us what to do, she taught us in our bodies what to do! Our fellow friends and teachers began to dread Aman’s long list of questions, but Mary loved weaving the answers throughout her class.

Mary instilled in us the importance of staying aligned with Mr. Iyengar’s teachings in our classes, as it was the very beginning of certification. She encouraged each of us in our individuality, yet when teaching, we were to help our students using the clarity of the Iyengar method.

It is difficult to share all that Mary meant to us in these few lines. Those first formative years with Mary Dunn have sustained and inspired us all these years of practice.

—Sunny and Aman Keays, Intermediate Junior III, San Diego, California

**Laughter, smile, energy, passion.** I am honored to say that Mary was my first Iyengar Yoga teacher almost 20 years ago. Her wit, passion, and depth of knowledge hooked me. Mary is the one who lit the fire in me to focus my efforts and to study and pursue teaching in the path of Iyengar Yoga.

One year at Feathered Pipe Ranch, I asked every student for the first three words they thought of when thinking of Mary (do some of you remember this?). I took all of those words and cut them up to create a piece of poetry which I read at our fun talent night. From 40-plus students I got these same words over and over again: laughter, smile, energy, passion, laughter, smile, energy, humor… you get the point. Mary, if anything, made a strong imprint on others with her intense personality, and she was so authentic that she came through loud and clear.

Eleven years ago my father died, and I wanted to do something special to remember him. During that time, Mary and James were leading a yoga trip to Bali. I joined the group along with some of Mary’s longtime students; her daughter Louise was there, too. I brought my father’s ashes with me and ended up leaving them in a sacred lake that we visited high up in the mountains. Mary was so kind and generous to me during that time. How she cared for me was so beautiful. She was a true yogini holding the space for my father’s transition from one life to the next with grace and clarity. There was nothing sad about it. It was just the natural life cycle, and her demeanor helped me remember this. I have photos of Mary from formal dances we attended; she is dancing with the local Balinese girls with beautiful flowers in her hair, smiling and holding her hands in delicate mudras.

I feel you can hear me, Mary, and I can hear your voice quite clearly. Thank you for your teaching, your friendship, and your pure heart.

—Lisa Jo Landsberg, Intermediate Junior I, Boulder, Colorado

**Always Welcoming.** I was slack-jawed with disbelief. She wants us to do what? Feet on the chair seat, hands on the floor behind the shoulders and… push up?!? Wow. Far out.

The year was 1978. I had nonchalantly signed up for an Iyengar Yoga workshop in Seattle with a woman named Mary Dunn.
Her infectious good humor, ebullient vitality, and inexhaustible curiosity, along with her commitment to this method called Iyengar Yoga, presented me with an adventure I could not refuse. Through her initial inspiration, I was hooked. It has become my lifelong love.

I was so impressed that I immediately invited her to come to Portland to teach. Although I was totally unknown to her, she agreed. Over the years, she became my teacher, friend, and confidant. She always had time for a visit, whether it was in Berkeley, San Diego, Rye, or New York City.

Mary was an inclusive person. Always welcoming… more questions at the end of class, more people to join in for dinner, more options to thoughtfully consider when making a decision.

May we all feel inspired to be open to our own curiosity, enthusiasm, and generosity for having known Mary, and may we be comforted in the knowledge that we carry her spirit in our hearts. Forever.
—Julie Lawrence, Intermediate Junior III, Portland, Oregon

**WHAT LINGERS FOR US TO GRASP.** The morning Mary died I wrote, “My path of yoga started with you.” Mary was not my first teacher, but she was the first who taught me how to teach.

I love what Mary said in a recent article: “I have learned to live life without holding onto it.” That’s something I want to relish and go back to. That’s a way of living our yoga. Mary, you taught us to live in the present moment. How easy it is to slip into the past, to let fond memories eclipse the present and stifle the necessary freedom of now.

When a loved one dies there is a huge gaping hole. What can we fill it with: with loneliness, with missing the person? Or can we instead remember their teachings? From the beginning of time, great teachers have died and left their students to continue their mission. We must think about the greatness they leave behind, what lingers for us to grasp and make part of our daily life and ritual. What Mary taught us is that we all have that responsibility to continue to teach, to share her teachings and her good example.

I remember what I learned from Mary. To rise early and greet the morning. To live life to the fullest. To smile broadly, evenly, fully, and often. To spread your arms wide to embrace the world. To speak from your heart. To teach with clarity of speech. To enjoy life and share that in your teaching. Mary taught eloquence and the power of the spoken word. She taught with sincerity, she taught from the heart, and she gave me the security to do that, too.

There is an old song lyric that I think about when I think about Mary: “Keep on the sunny side / Always on the sunny side / Keep on the sunny side of life…”
—Rebecca Lerner, Intermediate Junior III, Lemont, Pennsylvania

**SHE HAD TO TALK QUICKLY.** Many years ago, I signed up for a retreat workshop with Mary. A week or so before it began, I had an accident that caused a serious disc herniation in my lower back. Since I could not sit or stand for any length of time without pain, I called Mary and left a message, asking to have my name removed from the registration list.

The following day Mary called, explaining that she had to talk quickly. She asked me to get a pen and start writing, then read to me a sequence she had recently learned from Guruji for my type of injury. As she spoke, I could hear the sound of airplanes taking off in the background, then a click… silence… then her voice again. “I don’t have any more change,” she said, “did you get that?” “Yes,” I said. “Good!” Then lasting silence.
—Jeff Logan, Intermediate Junior I, Northport, New York

**A TIMELESS TEACHER.** In a Savasana that Mary taught years ago, she gently admonished us to “find contentment in the position you are already in.” I was sure she was speaking directly to me—my various itches, my mind’s ticker tape of past preoccupations and future plans, and my obsession with perfect alignment that caused me to adjust one more time. Finally, I stopped. I let go and gave in to the pose. I became quiet. Time was suspended as I made space for santosa (contentment) to join me there.
Years after that, I became a teacher myself. During a visit to RIMYI in 2006, during Savasana Geeta said, “Go to the place where you are no one and you are nothing.” I traveled to that place as best I could without fear. I indeed discovered contentment there. Mary’s teaching gave me the courage to follow Geeta’s austere instructions. As yogis, we practice corpse pose at the end of class—each class its own unique lifetime and universe—every Savasana a refuge of timelessness, where the wisdom of yoga can be assimilated. In that state, where the ego recedes, true contentment and freedom awaits.

I had the good fortune to hear Mary speak in July at her last visit to our institute in New York, fittingly, a celebration of Guru Purnima, an honoring of teachers. She spoke of her mother, Mary Palmer, and her teacher, B. K. S. Iyengar. As I watched her speak so eloquently and with great joy, she seemed to transcend her physical form, radiating her luminous spirit. I listened as she spoke of the important principles embodied in yoga and how it is the teachings that survive the ages. Mary, rest assured that your teachings and influence upon us all survive as easily as those timeless and universal truths you wove so skillfully into each and every class.

—Tori Milner, Intermediate Junior I, New York, New York

A transformational experience. Through all the many years I knew Mary, I took only a few classes with her at a couple of conventions. But I did have a transformational experience with her in a weekend teacher training workshop at the Institute. I was teaching Akarna Dhanurasana, not a pose that was easy for me at the time (and still not easy today). But Mary had her way of cutting through the “mind stuff” of the pose, and now I practice and teach it regularly.

Even more importantly, she taught me a way of teaching teachers. She stopped me in the middle of my teaching and corrected me on the spot. Others may have been disturbed by this technique, but I was grateful. Why go on teaching incorrectly when you can do it correctly right now?

—Suzie Muchnick, Intermediate Junior III, Naples, Florida

Infinitely giving. There are so many memories of Mary—such an extraordinary person leaves multiple deep impressions over many years. But now my overriding sense of her is her great generosity. She brought us all together in the temple she built for Iyengar Yoga and human development. Mary was infinitely giving of her time and knowledge, as well as her tolerance and celebration of all our different natures and abilities.

—Brooke Myers, Intermediate Junior III, New York, New York

Her legendary imagery. Most of my learning with Mary Dunn was at the Feathered Pipe Ranch. For many of the last seven years, I have trekked to Montana for a week of Iyengar Yoga, teacher training, and fun with Mary, Dean Lerner, and Rebecca Lerner. Mary always taught a challenging class but managed to be both practical and warm hearted at the same time.

Mary’s use of imagery in her demonstrations (whether on herself or with a student) is legendary. Who can forget “kangaroo legs” in Adho Mukha Svanasana, “backing the car into the garage” in Parsvottanasana, and the suggestion of “yachting” while in Paripuna Navasana. Mary would always join in the Feathered Pipe Follies on Friday night, usually singing a Broadway tune to everyone’s amusement and delight.

In teacher training sessions at the ranch, Mary always got to the heart of the would-be teacher’s struggles and explained how they could improve in a nurturing yet direct manner. A few years ago, Mary gave me a priceless gift as the week of yoga at the ranch ended. About 20 people had gone to the airport at 5 AM to catch the early flights home. We were all saying our goodbyes as each of us went to our respective gates. As I said goodbye to Mary, she looked me straight in the eye and said, “Do well on your assessment, Nina, but more importantly, be a good teacher.” I remind myself often of her wisdom and her spirit of giving as I strive to live up to her words.

—Nina Pileggi, Intermediate Junior I, Portland, Oregon

Thank you, Mary, I miss you very much. I met Mary Dunn in 1988 when, due to a back injury, I was sent to her by Dr. Loren Fishman. At that time, I had two young children, a full-time job, and a pinched nerve that made me unable to be active. Mary taught me how to be in Tadasana and Urdhva Hastasana, hanging from the door frame, making space between the vertebrae. After three sessions of yoga, I was able to go back to my daily activities, and avoided back surgery. I was so impressed by the process that I started going to class twice a week. In 1993, Mary started a teacher-training program in
New York City and Greenwich, Connecticut, and she asked me to join. I have been an Iyengar Yoga teacher for 10 years now and have just opened a studio in Stamford, Connecticut. Thank you Mary, I miss you very much.

—Silvana Stein, Introductory, Stamford, Connecticut

No time like now. I took my first class with Mary Dunn when I was 20 years old and visiting New York because I was thinking of moving to the city after college. Towards the close of class, Mary said (and I hear her voice as I write this), “Well folks, it all ends in Savasana.” Much of the class laughed and my stomach tightened because Savasana was the most difficult pose for me at that time. Mary calmly talked the class through a 20-minute Savasana, gently preparing each one of us to lie motionless and calm. I trusted her words, and ultimately myself, as I experienced the gradual inward turning, moving deeper and deeper within. Then I rolled to my right side, continuing to rest my head. As I pushed myself up to a seated position and opened my eyes, I saw the magic of an angle of light casting its spell on the wall of the classroom. I realized Savasana was a pose I could now practice. Mary showed me how to build my stamina and inner resources through all her practices.

—Eliza Bishop, Kerala, India

Service, dedication, luminosity, and joy. When I first started taking classes with Mary in 1988 or so, I wasn’t that impressed. Here was this unassuming, petite, brown-haired woman in yoga shorts who didn’t look like a celebrity. She looked more like a high school cheerleader. I didn’t immediately understand that she was a great teacher. Mary’s classes were difficult and her demands were exacting. It was hard work. Sometimes, she would demonstrate a pose and the class would collectively gasp (as, for example, in Sarvangasana, when she showed how to draw in the spine and lengthen it within its muscular supports, or how to free it from the tense hold of those supports). Lessons like these and the steady grace of her presence showed me how fortunate I was to learn from Mary Dunn: a clear and graceful teacher and splendid mentor in all of yoga.

Mary embodied a welcoming and inclusive spirit that embraced all in her presence. She could teach a room of 40 (or 80) students and see each one as an individual while continuing to guide the practice of the whole group. Her dazzling, warm smile and flashing blue eyes, her exuberant joy and intense interest compelled all to do their very best to be in the pose as she instructed.

And her instructions were so rich in language and metaphor! I remember vividly numerous analogies that she used to increase student understanding and resolve difficulties in poses. Analogies from architecture: flying buttresses, suspension bridges, archways. Analogies from technology: opening your chest with your hand on your hip as if opening a vent window on a car (oh, but modern cars don’t have these…). My favorite analogies were about hands: in Sarvangasana using the hands sensitively as if holding a violin; in Savasana, releasing and curling the hand “like mouse paws.” I love that last analogy, and it’s so perfect for Savasana.

With Mary’s passing, my heart is empty and full at the same time. Is the world diminished because she is not here? Yes. But it is much greater because she was here. I am deeply grateful to have witnessed her example of service, dedication, luminosity, and joy. She taught me much more than asana, and much more than yoga. I will miss her.

—Mary Beth Early, Brooklyn, New York

Hamba Kahle, Mary. Mary Dunn conveyed powerful wisdom with the very lightest of touches. Those of us who had the pleasure of attending classes with Mary, both in South Africa and abroad, have wonderful memories and recollections, not just as a result of the information Mary imparted, but because of the marvelous way in which she conveyed that knowledge in her teaching and all her interactions.

Mary evidently took great pleasure in using language to “induce play in the body.” For her, language was a way of “looking around the edges, of always being alive to new possibilities,” which she helped us experience in classes with her.

Joking with us about how we needed to be more diverse, like the amazing animals she’d seen on safari in South Africa, Mary found endlessly creative ways of inducing us to explore the hidden pockets and dim areas of our bodies and minds. Combining her skillful wordplay and wonderful sense of humor, Mary nudged, prodded, and poked us out of the dullness of the old and into the delight and surprise of the new.
After a class in which Mary had introduced us to some of the intricate ways in which we could locate and create spaces in our bodies and minds, someone enquired whether Mary was related to Houdini. We soon established that she wasn’t, but she said she didn’t mind being in his tradition.

While in South Africa in May 2006, Mary made time to get acquainted with aspects of our culture and history. She listened to our music and heard about our struggle for democracy. Her shining spirit touched us all. Her vitality, generosity, and open-mindedness have left us with memories and experiences that can only enrich us as we go forward in our practice and our lives.

In South Africa, when we salute our loved ones we say, “Hamba Kahle.” Hamba Kahle, Mary. Go in Peace.
—Lauren Gower, Johannesburg, South Africa

The African principle of transcendence. I knew Mary as a teacher, then felt her love as a wise friend. It is impossible to speak of Mary in the past tense. She is fully present with us, watching and smiling. I feel as if I am about to feel the radiance of her luminous smile. Even after her operation, there she was, ethereal and slight, equally elegant in yoga bloomers or Issey Miyake. Her teachings were an imperceptible blending of American and Indian ways, full of specificity about the body. She would suddenly weave in a colloquial joke; immersed in the seriousness of an asana, there would be lightness and laughter.

Mary, more than anyone I know, embodied Ubuntu, the African principle of transcendence through which the individual is pulled out of himself or herself, back towards the ancestors, forward towards the community and the potential each one of us has. It literally means, “A person is a person by or through other people.” Mary Dunn overflowed with Ubuntu.

Ubuntu requires that we come out of ourselves to realize the ethical quality of humanness. If I give a bottle of water to someone who is brutally thirsty I may get nothing back. But 20 years down the line, my daughter may find herself thirsty and without water, and someone will give her the water she so desperately needs, because I have helped to build a community that lives by this demanding ethic.

Mary had the ability to create a sense of community by knowing she belonged to a greater whole. She fluidly crossed borders, making the harmony and light she found in Guruji’s teachings in Pune, ours here in New York. She upheld the light her mother gave her when she introduced her to Guruji and Iyengar Yoga. Above all, she was always accessible—a human being first. She was filled with Ubuntu. It is now our responsibility to take on each other’s strength and weaknesses alike, to live and work beyond ego, and salute our beloved Mary as we strive to emanate Ubuntu in our lives.
—Mira Nair, New York, New York

Mary’s legacy lives on. Mary’s legacy lives on. Although both Mary Dunn and Iyengar Yoga have long roots in Ann Arbor, planted by Mary Dunn’s mother, Mary Palmer, and although I have lived in Ann Arbor for more than 30 years, I only came to yoga about five years ago. It was then that I met Mary Dunn, when she returned to Ann Arbor for a family visit and a series of yoga workshops at the Ann Arbor YMCA. Like her mother, a patron of the arts whom I had written about for the local newspaper, Mary Dunn had a radiance and inner beauty that invited even those who encountered her casually into her light. As she walked around the studio offering corrections, I told her I had a fairly new artificial hip. She pointed to her own hip and said, “Me, too.” She was an inspiration to me, pointing the way to continuing the things one loved and valued even in the face of obstacles. Yoga played a great role in my recovery.

When I came to New York this fall, I hoped to study with Mary. Instead, I read her obituary on the IYAGNY website. But I have found Norma Colón, who was Mary’s student, and Mary’s legacy lives on for me, as it does for so many others.
—Susan Nisbett, Ann Arbor, Michigan

We’ll never forget her. Mary was my first yoga teacher in Greenwich, Connecticut, in a big gym full of enthusiasts. I was 64 years old. We did postures over and over, with lots of physical and talkative input from Mary and, occasionally, an assistant. We folded our blankets with great care, used belts and bolsters, and learned the proper position for downward-facing dog. Mary told us that the
practice of yoga was like making pancakes: you had to throw the first one away. Your first try at an asana was inevitably something to throw away! We will never forget her.

—Olga Rothschild, Duxbury, Massachusetts

**LIVING EMBODIMENT OF GRATITUDE.** Mary Palmer, Mary Dunn's mother, was one of my first teachers. Mary Palmer and her husband, Bill, were significant contributors to the University Musical Society at the University of Michigan. In the 60s and early 70s, when Yehudi Menuhin would come to play in Hill Auditorium, he would stay with Mary's parents in the house Frank Lloyd Wright designed for them in 1951. At one dinner party, he talked about this remarkable yoga teacher, B. K. S. Iyengar. Mary Palmer went to India, was awestruck by Mr. Iyengar's genius, and the rest is history. At the strong recommendation of Mary Palmer, the YMCA of Ann Arbor invited Mr. Iyengar to teach his first public classes in the United States, in 1973.

Every year Mary Louise—that was what we called Mary Dunn—would come back to Ann Arbor to teach. Her teaching was a marvelous amalgamation of many influences. There was the influence of music, and the beautiful metaphors and analogies she would use from music. There was her love of nature—that was the influence of her father—and she would continually weave that in, in such a poetic way.

Mary Louise was always inclusive and egalitarian in the teaching. She respected and appreciated each student and the commitment they had made to this practice. It didn't matter to her whether that person had gone to India 17 times or didn't even know about India. Mary's responses to her students came from the fountain of appreciation she had for the subject, and from her love for her fellow seekers.

In May 2007, Mary taught her last class at the Ann Arbor Y. Her mother was there. Afterward, stories were told to us about a study people had read about. People around the world were asked about the most important ingredient to happiness. Some thought it would be love or peace or family, but this study found that the secret to happiness was gratitude. To me, Mary Louise was a living embodiment of gratitude. Her gratitude for having found this marvelous discipline, and our gratitude to Mary Louise for sharing this path to self-discovery with all of us.

—David Ufer, Ann Arbor, Michigan

**PRACTICE EFFORTLESSLY... WITH GREAT ATTENTION.** To me, Mary was a teacher, a colleague, and a friend. In my daily journal, I tried to write the main points after Mary's classes. Looking back at my notes, I see the common denominator: **Practice effortlessly, yet pay great attention to the alignment of the pose.** The message I understood is to be “softer” in some regions of the body, yet active and attentive in others. This teaching allowed me to turn in Parivritta Trikonasana, but also makes me aware that to understand Mary's great teaching will probably take hours of daily practice for years to come.

I was fortunate to have great time with Mary outside the classroom thanks to her interest in the therapeutic aspect of Iyengar Yoga. We met a few times at the clinic, learning and practicing the best ways to help people with disabilities. We also traveled to different venues to explain the great fit between physical therapy and Iyengar Yoga. We were invited to teach at a few annual conventions of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). It was interesting to watch Mary teach 100 therapists unfamiliar with her name and fame. They were prepared for a nonparticipatory, Power Point-style presentation. By a show of hands, only one third said they would take an active part. Mary was ready, standing proudly in her shorts (she was the only one wearing them). Within five minutes, everyone, including those who said they would only watch, were participating. She inspired many therapists to take Iyengar classes and teacher training.

Blessed to spend time with Mary outside the classroom, I learned about her love of nature; her knowledge of trees (learned from her father); her love of her family, traveling, and friends; and her compassion and desire to help people.

I miss Mary, but I admire the fact that she lived a great life, touching and inspiring many people. Her memory and her teaching are with us.

—Dalia Zwick, PT, PhD, Tenafly, New Jersey