



Photo by Christine Hewitt

YogaLife

BY KIMBERLY ALLEN

The Latin phrase *Esse quam videri* means: to be, rather than to seem. Yoga guru, body positivity advocate, and author Jessamyn Stanley tattooed this expression on her forearm as a reminder to always be authentic, genuine, and true to herself.

But if you get the opportunity to talk with the woman who helped level yoga's playing field you quickly realize the reminder is not necessary, as she already exudes these traits.

Like most, Jessamyn didn't start out this way. In and outside of the yoga studio she worked on herself and for awhile, was

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admittedly her own worst enemy. “On any given day the average person will say so many horrible things to themselves. And instead of just pretending like those things aren't happening it's about facing those moments down, being your own cheerleader, and doing self-inquiry by asking questions like, ‘Why am I saying these things about myself? Are these things that I really believe? If they're not, where is this coming from? Is this a need to conform?’” she proposes. “Most people are too afraid to do that kind of inquiry but in my opinion, that's the only way to have a better body image. I also think that conversation is separate from yoga, which prepares your soul and spirit for much bigger things than whether or not you like yourself. Practicing yoga is actually looking within yourself in only the way that the practice can make you do.”

Yoga is described as allowing one the freedom to be who they are; a practice that is all accepting, all encompassing, all unifying. But like everything in life yoga is what you make it, and Jessamyn has made it her own despite the occasional body shamers and internet trolls who mistakenly believe their opinions actually matter. “I'm just living my yoga practice, trying to adhere to this life as much as I can at every moment. And it's wild to me that anyone even cares,” she confesses. “I think the antidote to body negativity is body positivity, and really trying to harvest self-love within the cells by acknowledging the moments in which we are hateful toward ourselves. And these moments are endless.”

Her confidence is contagious and the way she weaves her experiences together makes her book, *Every Body Yoga*, a must read. Sharing her journey in real talk—part Yoga 101 and (perhaps unintentionally) part Psych 101 for those who can admit seeing themselves in her descriptions. From finding the best class/studio environment for your practice to shopping for yoga gear and truly “necessary” accessories, Jessamyn answers questions that don't come easily in a Google search. And her step-by-step pose pictures are literally *everything* for beginners! “The whole purpose of practicing any of the poses and doing the breath work is so that you can calm your mind down enough to sit quietly and meditate. That's the only reason to do anything. And this is why I always say yoga is for everybody, because as long as you can breathe—

Some Benefits of Yoga



Performing everyday activities in a satisfying manner can be difficult at times because of stress or other emotional imbalances that we suffer in life.

Yoga through meditation works remarkably to accomplish harmony within and helps the mind work in synchronization with the body.

Yoga is known to amplify flexibility; yoga poses trigger different joints of the body. Including those joints that are not acted upon with regular exercises routines.

Yoga offers a total detoxification of the body. It gently stretches the muscles and joints as well as massaging the various organs. Yoga also ensures the optimum blood supply to various parts of the body.

But these enormous physical benefits are just side effects of this powerful practice. What yoga does is harmonize the mind with the body, and this results in real quantum benefits.

Meditative practices through yoga help in achieving an emotional balance through detachment.

This in turn creates an extraordinary calmness and positive outlook, which also has tremendous benefits on physical health.



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even if you need assistance to breathe—then you're practicing yoga," she confirms.

Because we live in a society that promotes weight loss as the primary reason to exercise, Ms. Stanley refuses to play the numbers game with the scale; she is committed to taking care of her body and yoga is just one way to accomplish that. "I need exercise to be fun. It has got to be interesting, because otherwise I'm not going to be into it," she clarifies, listing weight training and cycling as options with the most intriguing activity being hiking. "It's really just walking on a different kind of terrain. And it's more interesting than walking down the street because you get to look at lots of different kinds of trees and animals, cross rivers, and see amazing things along the way."

She also champions the Queer Oriented Radical Days of Summer (QORDS), a weeklong LGBTI youth day camp founded by a college friend that focuses on music and social justice. "QORDS caters to queer kids from all over the world. They form bands, do empowerment workshops, and all kinds of stuff for attendees who frequently come from areas where it's unsafe for them to be themselves," details Jessamyn. "To me, growing up queer in a very traditional, homophobic North Carolina town, it's awesome that there is now a space where kids who are going through that same experience can feel safe, strong, and powerful."

New opportunities to share herself with the world are already lining up for 2018, such as the Stitcher Premium podcast, *Jessamyn Explains It All*, debuting in January. "I'll answer common yoga advice questions and

talk about what it means to live the yoga lifestyle for real, not just on Instagram." She is also working on her second book, which will include hot topics like politics, race relations and appropriations, and how all of these things relate to a 21st century yoga practice.

Whether on the road doing book signings and speaking engagements or hiking up a mountain, Stanley's practice is the glue that keeps it all flowing. "Yoga has helped me understand that balance is possible. But that balance is something that you have to continue with what you work towards," she reasons. "The moment you think you've found perfect balance is the moment that the seesaw is going to tilt in another direction. I'm just going to show up for the journey and treasure the moments I feel as though I'm in balance. When I'm not in balance, I'm going to try to utilize the tools that I have to work towards feeling that balance. And I'm just going to continue doing that until I'm done with this video game."

Authentic. Genuine. True.
Jessamyn!



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