

From Tow Law to Tokyo and my Yoga Journey

GABRIELLA White, a former student of Wolsingham school and graduate of Durham University, is working and living in Japan. Gabriella, who has a flair for languages, is bi-lingual in English and Dutch and can speak French and German fluently, is now learning the Japanese language. Along with her love of languages and a desire to see the world, Gabriella has recently become a Yoga teacher. She spent work experience with us at the Gazette and has, over the years, reported for us too. Here she tells the Weardale Gazette her exclusive story...

My yoga journey actually began in Weardale at Wolsingham Sports hall two years ago, where I used to take classes twice a week.

I always went home after lessons feeling on top of the world, both mentally and physically. The energy and relaxation I felt after a session were blissful and I functioned better as a human being. I felt like I had offloaded something and always went home with a feeling of deep inner happiness. The benefits of yoga really are tremendous and the beauty of yoga is that it is a life-long practice accessible to people of any age.

I moved from Weardale to Tokyo last year to pursue my career in broadcasting with the intention of continuing yoga here in Japan. Unsurprisingly, yoga is massively popular here as it is throughout Asia. And yoga has its fair shares of celebrity followers too. Sting loves it, Madonna swears by it and now even Russell Brand is campaigning about it with the "Urban Yogis", explaining how it has got his life back on track and made it easy for him to live a healthy lifestyle. "It works" he says and has become addicted to it. There are certainly worse things to be addicted to. In fact, I am a self-confessed yoga addict myself.

So what is it about this ancient practice, born in India that gets people hooked? In my own experience, yoga has connected my body and mind and has enabled me to see myself in an objective way; meditation even more so. The practice has enabled me to make better decisions and spring to action more as opposed to mulling things over for too long. I have a rush of positive energy following a yoga session, which allows me to perform well in other areas of my life such as my work life and study. My face literally changed: I noticed it when I looked in the mirror shortly after upping my yoga practice to several times a week earlier this year. What's more, people around me began to notice it too: my skin was literally glowing.

"You look radiant. What's your secret?" people would say. Bearing in mind that city life can be quite draining as opposed to life in Weardale with its abundance of clean air, plentiful green and slower paced living, the city of Tokyo never sleeps and the nocturnal nature of the city can take its toll on health, rest and relaxation as everything is non-stop; the neon lights, noise pollution, work pressures; the list goes on. However, when deepening my yoga practice I realised it only needed to be that way if I wanted it to be. It's essential to stop and listen to your body and mind and yoga is the ideal way to do that. It is also known to heighten your senses, your alertness and to strengthen your immune system.

This is an obvious one, but my body became more flexible. My body felt lighter and less weighed down as I walked down the street. This comes down to the actual practice itself. Yoga teaches you to

literally be lighter on your feet, which is best in balancing poses and jump backs. You need to be careful not to damage your joints in the practice and the key to that is to be lighter on your feet. Realising this reminded me of what an aborigine told me in the Australian bush three years ago about humans walking differently in nature such as the jungle. We are in fact heavier on our feet in the concrete jungle which makes us more susceptible to damaging our joints; and it's detrimental to our health.

I also noticed my hair and nails starting to grow faster and stronger. I started to laugh more and feel generally happier. I have come to realise the philosophy of yoga and the lifestyle attached to it. In accepting where you are in the here and now, knowing where you are going and savouring the day, I have developed more patience for things and the acceptance that everything comes at its own time when it is meant to. Realising this in itself has made me happier as a person and less impatient to rush things prematurely. The practice of yoga is an analogy to life.

The next one is a big one: I have connected more with my breathing. As a former asthma sufferer, breathing has always been something of paramount importance, in particular maintaining regular breath. In yoga, I am very aware of my breathing. Getting the breath right is essential for the correct practice of yoga, as you need to regulate it to continue the flow, which is easier said than done in challenging postures where the instinct is to hold your breath to hold the pose. I have now started running workshops based on breathing exercises and how to incorporate this into yoga practice and everyday life. This is where yoga fits into the bigger picture of leading a balanced life. I have become more connected to nature and have realized how important it is to engage in the outdoors and the sounds and scents of it.

I started getting into yoga in a big way in April of this year, when I joined a new studio in Tokyo. Not only did I meet and connect with an interesting bunch of people from around the world, but I soon got addicted to the practice, going to the studio 5 times a week, attending workshops with Japanese and international yoga teachers alike, some of whom would tell us ancient stories of Indian legends: all very motivating for the practice.

I experimented with different classes. The real endorphins rush for me came after a class of ashtanga yoga, one of the more intensive forms of yoga that creates great heat in the body: ashtanga is known for its detoxifying and cleansing qualities, not to mention weight loss and body toning. Bearing in mind that exercise in Tokyo's sweltering, jam-packed yoga studios in summer can be grueling, the perseverance and dripping sweat on the mat reaps its benefits like you won't believe. Ashtanga gives you an energy rush and a feeling of



Gabriella White with the Yoga team.

invincibility: a natural high. Ashtanga vinyasa is a modern form of the ancient form of ashtanga yoga. Creative ideas come to me quicker too. Your focus improves and one thing I noticed about myself is I became more talkative and extra communicative with people, more sociable even. I felt connected to myself, others and the Universe.

You know when people talk about a calling for something? Well, this is what led me to becoming a teacher in August—things became very easy for me since leading the yogi lifestyle, situations have unfolded themselves, answers to life's questions have effortlessly come to me and there have been sure signs pointing me in this direction. Finally the call to action came in May, when I stumbled upon a teacher training class in Bali that really appealed to me. I was looking to deepen my yoga practice and share with others the great joy of the practice and the feeling of well-being that is gained from it. This transformation of body and mind is something I want to share with others from around the world. Following an intriguing conversation with this training school, I booked my tickets to Bali and was off for an intensive, 12-16 hours daily yoga practice for a month on the west coast of the island. In the run-up, I increased my practice to a daily practice to prepare body and mind.

I expected the journey to be great. It was however more than that. It was exceptional and life-changing. Training as an instructor is so much more than just the yoga practice. It deepened my knowledge of the body's anatomy, the history of the yoga gurus, origins of the practice, chakras, in other words, the body's energy points, Indian philosophy, sutras, natural healing, Ayurveda, the practice of healthy breathing, meditation, massage and how to be a good mentor to yogis in challenging situations. First and foremost, it is essential to connect to the inner self in order to connect with others through dedicated self-practice.

If we don't know ourselves in

body and mind then how can we be expected to guide others? Routine-permitting, meditation and yoga practice at 6:30am is a good time to start; you can start earlier if possible, but in modern day life and daytime jobs this may not always be practical. To be well-rested is also important. In July, I finally became a yoga alliance internationally certified yoga instructor. I remember the last practice on the beach in Bali before returning to Tokyo: the last challenge was to complete 108 of the sun salutations (the opening sequence to ashtanga yoga): it is said in India that the number 108 carries great significance and is lucky. The sun is 108 times the diameter of the Earth for example. It was the marker of the beginning of a long journey to come.

To my delight, my housemates in Tokyo have joined me in my yoga practice before going to work; we now do a morning yoga and meditation practice together at sunrise. I am delighted to share my passion for yoga with them and be able to do so with others. Anyone from the Dale wanting English-speaking lessons whilst I am in Asia is welcome to contact me (I do both private lessons and group classes). I also practice outdoor yoga in Tokyo's parks with groups and everyone always goes home with a big smile on their face, happy and at peace. Just email: g.w.white@dunelm.org.uk

Lastly, yoga has given me the confidence to roll my mat out literally anywhere: I've stopped caring what people think about me doing my practice anywhere (the airport, the station, the kitchen, the park). Practicing yoga in nature is very rejuvenating and calming to the mind, so I aim to continue this practice at home and in my most favourite place to do it: the outdoors. Traditionally, the yoga gurus of India would place blankets outside and practice on them. The western world now uses man-made mats, but as long as you have a surface to work on, you can be imaginative with your yoga kit. I diligently continue my yoga practice whenever I get the chance. And when I don't have the time I make the time. Upon becoming a Yoga Alliance certified instructor, I signed up to a lifetime commitment to the practice and what a beautiful commitment it is to make.

Apple Trees in October



By Ros Nichol

Reports from up and down the Dale suggest that pollination of apple trees in 2014 was patchy, some varieties having blossomed during a cool spell in the Spring.

As a result, my Grenadier at 1200' has apparently done better than a Grenadier at a much lower level in Stanhope, presumably because the latter tree flowered earlier and was caught by frost or insects were not flying at the time. Grenadier is supposedly ready for picking in mid-August, which it may be down south, but I picked mine in late September and they were just ready. It is not a long keeper so apple and bramble pie is on the menu.....

October is the usual month for Apple Days in the North, held in farmers' markets, gardens, National Trust properties and village Halls. We have had two Apple Days so far in Stanhope but I am not running one this year. Perhaps next year.

The object of Apple Days is to allow people to sample different varieties of fruit and apple juice, and to help gardeners by giving advice on selection of varieties, cultivation, pruning etc. There is usually an element of fun involved, and a wide range of apple varieties on display. The biggest Apple Day in the North after the show at Harrogate, is probably at Acorn Bank, held this year on Sunday October 12th. Acorn Bank is a National Trust property in Cumbria with extensive grounds including a herb garden, flower gardens, large orchards and woodland walk to a restored water-mill. A panel of experts is usually on hand to identify apple varieties and there are apple-related activities, pruning demonstrations, archery, dancing displays, music and a wide range of stalls. Closer to home, Hexham Farmers' Market has an apple-themed morning on Saturday October 11th in Hexham Market Place. To enjoy these events you do not need to be as apple obsessed as I am; they usually have a wide range of interesting activities for everyone including children, so they are a good family outing.

If you are thinking of planting apple trees this winter the orchards at Acorn Bank display different ways of growing a wide range of varieties. As the reference collection there increases, lines of cordons are being planted as these take up less space. At Eggleston Hall Gardens apple trees can be seen grown as standards, espaliers, fans and stepovers. The old trees trained on the back wall are thought to date from the 1930s and include Allington Pippin, King of the Pippins, Hovgate Wonder, Grenadier, Laxton's Fortune – and some which have not yet been identified.

So, if you are considering planting apple trees now is a good time to visit orchards, find out which varieties you LIKE and look at the different ways of growing them.