

# Full Circle

## »» WITH LESLIEVILLE YOGA

Everyone who ends up teaching yoga will tell you about the profound affect the practice has had on their lives. In the case of Anita Barnes, owner of Leslieville Yoga, the fascination began at age 12 when she witnessed her mother's use of yoga to survive an unhappy marriage. By her mid-20s, Anita's curiosity grew enough for her to start practicing yoga. Anita said, "I was drawn to the simple practice of Hatha Yoga and the five principles of proper eating, exercise, relaxation, breathing, positive thinking, and meditation. It made so much sense to me." Starting with a well-worn copy of a yoga book her mother gave her, Anita has integrated yoga into her life.

Anita credits yoga and swimming as being her saviours during her pregnancy with her daughter. After the birth of Elsa Pete, her yoga practice became less consistent until she stumbled across the Sivananda Yoga Vendata Centre in Toronto in 1993. Upon entering the building and experiencing the lovely, rich colours and the subtle scent of incense, Anita felt transformed. She attended classes regularly and even went on yoga vacations in Val Morin, Quebec, and in the Bahamas.

For years Anita desired to teach yoga, but her daughter was young and she couldn't take the month to go the Ashram in the Laurentians for the teacher's training course. Anita explained, "I discovered that there was a kid's yoga camp in Val Morin, so my daughter and I set off shortly after she turned seven. It was an intense boot camp lasting four weeks. We both struggled the first week, and I was exhausted from the 5:30 a.m. wake up, 15 hours days, and the caffeine withdrawal. We both wanted to run away, but I knew leaving was not an option." Anita and Elsa persevered, and Anita now reports that taking the training was one of the best experiences in her life. In 1998, upon her return to Toronto, she started teaching at the Sivananda Yoga Vendata Centre.

Yoga is certainly a major part of Anita's life. She attributes her ability to overcome a tendency toward depression and her excellent physical and mental health to her consistent practice of yoga and meditation, along with maintaining a healthy diet and lifestyle. In addition Anita mentions, "I have challenges with my back, namely scoliosis and kyphosis, so I am limited in

doing really advanced postures, but the regular practice of yoga has kept my back healthy and pain free."

In January of 2010 Anita opened up Leslieville Yoga, which is a small yoga studio in the basement of her home. The cozy spot allows classes of up to eight students. Anita said, "I love the small classes. I can give my students lots of individual attention, something that I cannot do in larger classes. In the beginning I wasn't sure what the focus of the studio would be. I knew that the students would define it, so I started teaching a few classes a week and observed. I offer Hatha Yoga classes that are very gentle and slow paced, which seems to be what individuals that are brand new to yoga are looking for. I think individuals that are new to yoga and may not have done much else physically would be very uncomfortable going to a yoga studio that has 30 students in a fast paced class. Some of my students have never tried yoga or have not exercised for some time. Some have physical challenges that require a gentle approach. Some are fit and flexible, but prefer the smaller classes. I love the sense of community that has developed."



### Testimonial:

Dear Anita,

Thank you so much for your beginner classes that I started this summer—I'm now up to class #10. I believe that my taking your gentle, consistent, no-pressure class has been THE perfect opportunity for my back to heal in what I can only describe as "a miraculous way." As you know I came to you as a stiff and inflexible student with chronic lower back compression. I looked like an inactive senior doing yoga for the first time—and I'm only 44.

So, I will be coming on a regular basis to your beginner's class with no shame and a lot of joy. Thank you very much for your wonderful class and your lovely reassuring voice.

--Katherine Hardie

## "YOGA ON AND OFF THE MAT"



At a recent conference, Anita premiered her “Yoga On and Off the Mat” program, which involves an introduction to yoga in a very gentle way and gives the students a tool kit of techniques to use in their everyday life at home and work. For instance, the program encourages students to do basic stretches in the shower, at their desk and to tune into their breathing throughout the day. She also recommends doing a little bit of yoga each day, even if it is just one round of the sun salutation.

Anita’s teaching style is to allow students to work at their own pace and comfort level. She strives to create an environment in which students will feel safe and supported—not intimidated. She explained, “I want students to have a chance to focus on themselves, forget about their busy, stressful lives and go into extreme self care mode.”

Leslieville Yoga has exciting plans for 2011, including Saturday morning classes,

the addition of the Yin yoga style, and more “Yoga On And Off The Mat” programs. Anita offered, “I try to incorporate Ahimsa—a Sanskrit term meaning to do no harm—in all aspects of my life and teachings. Since yoga has had such a positive impact on my mental health and because I have worked in the mental health field for over 20 years, I am exploring ways of bringing the two together. In particular, I want to bring yoga to homeless shelters, namely shelters for abused women.” Coming full circle, Anita is now planning a donation program for Alzheimer’s disease, which is inspired by the fact that her mother—the person that inspired Anita to try yoga in the first place—now suffers from the disease.

For more information on class schedules, call Anita Barnes of Leslieville Yoga at 416-838-9461. Be sure to check out their website at [www.leslievilleyoga.ca](http://www.leslievilleyoga.ca). ■



## Testimonial:

I started taking yoga classes at Leslieville Yoga about a year ago. I had never taken a yoga class before but I went to my first class and since then I have been hooked! The convenience of location and the very reasonable prices are great, but what makes that even more worth it is the instructor. Anita is a hands-on, patient, highly knowledgeable yoga instructor. With the intimate atmosphere of Leslieville Yoga’s studio, Anita is able to ensure that you are doing the postures correctly. You would not be able to get that in a bigger studio, and that’s why the small intimate classes that Leslieville Yoga offers are very beneficial. She also offers advice to what postures and stretches you can incorporate in day to day work and home environments, for those days that you can not dedicate time for yoga.

--Stephanie Korzeniewicz