

Practice Makes Perfect

How one woman used yoga to recover from divorce — and to grow in a healthy new direction.

BY LISA EVANS

IN THEIR LATE 20S, many women are settling down, getting married and starting families. I, on the other hand, was getting a divorce after just 18 months of marriage. Feeling like a failure for having made a mess out of my life so early on, I questioned whether I should be allowed to make major decisions ever again.

I had my doubts before entering my marriage, yet I still stood before a justice of the peace and promised my partner and myself to do my best to be a good wife. My best clearly wasn't good enough. At least that's the message I took away from my husband's feedback.

Although I felt liberated once we separated, I still carried a heavy load of self-doubt. So when I stumbled upon a small yoga studio in my new neighborhood, I decided to try it out. I needed something, *anything*, positive in my life.

A few days later, I headed into my first class at Toronto's Breathe Yoga Studio, hoping to find the spiritual tranquility and physical well-being all the yogis I knew talked about. I was laying out my mat when the woman beside me asked, "How long have you been practicing?"

At first I was thrilled with the idea that my brand new outfit had tricked her into thinking I was a true yogi. Then I wondered why she used the word "practice." Why didn't she ask: "How long have you been *doing* yoga?"



The word "practice" echoed through my mind for several months before I finally understood its meaning. And when I did, it changed the way I viewed my life and gave me the self-respect I thought I had lost.

Learning From Falls

Midway through my first class, I attempted toppling tree pose: With one leg firmly on the ground, I bent forward at the hip, stretching my leg out behind me and reaching my opposite arm in front of me. I had barely gotten into position when my standing leg began to quiver. My body waivered, then — smack! — I collapsed into the wall beside me. →

AFTER ▲

A serene Evans, poised above the Grijalva River in Chiapas, Mexico, practicing the triangle pose in April 2012.



BEFORE ▲

Evans in May 2010, packing up her belongings after her divorce.

Success Summary



Having fun in the sun in Ocosingo, Mexico, December 2011.

Meet: Lisa Evans, 29, Chiapas, Mexico

Big Achievement: Using lessons gleaned from her yoga practice to transform her life: She quit a dead-end job, became an ESL instructor and moved to Mexico.

Big Inspiration:

Using the word "practice" as a mantra to help her feel more self-compassionate and less fearful of taking chances.

What Worked:

Seeing so-called failures as just another part of life.

What Didn't:

Beating herself up for mistakes.

Words of Wisdom:

"Free your mind enough to ask what makes you feel joy in your life, and move toward that goal without letting stumbles get you down."



My cheeks burned red with embarrassment, but to my shock, the other students hadn't noticed. They maintained their poses, legs stretched out straight, their focus never faltering.

The instructor placed his hand on my back. "You OK?" he asked.

"Yeah," I replied, looking more at the floor than at him.

"Everyone falls," he said.

But I didn't want to fall. Falling made me feel like a failure. I was in this yoga class because I wanted to *escape* my failures.

I had failed at marriage. I was two months into a new job that I already knew wasn't going to fulfill me. I had moved from an oversized four-bedroom house into an overpriced one-bedroom apartment and now had a social life that consisted of my mother and one friend who never really liked my ex-husband. I came to yoga to achieve some peace of mind and feel good about myself, not to fall on my butt. "It takes practice," the instructor said.

As I worked my body into the next position, I began to think about what yogis mean when they use the word "practice." Over time, my muscles would strengthen and my balance would improve, making such embarrassing falls less frequent. It made sense, but I was left with a lingering question about how this concept could be applied to my current situation.

Leaving the studio that first day, I noticed that, despite my tumble, my head felt clearer, my body felt healthier and my feet felt lighter. I walked the two-and-a-half blocks home on a cloud.

Sitting at my desk the next morning, I felt an emptiness and hopelessness that scared me. Was this job my future? Spending eight hours, day after day, staring at a back-lit computer screen surrounded by gray cubicle walls, performing menial administrative tasks? I yearned to return to the studio that evening.

Yoga had provided me with a sense of peace that was missing in the rest of my life. On my pink-flowered yoga mat, I didn't have to pretend to be someone I wasn't. I had spent the majority of my short marriage doing just that, and now I sat at a desk pretending to care about the work that passed in front of



Evans practices dancer's pose, Chiapa de Corzo, in April 2012.



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me. The only place that felt right was the yoga studio, so I continued going, hoping that one day yoga would guide me into a life that suited me.

With regular practice, I noticed improvements in my physical and mental strength. I soon began to find the confidence I had lost and started speaking up for myself. I thrived in those short walks home from the yoga studio, and loved the lightness that came over me as I became more mindful of my surroundings.

Yoga gave me an energy that I was lacking, and I often spent hours after returning home reading a book or writing in my journal.

In November 2011, six months after that first class, I decided to quit my desk job and become an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teacher. It certainly wasn't a lucrative career choice — it wouldn't provide the retirement contri-

butions or health insurance that my full-time marketing job did — but it would give me the same sense of accomplishment and purpose that I felt during yoga.

Two months later, I left my overpriced apartment, sold nearly every possession I owned (which, after my divorce, wasn't much) and hopped on a plane for Mexico.

I wondered how I would handle the transition without the support of the studio, but with three yoga DVDs stuffed into my carry-on, I headed south to my new home.

A Way of Life

It's been two years since I first stepped into the yoga studio and heard the word "practice." While the Buddha decor sits thousands of miles away, I continue my search for spiritual and physical well-being on my living-room floor via video. While I still commute one hour to my teaching job, I work for four-and-a-half hours a day instead of eight, and haven't seen a dreary gray wall or enclosed office cubicle since I arrived in Mexico.

The one-bedroom apartment I share with my boyfriend is painted in various shades of pink, green and yellow. While it doesn't have the Jacuzzi tub and stainless steel appliances my four-bedroom house had, it has a serene quality where I can finally say I feel at peace.

Before finding yoga, I focused on only my mistakes and had lost sight of the positive things in my life. If my toppling out of a simple pose was an accepted part of the "practice" of yoga, perhaps I should begin to accept my recent struggles as part of the "practice" of life.

While I started yoga trying to escape my failures, I now realize that in yoga — and in life — there is no such thing as failure. I have had many falls since that first toppling tree pose, but after each one, I picked myself up and returned to the asana, knowing it's all just part of the practice. ♦



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