

CHOCOLATE, CAKE AND COBRAS



Claudia Brown, 42, likes cake, chocolate, and her cat Casey Stoner. She's also a qualified yoga instructor now teaching in the West Midlands. Here she tells her story.

When people say to me, 'Why did you become a yoga teacher?' they are usually surprised by my answer: 'I was getting old and fat and yoga was the only exercise I didn't loathe.'

There was slightly more to it, but I'd just hit 40 and the waistline was no longer waspish and I was looking at elasticated waistbands as a serious clothing option. I'd 'done' yoga on and off for 10 years and had always flirted with the idea of being a yoga teacher, but the 'Negative Committee' that meets inside my head on a regular basis always told me I was 'too fat', 'not flexible enough', 'not serious enough', and so on.

Still, I decided to head off to the OM Yoga Show in London to suss out the options for teacher training and, as soon as I walked into the hall, I knew I had found my 'people'. That, and attending a workshop by Tara Stiles just sealed the deal. I enrolled with Sun Power Yoga to do my teacher training the following year in Manchester (October 2013).

Tough training

It was definitely the hardest but best thing I had ever done. The lead teacher, Anne-Marie Newland, worked us so hard and really pushed us to our limits but it was an amazing and inspiring experience. During my training, I was quite noticeably one of the larger and older women, but when I told classmates I was envious of their lithe, younger bodies, they would reply that they had always wanted curves like mine, or to be strong like me. It made me realise that not only should I appreciate my body and what it can do, but that everyone always sees something in you that you often don't recognise or appreciate yourself. I qualified early this year and ventured out into the world as a qualified yoga teacher.

I knew I didn't look like a 'typical' fitness professional: I'm curvaceous, and I've always had a big bum and big boobs. I'd taken my hobby of eating chocolate and cake very seriously for quite a while so was carrying a good extra 30 pounds more than I should be.

Hang on: but according to who? Surely what mattered was the quality of my teaching and making yoga accessible for everybody, irrespective of their age, weight, sex or whatever.

So many people told me they couldn't come to my class because they weren't flexible enough or they were too fat. 'Hey, look at my cake tummy,' I would say, grabbing my fat and shaking it at them, 'I'm hardly a skinny minny; don't be daft, just come along and give it try.'

"I knew I didn't look like a 'typical' fitness professional: I'm curvaceous, and I've always had a big bum and big boobs. I'd taken my hobby of eating chocolate and cake very seriously"

Net assets

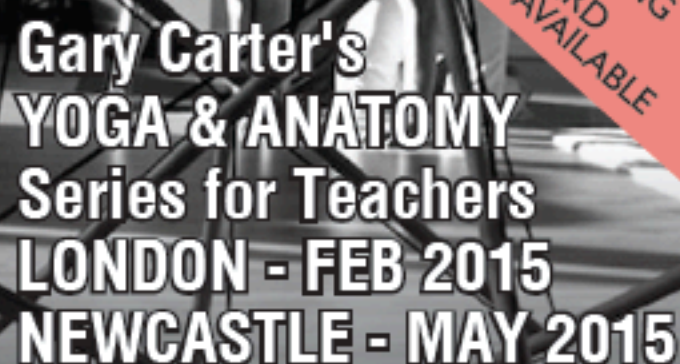
So, I made my weight an asset, not a hindrance. If my students continue with 'I can't do yoga, I'm too big, I'm too fat' I just explain to them that yoga is for everyone. It doesn't matter what size you are as I teach in a way that is suitable for all. I tell them that I used to think that I was too big to be a teacher. But it's just not the case.

I do sometimes catch myself, mid cobra, chuckling to myself and thinking, 'Me, a yoga teacher, actually running an 'exercise' class....?' but I know that my students enjoy it and they keep coming back, so I must be doing something right. Recently, I posted an amazing blog on my Facebook page by Elena Bahr called, 'What does a yoga teacher look like' which I read on the Yoga and Body Image Coalition Facebook page. It got a number of responses from my students, mostly saying how people can be so quick to judge, and how they fit into certain stereotypes. But, really, it's more about how you instruct your values, your teaching and demonstration, and how you work with people to improve their health and wellbeing.

The applies to other groups too. Two of my students are deaf, and wanted to join a class for years but felt inhibited to do so. I knew one of them through work and told her to come along anyway. I drew her some pictures and wrote instructions for her to follow, and then she brought her friend. She recently told me: 'That's what I like about our class, we're all down-to-earth and accepting of each other; and, more importantly, there's no competitiveness or jealous bitching (unless there is and I don't hear it!). There's a real good vibe to the group.'

I loved it that she called it 'our class'. It also made me think how lucky I am to have such well rounded and intelligent students. ☺

Find out more about Claudia Brown at: yogabyclaudia.com



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