



SHADES OF GRAY: Not such a stretch to benefit from yoga

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AGNES HERMAN For the North County Times

Dear Readers: I apologize if anyone was confused by the headline on last week's column about Alcoholics Anonymous. It referred to "addicts," and gave the impression that the focus was on addicts in general; it was strictly on alcoholism. The column also had an error in it: The only requirement for AA membership is the desire to stop drinking. Thanks for your understanding.



Yoga has a history that goes back 26,000 years; it came to the United States in the late 1800s. As a pathway to fitness, relaxation and the easing of tension, its popularity has grown in recent years. I believe myself to be open-minded, but in the early days of my maturation, I thought of yoga as "voodoo science." When my mind really opened, I learned different.

Sherry Morris visited with me to share the details of a special project at the Vista Public Library. "Food for Thought" is a unique program for a library, supported and sponsored by the San Diego County Library, the city of Vista and Aging & Independence Services. It offers yoga and lunch for seniors. Classes are held at 11 a.m. the first and third Thursday of the month. Yoga is free; the lunch costs \$3. It is chair yoga and is approved by the Arthritis Foundation as one way to soothe and relieve some of the aches and pains of arthritis.

Sherry is a warm, friendly and articulate young woman who has two teenage daughters. She had 20 years of corporate experience when 9/11 hit our world. Many of us, like Sherry, lost our sense of security at that time. She turned to yoga to ease tension and was inspired by her teacher, Mary Cavanaugh.

Mary was 79 and had 40 years of yoga experience. She became Sherry's role model. At 81 years of age, Mary made videos that were seen on Cable TV, produced by Sherry. The videos are the "show and tell" of yoga, with Mary demonstrating "Gentle Yoga," especially for seniors who might be enduring a disability. "Gentle Yoga for Everyone" is designed as a daily practice to support mobility and confidence. In 2005, after Mary died, Sherry bought her own studio, "Yoga Vista."

Today Sherry provides teachers for 25 classes at about a dozen libraries throughout the county. The Vista "Food for Thought" is the only library that concentrates on yoga for seniors. Other libraries in North County have the free program, open to all.

"Food For Thought" received the National Association of Counties 2008 Achievement Award in recognition of the effective and innovative program, which is now 3 years old. Among those participating are Oceanside, Fallbrook, Escondido, Rancho Santa Fe and Cardiff.

"Gentle Yoga" is as its name indicates; it appeals to many, especially our upcoming seniors, the baby boomers. A large number of them are not exercising. "Gentle Yoga" and chair yoga introduce the idea and importance of moving.

Exactly what is yoga? It is a holistic approach to managing physical, mental and spiritual health. It is a series of stretching and strengthening movements that get blood flowing, and joints and muscles moving. That in turn improves digestion, circulation and mental acuity. All that improvement inevitably leads to feeling better, sharper and optimistic!

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class that the vista library offers at this time is not enough, according to Sherry; she recommends a weekly experience. To expedite that, she offers classes on the alternate week at her studio at a discounted price of \$5.

My friend Ruth went to the class last week. A woman in her 80s, she found the experience relaxing and it left her feeling good. According to Sherry, close to 45 participants share the class every other Thursday. The average age is between 65 and 70, with some who are past 80.

Sherry offers discounts for seniors at her Yoga Vista Studio in downtown Vista. Give her a call at (760) 717-6262. There are also numerous yoga classes, not library-affiliated, throughout North County. Many of our senior centers have classes. I quote a phrase from Georganne Woodward of San Marcos' Senior Center, on the occasion of the opening of the center's new fitness room ---- "Fitness for longevity." That is what it is all about.

In an Associated Press article last week in this section, it was noted that scientific studies have shown that yoga, as well as meditation, battle the discomfort caused by stress. We have all been there; give yoga a try.

Agnes Herman is a freelance columnist. Contact her at (760) 744-6878; e-mail aggherman@sbcglobal.net.

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