

In Memoriam - Barbara Linderman (1934 - 2007)

Excerpts from a 1989 Interview with Ann Arbor's Most Treasured and Influential Yoga Teacher

(Editor's Note: Barbara Linderman died in late February, at the age of 72. She was Ann Arbor's best known yoga teacher, and a treasured and well-loved member of Ann Arbor's holistic community. Long before the current sprouting of yoga studios everywhere, Barb Linderman was quietly, patiently and kindly teaching yoga to successive generations of Ann Arborites. When she could no longer handle teaching so many classes herself, she founded Inward Bound, and joined forces with (and trained) other talented yoga instructors. Inward Bound today has nine teachers offering sixteen yoga-related classes each week. By any definition, Barb Linderman was the most influential yoga teacher in this community, and an important beacon of light for Ann Arbor's wider community of seekers.

About four years ago, I asked Barb Linderman if I could interview her for the Crazy Wisdom Community Journal. Barb very politely declined, saying at the time, "Oh, Bill, I just don't think I have that much to say that would be of interest to people".

Luckily, though, Barb had given an interview to Linda Diane Feldt, for the October 1989 Contributions to Wisdom Newsletter, which Linda Diane was then publishing and editing. What follows below are excerpts from that interview, which we are pleased to be able to share with our readers. Thank you to Linda Diane Feldt for providing it.)

Feldt: What effect has your yoga practice had on your life?

Barbara Linderman: Yoga fit very harmoniously the prior inclinations in my life. My husband (University of Michigan Professor Emeritus Gerald Linderman) and I had attended the Friends Meeting regularly before I started practicing yoga, and I found that the yoga postures enhanced that meditative practice. I was introduced to the philosophy and the chanting and meditation in the yogic style in the early seventies through Swami Prananda, a monk in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition. It's been a great blessing to be in touch with an Indian spiritual tradition of such depth and universality.

Feldt: What kind of relationships do you have with your students?

Barbara Linderman: I'm enriched by the wonderful people who come to yoga classes. Yoga is such an advantageous medium for me because I'm not a particularly verbal person, and I can relate to people in the silence of a yoga class at a deeper level than I can at a party or in everyday conversation. I feel connected with each one who is there, even though we may not speak directly. I always miss anyone who is absent.

Feldt: I have heard many of your students comment on how you seem to be at peace, very centered. Can you say how you achieve that peace?

Barbara Linderman: I've always felt that I shouldn't be allowed loose on the streets without having meditated.

Feldt: You share a lot of yourself in your classes through

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readings, chanting tapes, and other means.

Linderman: It's a matter of temperament. Because of my temperament, which is incurably devotional, I so appreciate chanting, readings that refer to the divine, and the use of the breath to move inward...

Feldt: I've been told that Ann Arbor has one of the best yoga programs in the country. Why is that, and what kinds of relationships exist between the yoga teachers in Ann Arbor?

Linderman: Ann Arbor is fortunate to have so many talented and gifted people who have chosen to give a



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major portion of their time and energies to yoga. Our relationships are very harmonious. We recommend each other's classes, we appreciate the different qualities that each teacher brings to a class, and we cooperate in circulating news of opportunities for further growth. I do feel, however, that Ann Arborites could appropriately request that additional styles of hatha yoga be made available. Not everyone enjoys the rigor of the Iyengar approach.

Feldt: Would you say something about the healing benefits of yoga?

Linderman: I feel so strongly the asanas are vehicles for our healing and that the alignment that is accomplished through the postures is healing. At the physical level, it's like an owner's manual for care of the body. With regular practice, all of the body's systems function more effectively. In addition, many experience a balancing of energies at subtler levels, and this may help to keep disease from manifesting at the physical level.

Feldt: What are asanas, and how were they developed?

Linderman: It is said that the ancient yogis closely observed the movements of animals, imitated those natural stretches and named the asanas accordingly. It is also said that the yogis were so finely attuned to the internal functioning of their bodies that they could intuitively sense the physiological effects of different postures and stretches.

Feldt: What is it like to be able to do some of those postures? It looks so miraculous!

Linderman: I always hear Mr. Iyengar saying how the pose could

be better. If you're doing yoga correctly, you're always working at your edge, the point between ease and strain. A beginning student trying to find his (her) edge in a single posture is not that different from an advanced student seeking to find his (hers) in a complex pose. Both experience some discomfort, but the continuing student experiences it as sweeter and more welcome while the beginning student is more apt to harden and resist it.

Feldt: Is your family involved and supportive of your work and your spiritual practice?

Linderman: I taught my daughters yoga when they were young and they both moved from it to become quite adept in gymnastics. They are presently in their 20's and might decide any day to return to yoga. My husband is a very re-

flective person without the same need that I have to reading in philosophy and religion. We're very compatible without sharing the same reading and sources. He has totally supported my involvement in yoga and even encouraged me to leave full-time teaching in the public schools to do yoga part-time, an obvious financial sacrifice... He is a wonderful person and a very dedicated teacher. He has won three major awards that the University of Michigan offers for

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undergraduate teaching...

Feldt: You're both teachers then. As a teacher, what qualities do you think are important?

Linderman: He puts much time and effort into his preparation in order to be able to present stimulating lectures, and he's very caring and sensitive in his personal interactions with students. He is also careful about even the smallest responsibility or commitment. Too often in the rush of many people's lives today, carefulness is lost. I'm very proud of him.

(The same, obviously, could be said of Barbara Linderman, herself. She put time and effort into her yoga classes, and her classes were stimulating. She was very caring and sensitive to her personal interactions with her fellow teachers, and her students. She was careful about even the smallest responsibility or commitment. She never lost her own carefulness in her interactions with others, and she was deeply alert to the care that others took.)

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