



## healing lessons

When Eve Grzybowski presents at conferences, she is commonly billed as an Australian yoga legend. Raised in the United States, Eve got hooked on yoga in 1971, quickly mastering advanced poses and a very athletic style of yoga. Eve moved to Australia in 1976 and started the popular Sydney Yoga Centre in 1985. Her journey with yoga took a sharp turn in 1991 when she was diagnosed with osteoarthritis and was forced to explore gentler styles, other healing modalities and adopt a wider view of yoga. She now teaches yoga on the mid-north coast of NSW. Interview by Tamsin Angus-Leppan

**What brought you to yoga?** Somebody dragged me to my first yoga class in Pennsylvania in 1971. The teacher had us doing things like headstand in our first class. I'd been a gymnast at school and maybe that's why I liked yoga so much, because I could see there was an athletic side to it.

**In 1991 you were diagnosed with arthritis. How did this affect you?** I had become very attached to my athleticism and it set me up as being an important teacher, because I could teach advanced poses. When I was diagnosed I was extremely upset—I thought I wouldn't be able to teach, I wouldn't be able to do yoga—and that was my profession. I was embarrassed that I had a serious illness; what good was yoga then? I went through being extremely disappointed, even depressed.

**How did you come through this difficult period?** Maybe I had enough yoga in me that I didn't go down the gurgler. My husband Daniel was very supportive. I had an intensive course of treatment in acupuncture and started making lifestyle changes and changing my practice to more relaxing ways of doing yoga. I also started looking at Ayurveda and my diet. I didn't do the reflective practices like pranayama, meditation and Yoga Nidra, but then the arthritis became a kind of teacher for me and I realised these were things I needed.

**What did it teach you about yoga?** I felt at first that this was all being forced on me, because I still wanted to be able to do Headstand dropbacks. Then I came to the conclusion that yoga is not an insurance policy: everybody gets sick, maybe becomes diseased, will get old and eventually die, so what are the things that matter? The arthritis made me more compassionate towards people who had a serious problem. Before that I would be dismissive of people and couldn't understand how people could be in physical pain. I was kind of like: "well, do something; get over it; use yoga." But it's not like that—sometimes you are meant to be in whatever pain there is. Before exploring other healing modalities, I was very fixed about what yoga is. But I found out yoga is meant to be a system for helping people evolve. It's a way of presencing yourself and opening yourself to everything.

**Over the years you have trained many yoga teachers. What advice would you give people who have just started teaching?** In the beginning, teachers are teaching the way their teachers taught them and they are using their teacher's voice—the same expressions and the same attitudes. That goes on for a while. At some point there's a bubbling up of your own voice and probably a lot of confusion, because you don't know if it's going to be valid or not. As a rule of thumb, it takes about 12 years before you get in the groove of your teaching, but when it finally happens, it's a really beautiful thing. ❀

*Eve Grzybowski moved to Mitchells Island, NSW, in 2009. Visit her blog Sharing from the Yoga Shed at [eveyoga.com](http://eveyoga.com).*