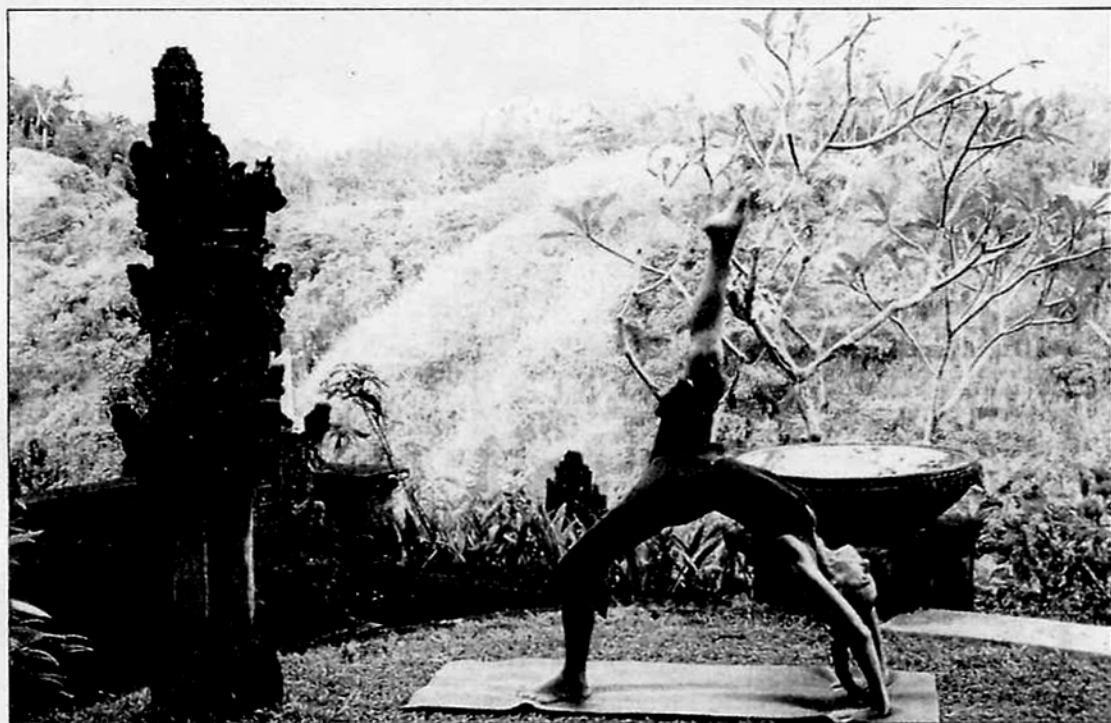


'Awareness of the body is foremost — what is going on in my spine? Why do I have constant hip pain? Why has my shoulder never fully regained movement after surgery?'

'And the next question — what am I going to do about it?'

— Ms Barros (right)



## Swearing By

# Yoga helped fix her spine

Ann Barros, now an Iyengar yoga instructor, tells **Shefali Srinivas** how the exercises helped her cope with scoliosis, a condition in which the spine curves sideways.

**S**coliosis sufferer Ann Barros swears by Iyengar yoga, which "re-positioned the musculature of her back".

Ms Barros is a certified Iyengar yoga instructor, who travelled to India to learn yoga directly from the legendary B.K.S. Iyengar in 1976.

"I was suffering with scoliosis; my curvature was approximately 2.5cm to the right," she says.

Scoliosis is a condition in which the spine curves sideways, putting pressure on the organs and the back.

The curve usually appears as an elongated "S", with a primary curve at one point in the spine and a smaller curve at another point.

At the apex of the curve, depending on how severe it is, there is pressure on the lungs, liver, kidneys and other organs.

There is also strain on the muscles of the back, resulting in ongoing pain.

Having benefited from Iyengar yoga, Ms Barros now conducts workshops specially geared towards people with scoliosis.

She says that Iyengar yoga gives priority to lengthening the spine in all poses. "Over time, this elongation (creating space between the vertebrae and the discs) will result in longer, stronger muscles of the back.

"As the spine lengthens, the muscles of the back supporting the spine lengthen," Ms Barros says.

But she acknowledges that repositioning her spine was a painful process.

"Through long-held supported traction, my spine went into vertical and perfect alignment. It was not easy or quick and sometimes I cried, but the discipline and passion to cure my spine motivated me to deepen the practice," she says.

So she tells her students that there is

either the pain of doing yoga or the pain of not doing yoga.

"Difficulty is relative to a student's pain threshold and willingness to break through postural problems," she says.

She believes that with a qualified Iyengar yoga teacher, a student may see significant improvement in weeks.

"Success comes with the repetition of specific poses for specific issues over time. Awareness of the body is foremost — what is going on in my spine? Why do I have constant hip pain? Why has my shoulder never fully regained movement after surgery?"

"And the next question — what am I going to do about it?"

Depending on the severity of poor body alignment, a student may seek chiropractic adjustments, for example, and then follow up during stabilisation phase by working one-on-one with a certified Iyengar yoga instructor.

For Ms Barros, the whole process of

"repositioning" took six months.

The pose that worked for her was the halasana pose.

"Halasana is an inverted pose, in that the spine is upside down, and in my case, my legs were elevated and placed to rest on the seat of a chair. Blankets were placed under my shoulders so that my neck was free," she says.

Weights were placed on the widest part of the shoulder joint as fulcrum points so that her shoulders could freely rotate and the spine had to go up.

Weights were also placed on the backs of her knees and hung from her ankles.

With all the weights placed at strategic fulcrum points, the spine was free to lift upward.

"I held this pose for 20 minutes a day for a period of six months," she says.

"The experience was sometimes extremely painful but I had to move beyond the pain through deep breathing and the reassurance that the alternative — a surgically-placed metal rod in my spine — would be more debilitating for my body and spirit," she says.

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Yoga In Asia has invited Ms Ann Barros to do a weekend intensive Iyengar yoga workshop in Singapore.

Date: Aug 6 and 7

Venue: Gaia Yoga, 30 Bideford Road, Thong Sia Building (behind Crown Hotel At Orchard) #03-01, Singapore 229922

Call 6738-2028 for more information.