

Bryon Middlebrook

For the late afternoon of a hectic workday, Bryon looks pretty relaxed when I arrive. He looks present. He smiles and says hello to people coming in and out of the coffee shop.

Bryon says that it all started when he hurt his lower back, sledding. The injury prohibited his usual exercise, so he picked up some yoga videos and a mat, and started learning poses on his own, at home. Six years later, he was still practicing with the same videos. I mention that it strikes me as uncommon for someone to do yoga on their own for so long. He laughs, then leans in and says, self-deprecatingly: “The thing about me is I’ll just go and do it. I just jump in, long before I know what I’m doing.”

Eventually, Bryon began taking some classes at the athletic club with Ken, and then came to The Yoga Experience, but his practice at home still stands at the center of his yoga, 18 years later. Nowadays, he usually practices twice a day: once at home, and once at the studio. The way he got hooked may be unusual, yet he explains it simply: “Yoga is so built in to what you’re doing,” he says, “that regardless of whether someone is pointing it out to you, it starts happening to you, and you begin to feel it.” I ask him at what point he started to feel the connection.

“Almost from the moment I started doing it, I could almost immediately feel a difference,” Bryon says. “It was different than working out. There was something else going on... I could sense it when I would talk to someone, I could sense it in a very stressful situation, I could sense it in the courtroom. At first I couldn’t tell you what that difference is.” He pauses, and stays still for a moment, as if focusing on something just out of sight. “Now I could say it was the ability to step back and realize what was going on, get a connection with the present.”

As much as the yoga postures themselves sparked a connection in Bryon, moving into the Anusara tradition of practice began to bind that connection. He says he arrived to the tradition at just the right time. “It’s like they say, when you need a teacher, the teacher will appear. (They) took me to the next level that I wouldn’t have reached by myself for years to come.” The teachers not only led Bryon into new poses, but brought a greater meaning to the poses he’d already been practicing. He learned to make his connection intentional, rather than allow it to be consequential.

As an attorney, Bryon’s days are full and demanding. He says sometimes it’s difficult to walk out of the courtroom and really *leave* the courtroom. But over the years, yoga has allowed him space to practice the ability to

step onto his mat, and be nowhere else; to engage a connection to the very moment. He says that after all, this is the goal. “The masters are able to stay connected all the time,” he says. “The rest of us are in and out of connection. This is why you have to practice, constantly.”

I have to say: it seems like Bryon *does* practice constantly. Now, that doesn't mean he's able to stay connected all the time. But, he believes it's worth trying. My argument for this breaks down as such: Bryon hurt his back, bought a yoga mat, and started trying poses. Eighteen years later, he tells me how the practice has affected his entire life. What strikes me about Bryon's story is how early on he believed. There's a moment, I think, where you start to feel the connection in the poses he talked about, and then you decide: engage or release; believe it or forget about it; allow this practice to stay outside, or allow it to come in. Bryon believed. He simply says: “I knew something was going on. And it was right.” So many years and so many poses later, it's still right.

Bryon is a good conversationalist. In our hour talking together, he pauses once; it's when I asked him the biggest affect yoga has had on his life. He says, “The greatest affect is mental,” but then he crosses his arms, and looks out the window. Finally, he says:

“Here's the thing. Ten or twenty years can fly by. With yoga, I was *in* those moments. It wasn't just life rushing right past me. I was there. Had I not done yoga, I wouldn't have known I was there, (that I) was a participant.” He says it could have been, “just a blur, with nothing to say, this is it: this is life and you're here.”