

A Hot Topic

By Lesa Knollenberg

I'M DRAWN TO THOSE THINGS THAT ARE SIMPLE, especially when it comes to being a healthy human being — that's part of the reason this column is named "The Naked Truth." (Well, that and the fact that saying the word "naked" in public embarrasses my kids. It's a mother's perk, right?)

I attempt to live according to my own simple rules and let others live out their own. It seems like lately, however, I'm collecting difficult people like Velcro in a dryer full of socks. My reserves are waning, and I know that I need to go somewhere with the anger, bitterness, and the feeling that every little slight is a personal affront. It's time to get centered. It's time to get sweaty.

Usually I work it all out with some serious cardio; I exercise to exorcise. But every once in awhile, in the midst of an existential funk, I need to face the music. More accurately, I need to face the mirror. I need to acknowledge my failings, stand in the midst of truth and get balanced. Whenever I set out to rid my body and mind of toxins, I turn to Hot Yoga.

Hot Yoga is the practice of vigorous poses done in 95- to 105-degree heat. It's hard to imagine: 90 minutes in a sauna with strangers and their, well, bodily functions. There are sights, smells and sounds that would send my nine-year-old into paroxysms of giggles. But after awhile, I start to realize that we are just that: bodies. Vessels. We all sweat, stink, struggle. Standing in honesty with other people and their breathing (in through the nose, out through the mouth) centers me and starts me fresh.

Yoga takes intense concentration and layers of experience. The best things come slowly, and the practice of yoga requires a slow, deliberate peeling of pretense. It's like Shrek's onion theory: there are many layers to each of us. Unwrapping the translucent layers in each of us is an enlightening process.

I have a friend I've known for five years, and I just recently found out she grew up using an outhouse. Wouldn't you think that would have come up in, say, year two? She's a wise and unassuming woman, more intent on listening than telling, and there is never enough time to talk when we get together. Every layer has been fascinating with her.

The onion theory is the mainstay behind the practice of yoga, as well. First there is the uncomfortable, drag-yourself-into-



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the-room stage. There. I've done it. I'm here. Then there is the awkward how-do-they-do-that stage. Next? The humble I-can't-do-this stage.

Soon movements start gliding into each other, and a teeny sneak into the mirror shows that your downward dog isn't quite as dorky as before. It's a process, where each time you truly show up for yourself, you're rewarded with more athleticism and grace. Yogis practice for years to become fluid and lose themselves in the practice. Like the onion, each layer of work leads to something deeper.

My BFF from junior high school was my BFF because she was so unique. She could bend herself into a pretzel while we watched Starsky and Hutch. A bit germaphobe, she used her feet to open bathroom doors. She was a gifted musician, and deeply introspective — lots of layers, that one. We lost touch over the years, but I'm thrilled to say that I found her again, and it all makes sense. She's a celebrated yogi, and all her unique qualities — the musical pretzel — came together to make her wildly successful and currently teaching in Italy. She is a proponent of the raw food diet, but I'll work on her with that one. Maybe I'll invite her to Wisconsin and turn her on to fried cheese curds. Wouldn't that mess with her locust pose?

Sometimes I want the whole world to take a Hot Yoga class, all together. Conservatives and liberals would just have their mats touch for a start. Packer and Viking fans could start with a sun salutation. They'd see that we're all made of the same biochemical matter, and remember that we all do matter. Working toward a practice of getting better — as yogis and as people who share the earth — reminds me that all I have to do is breathe. And perhaps be a little more kind.

Namaste. **mb**

Lesa Knollenberg lives, works and tries to keep things simple just outside of Madison.