

# Kara Kelty

Kara and I are sitting across from one another at a small, wooden table. We don't know each other well, outside of yoga class, and ongoing jokes about how long is "long" to hold backbend. I ask her why she does yoga. This is what she says: "I'm a very cerebral person. I think too much. I can't let go of things." She says this matter-of-factly, as if a long time student of the subject. I jokingly ask if these are things someone has pointed out to her. "No," she says. "This is self observation." She goes on to explain, "The thing you realize right away (with yoga) is you can't hold onto things in this life. You can't think of things in your life, and hold the pose. You'll fall out of it. You have to let it go," she says.

Kara's honesty strikes me as much as the reason she states for doing yoga: for sake of practicing what's hard for her. I know this takes a strong willingness, and this strength is apparent in Kara, even from a distance; it's also something she's worked hard for, over many years.

The first yoga class Kara ever took was in Guatemala, while she was serving in the Peace Corp. She left feeling sick and didn't go back. "But," she says, "I knew it was powerful." She says this with a look on her face that reveals a different time; her eyes are looking past the window behind me, somewhere into memory. She remembers knowing she just wasn't ready.

It was years later before Kara walked into another yoga class. This time, she loved it. In the time since, things had changed. She was married. She was a mother of two. She was living in Flagstaff now. The connection she felt was strong and immediate. "It felt so liberating," she says. After practicing, "I could just feel the energy in my body moving differently." She changed her diet because she felt more in tune with her body. She read philosophy and history that corresponded with what she was learning in class. Once Kara was ready to dive in, she dove in, wholly.

Kara also mentions the important concept of duality she's learned through yoga. She grew up Catholic, where things were often described as black and white. Yoga has encouraged her thinking beyond this. In poses, you must extend and contract. You must move forward while reaching backward. In life, grey exists. We humans are not just made up of strengths and weaknesses. There's expansion. There's time to grow. Kara still practices Catholicism, but it, like herself, has evolved. She says the study of her belief system through yoga has enriched her religion.

The beauty of Kara's practice that strikes me most is how deeply it has saturated her life. Practicing for ten years does not only mean she can do a

beautiful scorpion pose and a very long backbend (although, she can.) It also means she has better learned what she believes. It means she lives those beliefs more thoroughly. It means she has become a committed student of herself, and of life. In reflecting upon yoga's influence, she says frankly to me: "I mean, savasana is the most powerful pose of all. It's preparing you for death."

To be honest, this sentence startles me. I know she's right: savasana means "corpse pose." And, I understand her point: death is the ultimate letting go. It's still a little unsettling to me, though. I recognize in this sentence a certain strength that is uncommonly acquired. I also recognize that this strength is what Kara has gained, through all of her practice of letting go. She's strong enough to say calmly, to a near-stranger, in a crowded cafe, what is hard for her. She knows how to focus in on what's difficult, and offer time and breath into that space. She's no longer afraid of what lurks in the distance, beyond her control. She has learned the art of grey. And it's a vibrant sight, indeed