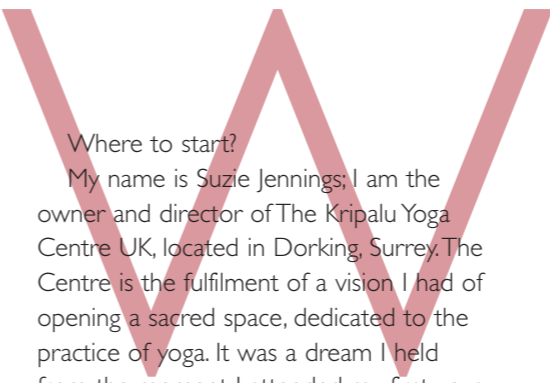


"Life is not a private affair, a story and its lessons are only made useful if shared."

The Way of the Peaceful Warrior
by Dan Millman

From Child To Warrior



Where to start?
My name is Suzie Jennings; I am the owner and director of The Kripalu Yoga Centre UK, located in Dorking, Surrey. The Centre is the fulfilment of a vision I had of opening a sacred space, dedicated to the practice of yoga. It was a dream I held from the moment I attended my first yoga class at the age of 21. Little did I know at

the time that this dream was to be on hold for another 30 years as I raised my young family, worked as a bursar, moved to Canada where I opened an award-winning vegetarian restaurant in the middle of what could aptly be described as a hunter's paradise. My restaurant, Trumpers, was sold in 1994, we returned to England and I returned to work, this time as a deputy bursar. I was making good money, my children were grown with their own children, I owned a home with my husband of 28 years, we were planning our retirement, and yet there was a void deep inside of me, something was missing.

One night I got a call from close friend from my Canadian years suggesting we go on a trip together ending at the Kripalu Institute in Lenox, Massachusetts. It felt right so I said, "Yes." We made plans to meet in the state of Maine and drive from there. I flew into Boston and bussed it north to Bangor to meet her. Travelling south on the coast, we arrived at a town called Portland and popped into a small shop, nothing special really at first glance, little ceramic figures, wooden seagulls, straw hats and inexpensive jewellery. As is the way in the States, the woman in the shop commented on my accent and asked, "Where are you from and where are you going?" To which I responded, "Coming from England, going to Kripalu in Lenox." She looked me straight in the eye and said, "This experience will change your life forever." She told me that nine years prior she had lost her home,

her husband and everything she valued. At the time she had been an employee in this very store. She went on to explain that in the midst of that upheaval she herself had made a decision to go to Kripalu. She said it completely changed her life, she had remarried, she had bought the shop, and was now joyous and at peace. And she told me it had all begun at Kripalu.

I have to admit I was a bit spooked, I mean she had told such intimate things to a total stranger and I was conscious that she had singled me out; she never said a word to my friend. Yet, the passion in her eyes was to haunt me for the rest of our journey to Lennox.

Arriving at Kripalu quite literally took my breath away; it hit me in the chest. I knew, for the first time in my life, that I was home.

I immediately felt nurtured and protected, held deeply by a place I had never been, and loved unconditionally by people I had only just met.

The woman in the shop was right. I returned to Kripalu two more times over the next few years and then in September 1999 I completed my training and became a Kripalu Yoga Teacher. Two months later, I quit my well-paying job, the one with the pension and security, sold my Mercedes and bought a van. I hired someone to paint a huge yellow OM on the bonnet, and sign-write Kripalu Yoga all over it. It caused quite a stir in my little market town. I then rented



any hall that had no yoga teachers and began to teach. Within two years I had 220 students and desperately needed a dedicated space. After many false starts, and much expense which I could ill afford, a landlord got tired of my badgering and gave me permission to lease the building where we are now located. I don't know why he put up such a fight, it was an abandoned warehouse, grey and sad and lonely looking. It was a huge effort to convert it to a workable studio and I was grateful to my husband, my children, my friends and my students for all of their help and support and

it was with immense joy that the doors of Kripalu UK were opened to public in July of 2003. I felt on top of the world, I could now have not only a yoga studio, but modelling my work on Kripalu in the States, I could also facilitate workshops and seminars providing opportunities for growth and discovery. As I was teaching over 20 classes per week, I knew I would need help and I was blessed when an American woman, who had trained with me at Kripalu, agreed to come and work alongside me. The first six months were bliss.



In January 2004, I returned from a well-deserved holiday in Florida to hear from the American teacher that she was pregnant and had decided to go home to have her baby. I didn't know what to do, I was teacher training a student of mine, preparing her for the Kripalu final exams, but she was not yet qualified to teach and I knew telling her would harm her ability to perform well on the exams and limit the fullness of her time at Kripalu. And then, on February 14th, Valentine's Day, in the midst of my panic as to how to carry on, my husband of 38 years told me that he was leaving me. By the end of the month I was alone, I had 250 students enrolled and 25 classes needing to be taught 6 days a week. All the responsibility of the studio, the bills, having to sell our home, having to divide our earthly possessions, and having to try to find another place to live was on my shoulders.

It was as if my heart had been ripped out of my chest and in its place was his fist. I could find no way out of the blackness. I did not want to live. But in looking back I know I never missed a single class, yoga sustained me in a way I cannot fully comprehend, even to this day. The reception at the Centre is on the ground floor and our studio is up a flight of stairs, one wall is lined completely with windows, every time I climbed those stairs to teach I walked into the light, I chose life. But I didn't spend all of my time at my studio; I spent agonising days and nights, on the floor, literally unable to move.

I now know that the abandonment I felt had triggered memories of having been physically abused and neglected throughout my childhood. You see, my husband had been my first and only love; we met when I

was 13, I was pregnant at 16, and we had run away to Gretna Green. He had been my safety, my security and my world. And then, he was gone. I was in a place beyond grief and so began the darkest night of my soul. I knew nothing, but my body and my deepest self did, and I hated them for it. They demanded that I keep waking up, keep showing up to teach, keep entering the suffering. As the months passed and the hideous pain gave way to a dull ache, it became clear that I was being led into asanas and pranayama from a place beyond myself. The wisdom I received helped me to stand once more, to hope again and to learn compassion.

This was the path down which I was led: Each day would start with regret. I would get out of bed and fall to my knees.

I would find myself in Garbhasana (Child). It felt safe; my breath would come slowly and gently, creating a place of protection from the outside world. It was deep integration, rest and nurture for my body, my mind, and my emotions.





From here I would turn over to Matsyasana (Fish). It was always restorative Matsyasana, as I could not open too quickly. Fish was stretching my entire chest cavity. I likened my heart/chest area to the bark of a tree.

I had such physical pain in this area that breathing was often laboured. I would start with a simple natural breath and then slowly as I came into the asana I could feel my chest expanding, my heart releasing, the bark of the tree cracking open. My breath would deepen and I would find myself in Dirgha (3-part breath). Dirgha allowed my body and mind to calm, bringing oxygen to the innermost reaches of my lungs. It released me from my shallow breath of fear and reminded me that that the peace I yearned for was just a breath away. The key to opening this asana is the Mulabandha (core lift), lifting from the perineum, which allows a passive elongation of the chest, the ribs and the throat. This is where I felt the most pain. Eventually

I was able to practice regular Matsyasana, but it took a very long time.

Following Matsyasana I would roll over onto my right side and slowly stand to practice Seal of Yoga, Yoga Mudra. This was my rolling up from the ground, standing on my feet and releasing my spine of past trauma. I always practiced standing Yoga Mudra because it helped me to unwind my spine and create space between my spinal discs. Forward bends release old stuff. Yoga Mudra is a deeply tranquilizing asana and a wonderful counter-stretch for the backward bend of Fish. It is a gesture of surrender, both physically and emotionally. Hands reaching to the Universe, head resting towards the Earth, heart held safely somewhere between. As I slowly came into Yoga Mudra, I would roll down one disc at a time, feel a deep letting go, once down my arms would slowly rise up, receptive to the Universe, my heart opening slightly, almost resting on my torso as I swayed slowly from side to side. To release I bent my knees into a squat, lowered my arms slowly and stayed for a short while before closing my eyes and rolling up gently, one disc at a time.

I would then slowly open my eyes to stand in Tadasana (Mountain) breathing Dirgha. From Tadasana, the most important of all the standing asanas, I re-established my balance and aligned my body in preparation for Virabhadrasana II (The Warrior).



Warriors have always been very important to me, perhaps they are for all women and, indeed, they were incredibly symbolic in this season of death and rebirth.

They reminded me that everything I needed in this moment of my life was inside of me and the gift of the Warrior was to see it revealed in small steps each and every day. Warrior builds confidence, stability and strength. When the Mulabandha is engaged, the Hara, centre of creation, is flooded with energy. With every Dirgha breath, I made a conscious choice to focus my vision on my outstretched hand. I saw above and beyond. I saw a future.

This past July, the Kripalu Centre celebrated its sixth birthday, the student who took her exams that painful February is named Lou Ionascu; she is a Kripalu teacher, a qualified yoga therapist, and my right hand at the Centre. My deepest thanks must also be extended to my student and model, Jo Presley; to Nicholas Down, photographer; and to Judy Malloy, Creative Director of Kripalu UK, who has helped me to find my voice again.

For all that was... Thanks. For all that is yet to come... Yes. Namaste.

