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INTERVIEW - LIZ LARK

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Liz *Lark*

Liz Lark, a well-established yoga teacher internationally and at home in the UK, reveals to Emma Sharma her story of how she became an acclaimed yoga teacher and celebrated author.

Liz instantly conveys a sense of warmth and openness. She emanates positivity and possesses the personal style of an inherently creative person. Her wardrobe celebrates bright colours reflecting her sunny disposition. Without following a set path, she has pursued that which she loves and is true to herself, resulting in the recognition she now has within the yoga community. Liz has an MA in performing arts yet emphasises she is not an academic person but a practical, creative individual.

THE DAUGHTER OF A VICAR SHE HAS NOT GROWN UP WITH A RELIGIOUS BENT, BUT INSTEAD SEARCHED FOR "SOMETHING SPIRITUAL". SHE WAS FIRST INTRODUCED TO YOGA AT SCHOOL. A SPORTY AND ACTIVE CHILD, SHE WAS MESMERISED BY YOGA'S SYNCHRONICITY OF BREATH AND RELAXATION; HER ATTENTION HAD BEEN CAPTURED. LIZ IS, BY HER OWN DESCRIPTION, A VERY PHYSICAL PERSON. AT THE AGE OF 19 SHE TOOK A YEAR OFF TO OFFER VOLUNTARY SERVICE IN PAKISTAN. SHE TRAVELLED FROM THERE TO AN ASHRAM IN THE STATE OF MAHARASHTRA, IN INDIA. AT THE ASHRAM SHE ENCOUNTERED, IN HER WORDS, "... A MAN HANGING UPSIDE DOWN IN THE LOTUS POSE, STRAPPED TO THE WALL, LIKE A BAT".

She found this sight both astonishing and fascinating. At 25, she became totally absorbed in yoga and loved the liberation that came from exploring her physical edge. She loved the flowing, choreographic approach to Vinyasa yoga and immersed herself initially in Ashtanga Vinyasa at The Practice Place in Crete. She completed a BWY teacher's training course in 1992. She further studied Ashtanga in Mysore, India for a month and participated in a teacher's training in Goa, India. By 1995 she was a fully-fledged yoga teacher and moved to London to teach at various health clubs, making her living through teaching yoga.

Liz has taught at The Life Centre, in London's trendy Notting Hill, intermittently since 1995. The Centre has been a 'base' teaching ground for her. She was invited to become a board member for The Life Centre's teacher's training course in 2003, which is recognised by both BWY and Yoga Alliance. The course is run by a broad range of teachers, each offering instruction in their own field of expertise. Liz teaches sequencing to students of the course and explains how to construct classes. She also teaches the hands-on adjustments. In 1995, whilst travelling in Thailand, she took part in a Thai Massage course (what some people call 'Lazy Yoga') in Chiang Mai. She believes this really helps with adjusting because it makes one aware of how to touch with sensitivity without trying to force a body. It encourages passive deep stretching in yoga postures. Liz thinks it is very beneficial to combine bodywork with yoga.

She loves and appreciates the exposure she has to different individuals through teaching, which includes a number of private clients in London and regular travels abroad to teach students. Once a year she teaches at a picturesque retreat in Colorado where there are hot natural springs and striking mountains. Every week Liz teaches at the International Ballet School in London to enable the ballerinas to prevent injury later in life by closing the hips and protecting the lower back. Yoga serves as a wonderful stress relief for what can be an arduous training regime.

Liz hopes to be a facilitator when she teaches, to help

encourage people to connect with themselves resulting in a mind state that is not about linear time and productivity. Her goal through yoga is to help people accept and understand themselves and create happier and healthier individuals through fruition. Yoga tends to lead to more for people than they initially think. Helping to peel back the layers of an individual, yoga instigates mind and emotional clearance. "You have to keep finding liberation in yourself, which is what yoga is all about". Liz is adamant she does not like to judge, preach or enforce students but coaxes and explores through her teachings. She aims to teach with words that do not sound austere or suppressive, recognising the power of words. The focus of her classes could just as easily be about poetic ideas or philosophy as about hip opening.

In 1998 Liz began holding her own yoga retreats when she was invited to teach a group of individuals at a villa in Menorca, this continued for several years running. She relishes retreats because the havens are in a contained area that is typically surrounded by nature, away from the stresses of a work environment. The tranquillity of the retreats provides a rare opportunity to concentrate fully on yoga and relaxation whilst enjoying a healthy diet. Liz eats a pescetarian diet and is a self-confessed foodie. She loves to enjoy food; her approach to diet is a middle path, not too indulgent, but to enjoy life at the same time. Liz is holding a yoga retreat in Ibiza this August (17th-24th) with Jean Hall, on the North of the island near Benirras beach. The retreats tend to follow a format of a two-hour morning and evening yoga session daily. During the day there is personal time, when people tend to go on a hike together or go to the beach and of course healthy meals are served as part of the course.

Liz particularly enjoys holding day and weekend intensives in the UK. In the past she has held many retreats abroad year round, but since marrying a few years ago she has focused on settling in the UK, coming back to her roots. She is finding peace where she is and, in her words, is "falling in love with England again". She has moved to

the countryside in Sussex where she grows her own organic vegetables and fruit trees, and plans to get chickens. She is a living model of 'The Good Life', a favourite television show of hers. Approximately four years ago Liz started teaching with the In Spa team. The concept is health and fitness holidays at high-end venues (for example, a beautiful Tuscan villa) with an array of different specialist teachers; yoga being just one element offered on the holidays. She teaches about six-eight weeks a year with In Spa, but is now starting to pull back on this in favour of teaching her own retreats and less travel. "As one door closes another door opens" is her motto.

Her workshops tend to follow what she is focused on at that particular time. Her next one, for example, explores maha bhutas (the elements) since she is more captured by nature of late. This enables students to get a handle on eastern ideas through western interpretation. She concentrates a lot on alignment in her workshops.

Liz has written an array of yoga books, including '1001 pearls of yoga wisdom', a wonderful book full of quotations, anecdotes and yoga tips in accessible format, a terrific light read. Her books have been translated into a

multitude of languages, demonstrating the global nature of her appeal. Her DVD, 'Yogalibre', which she personally worked hard on, was filmed on a cliff edge on the south coast of Cornwall.

Liz finds meditation in anything creative, like painting or dancing. She has a passion for music and loves to sing. One of her students is renowned composer and pianist Ludovico Einaudi. Liz sometimes uses his music for meditation. She listens to a piece of music and if it inspires her she tries to put some yoga choreography to it. In addition, Liz is a talented artist (this used to be her full-time job) and creates vibrant life drawings. As she says, she is "an artist that teaches yoga". She looks for creating images that reflect comfort in one's own skin, a celebration of the body and colour. Her influences are Matisse and Modigliani. For Liz the yoga, art and music all work together, in a creative package. She artistically draws flow sequences with figurine statues that look quite beautiful and include quotations from the 'Bhagavad Gita'. She uses these drawings as a tool for her teachings but also sells them at her workshops. Her dream is an art exhibition, perhaps titled 'Liz's Yoga Journeys'.

She has many inspirations. At the moment she is inspired by her rescue cat, for his ability to stay totally present. A lot can be learnt from animals about staying present she believes. Rod Stryker, the renowned LA based tantra teacher, is also a motivation for Liz; he encourages students to be very contemplative and aware. She is also moved by the creativity of Britain's poet laureate, Caron Ann Duffy. Liz is energised by the seaside, and if she has a day off she likes to spend it by the coast or visiting sacred and historical places.

Liz has come full-circle. She has travelled extensively and searched outside of herself, and now she is drawing her energy back in, craving peace in her life and honouring what she has. The years ahead will be focused here, in the UK, the place she can now joyfully call home once again, and is progressively nurturing a greater affection for.

To find out more about Liz Lark, her workshop and retreats, visit lizlark.com Emma Sharma is a qualified yoga instructor and freelance writer who lives in London (emmasharma@hotmail.co.uk)

PHOTO CLARE PARK, CLAREPARK.TV

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