Strike a power Pure Yoga instructor Claudia Whitney. Photo: Mark Tim

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How yoga straightened me out

By Samantha Grant
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Chubby-born American-bred Claudia Whitney, 39, wasn't always keen on the idea of doing yoga percent poses. Her mum was pregnant a bright form of exercise that wasn't meant for her.

"I had the self-consciousness for everyone I went today. 'I'm just flexible', 'I have a not enough flexibility', or 'This isn't for me'," she says. "But I finally got into it 12 years ago in New York. I was hooked from my first class. I'd applied the whole way through, but the exploration difficult was on so many levels that there was no look-in anymore."

An ancient practice originating in ancient India, it seemed like a fad action, where celebrities and others were [illegible] but why did she feel so hooked?

"Yoga is more than a workout. I think that it becomes a way of life for most people," says Whitney, who is a instructor at Pure Yoga. "You start to shift from the outside in, or the stuff, and then you're capable of changing things in your everyday life. Without dance or stuff, the poses were [illegible] mean nothing, and I think that is what keeps people coming back."

Whitney thinks yoga provides health recognition too, to help calm teenage anxiety and [illegible] movement.

"I was a mild child – well, I'm still a wild girl – but growing up, I had to overcome tough times," she says. "Yoga has helped me [illegible] and calmed me down. I wasn't bad natural realist, so it really centered you. I've learned to let go of a lot of the [illegible] anymore things ... I'm basically never leave happiness in my life."

Have you a spiritual journey as a child?

I was not a wacky child, and my dad was terrible. I ended up having overweight in my late teens and early 20s, so I started changing myself about nutrition and fitness, and then it where I first connected to something [illegible]. Changing my diet and working with a personal trainer helped me to shed the extra weight and develop my confidence.

Eventually, I found yoga and while it helped me fit, it has become more than a physical practice. I can't imagine my life without it.

I guess you had the diet of total vanquish?

Yes, I grew up eating fried food, junk food and fast food. When I made the choice to lose weight I caught smoking. I stopped eating all of those things and started experimenting with my diet. At one point, I ate only raw vegan food for three years, and I felt amazing. When I moved to Asia, I was so excited about the variety of food and flavours (and [illegible] restaurants). Cooked food, and now I'm about 70 per cent to 75 per cent raw vegan, and I've never felt better.

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Was you made a spiritual journey in India?

I spent three months in India six years ago. I travelled to Mysore first to study **ashtanga yoga** with Pattabhi Jois and Sharath Rangaswamy. Practice was hot. Yes, so I had the rest of the day to study anything I was interested in. Dancing, a southern Indian style of painting called Kolam, and traditional meditation and drawing with another teacher. My mind sit outside [illegible] on the ground and meditate [illegible] which started me with [illegible] with everyone to get warm [illegible] I also took vegetarian Indian cooking classes and studied Ayurveda [illegible] the Indian system of medicine [illegible].

As a yoga teacher, what's your talent [illegible]?

If someone is really interested, then I usually [illegible] to try a complimentary class at Pure Yoga. [illegible] the physical benefits because your little [illegible] a toned, flexible and strong body, but there are benefits beyond that. We feel [illegible] and maintaining a balanced [illegible]. [illegible] lower stress levels. When you practise [illegible] you are also building awareness of your body, feelings, [illegible] and [illegible]. It's a complete package.

Are [illegible] aware to yoga [illegible]?

[illegible] yoga [illegible] a misconception that yoga is only stretching and meditation, and they don't realise [illegible] physically challenging. I have noticed an increase in male attendance in the past couple of years. They find it a great complement to their gym workout or any sport. Anyone can do it, and it's [illegible] strength and [illegible].