

Student Spotlight

This month, Renee Razzano, CIYT in San Francisco, talked to Jeff “propifyyourlife” Wilkerson of Portland, Oregon.

Renee Razzano: How did you find Iyengar Yoga?

Jeff Wilkerson: After working a 9 to 5 desk job for a few years after college, living got a lot tougher. It was stressful getting up in the mornings, and it was difficult to let go of stress in the evenings. This is probably true for most adults, but I have cerebral palsy, so the effects of the stress increased exponentially.

I wasn't digesting food properly, and I wasn't sleeping, which added onto the stress – a vicious cycle to say the least.

I'm a strong willed individual, but the older I got, the more I understood I couldn't just fix my problems by forcing myself to do stuff. I had been practicing yoga for years on my own. It took a lot of courage to start going to classes, and I had good experiences. However, I didn't feel like I was helping myself. The overall imprints from these classes was that I needed to “try harder” or “push my limits,” and I knew that was not what I needed to do.

I was going to Reiki sessions when my therapist suggested the local Iyengar studio. I took the next available free class, and immediately felt intellectually stimulated. A few months later I had my first restorative yoga experience, and was hooked after that, overcome with joy due to learning how to be receptive in the pose.

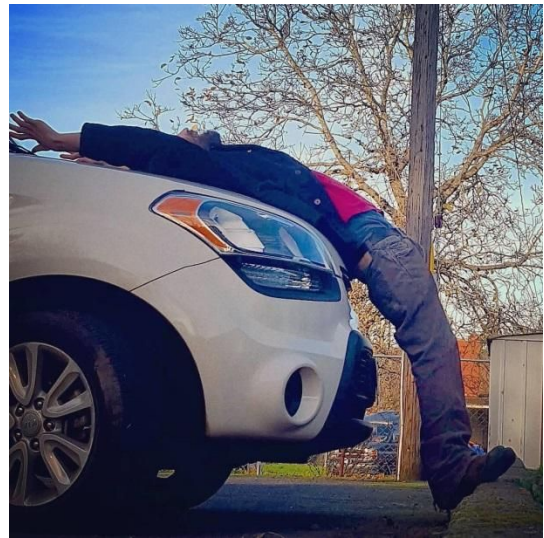
Growing up with CP, I'm always doing. Everything takes effort, even relaxation. That first restorative class was the first time in my adult life when I could truly ‘not do.’

RR: How does your practice support your health and wellness?

JW: My practice helps me to be creative and soft in response to changing health needs. It certainly replaces my need for physical therapy. Practicing the Iyengar methodology specifically helps me to build new muscle memory and resist repetitive behavior, which is absolutely crucial when dealing with the effects of Cerebral Palsy. My practice basically demands of me to be innovative, and as a consequence, I am finding more authenticity in my relationships.

RR: You have a public Instagram account in which you use the hashtag “propifyyourlife.” I love the word “propify” – it reminds me of the innovative, vivid verbiage I've heard from B.K.S. Iyengar and Prashant and Geeta Iyengar. What does that mean, to propify one's life?

JW: To propify one's life means to acknowledge one's own unique needs and fulfill that need with humbleness and creativity. To propify implies asking for support — can you prop me up? You're not necessarily going to get it, the point is to acknowledge and accept our essential need for support,



then move forward with practice and detachment.

The “project” was initially meant to protest the mainstream notions of what yoga is and where it’s done. To protest is to go against, and too often I hear people say that they’re too tight / fat / old / crippled for yoga. This is of course nonsense, and the irony is that these people could benefit from yoga the most.

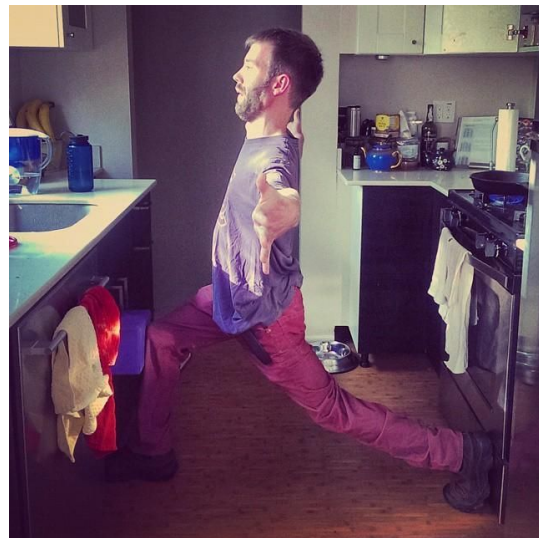
I also wanted to express the idea that yoga is everywhere. What’s the deal with yoga being done only in yoga studios? I think the checkout lanes at the grocery store and my kitchen are great places to practice yoga. If you consider Mr. Iyengar’s commentary on *sutra* II.46, I think the definition he gives for *asana* could be applied to mindful action in general. We all have obstacles to overcome; we all have a choice to find “perfection” in our lives through careers and relationships. Finding effortlessness in those actions requires patience, softness, vulnerability, and in my opinion, there is not enough of that in the world.

RR: How would you like to see Iyengar Yoga evolve in the United States in the next twenty years?

I hope Iyengar Yoga and its methodology becomes more common knowledge to those interested in self care. I’d like to think that there is a growing need to understand essentially what we are all fighting about, and we are beginning to think about things like hyper-sensitivity and tolerance.

There is a rich source of empowerment to the Iyengar way, and I would like to see that kind of tool be more widely available.

The Iyengar brand of yoga is amazing to me. I moved from Nashville, TN to Portland, OR and only missed one week of class. It was a beautiful feeling to be struggling to adjust to a new climate, so far away from friends, family, and southern home cooking, yet be able to continue my yoga practice without interruption. That is testament to the dedication, knowledge, and integrity of Iyengar Yoga teachers, which I think will pay big dividends going forward.



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