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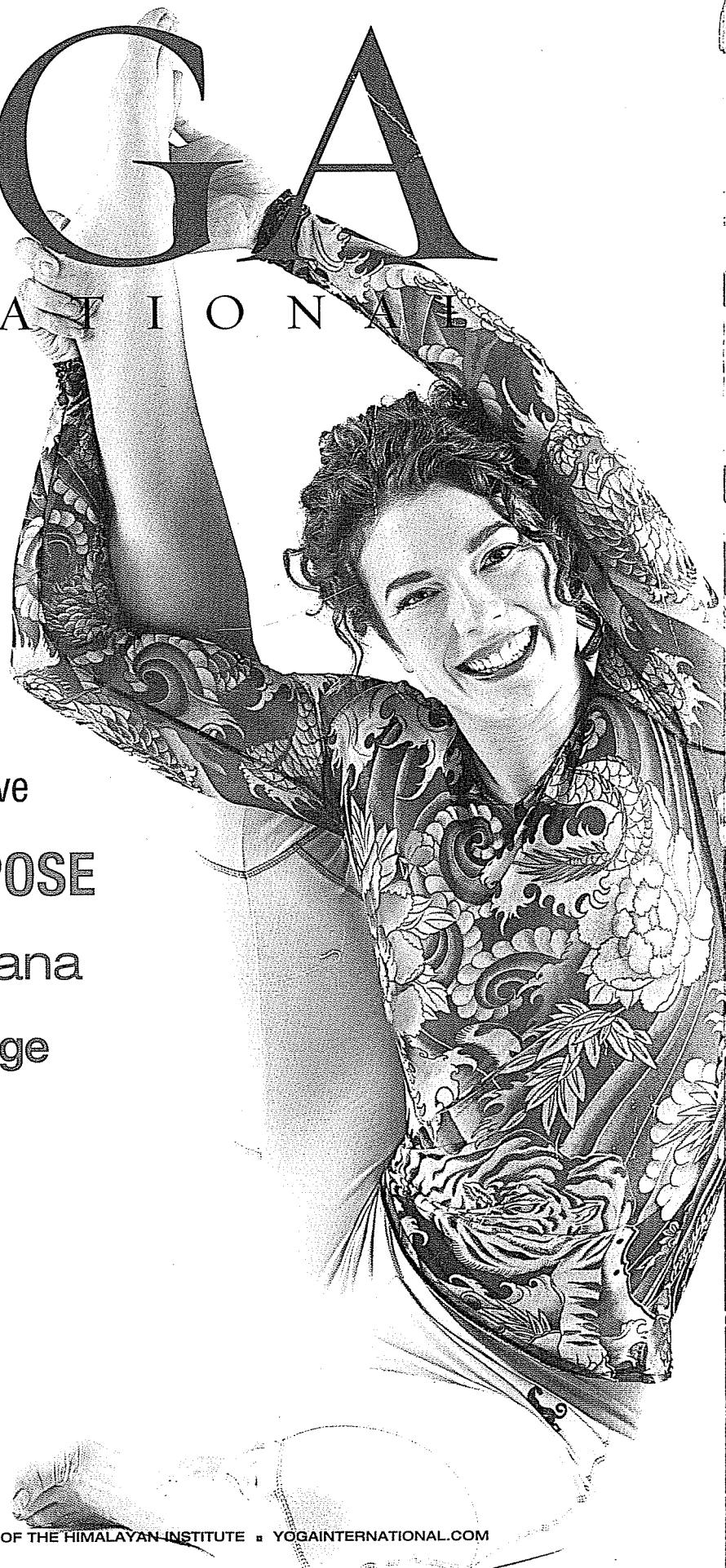
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YOGATHREADS

Deepen your practice + Inspire your life



When 96-year-old Ida Herbert breezed into Toronto recently to teach a special yoga class, she didn't really think she was anything that special. But the students who eagerly awaited her arrival—mostly women half her age—knew better, and the four-foot-ten bespectacled Herbert didn't disappoint.

"Do you watch Dr. Oz?" she gleefully shouts to the class, referring to one of her idols. "Say hello to him!" Then, as if to prove the good doctor's pronouncement—that doing yoga keeps us young—she deftly leads the women through sun salutations, downward dogs, "the mighty cobra," and more, all seamlessly tied by her *ujjayi* breaths and pearls of wisdom.

"Take a breath and enjoy yoga!" says Herbert, designated the oldest living yoga teacher by the 2013 edition of *Guinness World Records*, as she closes her eyes and raises her arms and legs for a five-minute *navasana* (boat pose), arduous for many even a quarter her age. "Collapse if you have to," she continues, "there's no shame in it."

Not your typical nonagenarian, this feisty fan of Judge Judy (because "she has a mind like a rat trap") has traveled the world twice, ridden a motorbike halfway across Canada with a cairn terrier in tow, and plans to live past 100. "I have a lot of energy,"

Yoga's Pint-Sized **POWERHOUSE**



IDA'S PEARLS OF WISDOM

- 1 Remember: you're never too old to do anything.
- 2 Keep your cartilage moving because it's the root of our hip problems.
- 3 Always move your body—that's my mantra! Keep things that you use on top shelves in your home so that you always have to stretch for them.
- 4 Do yoga daily to relax and don't overreact to the stresses that inevitably come our way. Things will pass. If you're still stressed, take your vengeance on leaves and weeds.
- 5 Keep the companionships of those who are compassionate and encouraging of your path.

she says, energy that's helped her teach passionately for more than 20 years. When Herbert first discovered yoga—in the 1960s—she never dreamed it would become her life's work. Back then only a few females, such as Vanda Scaravelli and Indra Devi, dared to ven-

ture onto this predominately male path. And these legendary yoginis, as Herbert is quick to point out, also lived to a ripe old age (Indra Devi was 102). "That's what yoga can do for you!" she says.

After living through two World Wars in England (she was born during the first one and worked five floors underground as a teleprinter operator for the government—with bombs raining overhead—in the second), Herbert and her husband, Michael, decided to head for the safer pastures of Canada and set sail on the famed Aquitania.

It was while living in Toronto, as a 50-year-old junior high school secretary who "hated aerobic exercise," that Herbert discovered yoga. She was practicing on a stationary bike in a local health club one day when she noticed a woman doing asanas on a mat nearby. "It looked so graceful and peaceful," Herbert says, "I just had to learn more." So she enlisted the health club's supervisor to teach her yoga at home. There she learned a couple new poses each week, read books to learn more, and soon developed a regular practice, beginning with sun salutations every morning at 5:30, something she continues to this day.

"Yoga gave me a lovely feeling. You learn to be quiet inside. Your limbs get stretched and feel lighter, and you feel very peaceful," she says. "It quiets my mind, my body, and my senses. And it really soothes my emotions."

After retiring in 1986, Ida and her husband began wintering in Florida at a KOA campsite with other retirees. When the campsite's exercise teacher moved away, Herbert seized the opportunity to teach something she loved... for free.

"I fell into it quite naturally. I don't even consider it teaching. I wanted to encourage people to keep moving—that they're never too old. That's my mantra," she says. "You are never too old to do things that are good for you."

A few years later, when the couple moved to Orillia, Ontario, Herbert started teaching slow, gentle yoga at the local Y (which granted her its certification). But she now has her classes at the Bayshore Village Community housing complex where she lives (north of Toronto). And that's where her greatest fan base resides. Sixteen years ago, on her 80th birthday, a dozen or so of her weekly students and fellow residents (all women, 60 to 80 years old) surprised her by showing up in shirts emblazoned with the phrase "Ida's Girls" on the front. She proudly carries a photo album of "my girls" everywhere she goes.

When she's not teaching, Herbert can be found tending her prized vegetable garden or sitting in meditation on a large boulder nearby, aptly named *Ida's Rock*.

Does Herbert feel that her daily sun salutations are what keep her looking 70-something, with a sharp wit and mind to boot? "You could attribute some of my longevity to that, I think. But I also eat no junk food, drink sherry with lunch, and love to flirt!" she says, laughing. "I don't feel a day older. I feel exactly as I have my whole life."

Her only qualms about aging? Not being able to read or ride her bike because of her macular degeneration. Otherwise, she has "No pains at all. Ever!" And, with no plans to quit teaching anytime soon, the *Guinness* title may be in her name for years to come. "Well, if I feel like I do now," she says, "it just may!" —*Lisa Miriam Cherry* >>

Lisa Miriam Cherry is the co-author and editor of Stories from the Yogic Heart.

Bryonie Wise