



## Cathy Underwood talks to Deborah Smyth about setting up Yoga4Mums

"Why do you think people come to yoga classes?" I asked. "Some come for a great stretch, some come and find they are connecting deep within themselves. The joy is," she looked at me intensely with her eyes shining, "they're both in the same class yet getting completely different experiences." Already I was getting swept along with her enthusiasm.

Cathy has lived in Enfield for 5 years. She is married to Tan Radan and they have 2 boys – Tyler Chi (8) and Corben Tao (6). Originally, she trained in the performing arts and spent her early career dancing, acting and teaching. I find it fascinating that she was so involved in fitness and even high impact aerobics originally but then felt drawn to finding out about the body's natural energy through Pilates, Reiki and healing. It wasn't until she was pregnant with her first child, that she trained as a yoga teacher.

Events of motherhood have very definitely changed her. "I had a very hard birth with my first son and also suffered with post natal depression," she reflected. "Yet the more I pursued yoga, the more I found there were things I could do for myself to help. For instance, yoga can help physically by softening the muscles, and emotionally by calming the breathing. In turn, this helps to level the hormones - a great bonus in pregnancy!" Now Cathy is able to help other mums through equally challenging times by drawing on her own experiences and insight. For this reason, Cathy set up Yoga4Mums last year.

"I've spent too much time running around, trying to catch my tail and then paying the price. And in my marriage, my husband and I were like ships in the night . . . I did become a very good juggler though!"

We talked about the enormity of being responsible for someone else's life and how it can be quite overwhelming. "Yoga has a positive, calming influence on daily life," she enthused, "and so is especially useful during these stressful situations." We then discussed how, once we have children, we become more aware of the scary things that go on around us. It is true that we look to establishments like schools to nurture our children but it's

really the community spirit that needs building and this is what Cathy is trying to achieve. I questioned how that works. "People find they have a common bond with others in the class and then they may choose to go to a yoga workshop or weekend together. Friendships blossom and families begin to communicate. There's a ripple effect too. If you start to incorporate this yoga philosophy in your life generally, it rubs off on others and affects those around you."

*"You soon realize that if things go wrong, you can either go mad and smash plates, or you can take a step back and breathe!"*

Now, with her business partner Colin Davis, she's expanding into working with small businesses, schools and community centres. "It is a way for businesses to care for the physical and mental wellbeing of their staff," she said. "It also supports the theory that companies who are socially responsible will prosper!" Their yoga teachers go into the workplace weekly and offer vital tools to help people cope with the demands of the workplace, improve work relationships and inspire a healthy, stress free environment. They even offer a percentage of their time free and the proceeds go back to the community. For 2009, this will be donated to Tree-House, the national charity supporting children with autism and their families.

"These are huge projects for you to be taking on," I stated. "Maybe it's coming from a big family," she countered, "I've never had small ideas!" I asked her how she relaxed. There was a pause as she looked at me in disbelief (and

now I accept this may have been a silly question). "I do yoga!" she stated. We both laughed as she explained further. I do a weekly class with my own teacher and an intensive one with my teacher from Australia. In addition, I practise yoga every day. "That takes a huge amount of discipline," I remarked. "Well yoga is a practice. I have created a special place in my house that I use for yoga and here, I feel totally awake and energised.

It's been a real delight talking to Cathy; her ideas and her enthusiasm are truly inspirational. Do make a note of the Yoga for Energy Workshop on 26<sup>th</sup> April which promises to be an uplifting day. It will be a day of yoga - Chi Gung for vital energy together with the power of Hatha yoga. I plan to go so I hope to see you there!

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