

THIRD COAST YOGA STUDIO Community Spotlight

by Julie Hurley

Yogini Gretchen Cline of Third Coast Yoga has been an educator for most of her professional career, which spans almost 30 years. In fact, part of her ascribed spiritual name, Gurubanda Kaur, means “teacher, transforming wisdom”. The rest means “locked or strong foundation” and “the lioness who walks in beauty”.

“I love creating curriculum, classes,” said Cline, an English, Women’s Studies and PE Yoga instructor at Muskegon Community College (MCC). “My first Hatha Yoga training in Traverse City synthesized many of my interests and passions—psychology, creative things, literature, yogic philosophy and how all of that relates to well-being and self transformation. It was the perfect place for me. I kept that in the back of my mind.”

One decade later, she realized that merging her love of yoga with her love of teaching was her life-long dream, or in yogic terms—her Dharma or her life’s purpose—and began the process to become a teacher trainer (a “teacher of teachers”) of Yoga, specifically Hatha Level I Teacher Training, the very same course that inspired her years ago.

“Over the course of 17 Saturdays from September through May, we cover a wide and encompassing range of study areas, including anatomy and physiology, techniques, teaching methodology, Yoga philosophy, lifestyle and ethics,” said Cline.

“Homework for the course includes reading assignments, a 40-day personal sadhana (yogic practice), an independent yoga project and 20 additional yoga classes.” The course is Yoga Alliance-approved at the 200-hour level—a national organization that sets standards for yoga teachers and schools.

The teacher training course is held in Cline’s studio, which was built as an addition to her home. “My studio is not very big, probably about 1,000 sq. ft., but I specifically designed it with high ceilings and added sun tubes, which let the light in but don’t bring any heat in. About 10 to 12 people can practice in there comfortably,” said Cline. “It’s also on the second floor, so it looks and feels like you’re in the clouds, overlooking a pine forest. I put my blood, sweat and tears into the studio and I’m very proud of the space—and my new gongs.” Cline recently purchased two symphonic gongs, the kind used in Kundalini yoga, and loves giving students a ‘gong bath.’ “It’s Yoga therapy, a part of the Kundalini yoga experience.”

Cline took her first yoga class in 1987, though over the next several years didn’t really dedicate herself to a consistent practice. However, after becoming certified to teach, a few years later she began a small practice in a rented building in Grand Haven. She had an idea that in order to share yoga with others most effectively she needed to aspire to own a yoga center and become immersed in the business of yoga.

“I was teaching at MCC at the time and I nearly gave up my career there,” said Cline. “But after seeing how things worked, I realized that I didn’t need to have the yoga center. I didn’t want to be a businessperson. Many successful people running studios had backers and partners with money and health insurance, but I didn’t. It’s really hard to make a living running a studio without backers. Plus, I didn’t want to keep books or do the business part.”

This revelation came to Cline while she had already been teaching one to two yoga classes a year for college credit in the PE department at MCC. Suddenly, her full time job was a gift. Her yoga classes were so successful that she was soon offered two to three classes a semester (aside from her English and Social Science courses as well), in addition to receiving benefits and a retirement.

It was during this time that Cline, having just completed Professional Yoga Therapy certification, began seriously exploring Kundalini Yoga, and she wanted to incorporate it as a PE class at MCC.

“I pulled together a curriculum after some research and presented it to the school chair; they accepted the program,” said Cline. “All the dots had been connected and things started lining up for me in the universe. I was getting paid to teach what I loved, while enjoying some financial security. And I still had a practice on the side, teaching one to two classes a week at my studio.”

The MCC Kundalini and Hatha Yoga classes are very popular, with Cline admitting that she suspects most students sign up for it because they think it will be an easy credit.

“It’s the only class where you’re required to take a nap,” she joked. “But we do a lot of learning as well, including anatomy, 50 yoga poses, alignment, adjustment, the history and Yoga sutras. I’ve had some students come back and tell me that it was the most important class they’d taken all year because it helped them handle the stress of being a student in today’s world.”

Kundalini “refers to the life force energy that resides within each human being. Kundalini Yoga, as taught by Yogi Bhajan, Ph.D., consists of postures, special breathing, hand and finger positions (mudra), chanting and meditation in a specific sequence to clear the energy channels and prepare the body and mind to manifest one’s awareness of his or her life force.”

“Both Kundalini and Hatha Yoga (which is the most common form of Yoga) bring you to the same place; Kundalini Yoga just does it more quickly,” said Cline. “You can often feel the powerful effects of Kundalini Yoga after just a few minutes of practice.”

In Yogic tradition, the Kundalini energy is portrayed as a coiled serpent resting at the base of the spine, or your first chakra.

“Kundalini is your creative life force. By awakening it, you feel alive. That’s really all it is,” said Cline. “It works physiologically via the neuro-endocrine system to create a sense of positivity, and eliminate stress.”

Cline is one of very few teachers of Kundalini Yoga in west Michigan, and Third Coast Yoga Studio/School is the only place in West Michigan to have what Cline calls an “amazing elevating yogic experience that integrates movement, sound, and meditation.”

For more information visit www.ThirdCoastYoga.com or call 616-844-9074. See ad page 10 & 16.

A married mother of two young children, Julie Hurley is a freelance writer with a strong interest in natural living. Visit her personal blog at www.ourlunchbox.blogspot.com. She is also the Director of Public Relations at Principia Media, a publishing house in Grand Rapids. www.PrincipiaMedia.com.