

What Current Class Members Want You to Know:

Kara Seidman, 22, College Senior majoring in Nutrition:

I first got into yoga when I was 17. Ever since my first class I knew this would be part of my life forever.

It took me a while to find teachers I could fall in love with. But when I met Ruth Anne and Josh, I just loved them. With them it's not so much about the business side and how many people come to class. They love yoga and they want us to love it, too. I saw that love and I saw that light and it resonated with me. Besides that, they're so knowledgeable about their subject. For someone who really wants to learn about yoga and the spirituality and the philosophy ... they can break it down so it's easily understood. They also care about their students. They care about us and our journey.

I studied with Ruth Anne and Josh for about a year before deciding to start the teacher training. I already envisioned myself as a teacher. This goes with my interest in nutrition. It completes me.

Josh is so great with teaching anatomy. It is about the body and a lot of things happen inside of it. He teaches it so it's not so complicated.

The training is fun. It's easy-going and relaxing, yet still very educational and informative. We joke and we're serious sometimes. We can be so comfortable with each other and our teachers.

It's like I have a whole new family here. They're friends and they're family. They're people I can go to. In my major (at school) there are a lot of Type A personalities. There is a lot of stress. Then, when I turn to my yoga family, there's peace, there's stillness.

This training has taught me a lot. It's been the best thing for me. I've learned to time manage everything. I've learned to relax and be confident that things are going to get done and I don't have to worry so much about it. I have peace with everything I do now.

We spent so much time learning to look inside ourselves through meditation and getting a stricter home meditation practice, which is so important on this journey.

I have such a strong practice now: Yoga and meditation. I'm so much more myself now. I'm so confident and I'm confident that what I'm doing is what I'm supposed to be doing. I know this is something I'm going to do for the rest of my life and I can't wait to see what more is going to come and how much deeper my practice is going to get. I'm only 22, I have so much more time to learn about myself. Now the seed is planted and the tree is going to grow.

Barbara Miranda-Sousa, mother of two children, ages 7 and 11:

I'm from Lima, Peru. About fifteen years ago I was trying to figure out what yoga was. You don't really know what it is until you practice. You have pictures in your head of some naked guy with his foot behind his head. I went to a yoga class in Peru and talked to the teacher, but he wasn't convincing. So I didn't get started until later.

I started practicing yoga about five years ago. I fell in love with it. It was obvious to me that the next step was teacher training. I looked on the Internet trying to find out what my options were. I found Mama Nirvana's web page and liked it. I felt a good vibe.

I called Ruth Anne and left a message. She called back with her beautiful, relaxing and sweet voice. She said that the teacher training was for everybody, that it was a step in the journey of your yoga practice and I liked that.

I was glad that Mama Nirvana's seemed casual. You can be profound and deep without being controlling. I went to take Ruth Anne's class and I liked her. I liked her style. She always finishes class with a very nice thought. It helps you leave the studio with a nice way to continue your practice. You go to class and after that you leave in peace. You don't want to do anything, just rest and keep that air that surrounds you.

I didn't really have expectations for the training, but I loved it. Ruth Anne gave us some books to read and she talked about philosophy, history, and she did it in a very nice, easy way. She told a story in a way that's easy to absorb. You can see her knowledge. I felt safe with a person who seems to have a lot of knowledge.

I could see how it was about more than the physical part. I was going deeper into the philosophical and the spiritual parts of yoga. The training really helps you to explore that.

It's good to have two teachers. Each teacher has something new to bring, not better than the other, just new. You get a combination. Ruth Anne, she's in charge more of the philosophy and meditation part. Josh is in charge more of the physical part. That's a good thing. You have two different people and each is strong in what they teach. Josh is a big guy with a big heart. He knows about the muscles and the bones. He is a very safe person. [referring to learning to be safe in poses] Ruth Anne has experience with meditation and pranayama. Ruth Anne is more open to experiencing yoga in your own body. She brings new things ... that come from her own journey. She brings that to the table.

All of this knowledge prepares us to be more mindful with our students.

I'm a mother and I live in Deerfield, so the teaching requirement at first was very intimidating. I had just moved to the area. I had no idea how I would get students. Ruth Anne said none of us probably feels ready, but we are. She said we weren't choosing this but that something bigger had chosen us. She said the perfect words to encourage us.

Now I teach Friday mornings at my children's school. I teach a free class for the parents after they drop their children off. After teaching my first class I was so stressed that I finished the class with a headache. But the next class was better and the next was even better. What I thought was a hassle in the beginning really prepared me. When we finish we'll be totally over the fear of doing this, of being center stage.

I am always looking inside myself. A long time ago, as a teenager, I went to therapy. Now I found my therapy in yoga. In the beginning you just learn the asanas. Then you learn the breathing. Then you integrate both. I started meditation and I realized, I don't need therapy anymore. Training helped me continue that meditation and reinforce the importance of meditation. It's difficult to keep at it and to stay still, but it's part of the journey.

As a whole personal experience, yoga is a way to grow. The training is a great way to grow in your yogic path. I'd recommend it just for that, aside from professional ambitions. It's really more for the love of the art. If you are on this path, the training is the right way to go.

It's a great package deal. You get the training workshops plus you get a couple of classes a week to improve your practice.

J. Vaughn, massage therapist:

I've been doing yoga for years. I've always had some flexibility, but I've never been an athlete. In my younger years I never did any sports. It wasn't until I was in college that yoga came into my life and then I just keep showing up. I'm constantly surprised at how much I'm able to do. Yoga is a mindset and it affects the body itself. It's an ever-evolving, ever-changing thing.

I'm taking classes two times a week now. I'd thought about doing a teacher training but I made whatever excuses not to do it. Then Ruth Anne sent a copy of the application form with a note that said, "You might like to do this," and I said, yeah, I would.

I initially went into the training with the feeling that I probably would not become a teacher. I thought the teacher training would expand my knowledge as a body worker. I'd recently gotten into massage therapy and had just finished up training in that. I often give people stretches and things to do at home, I use yoga poses as a reference. Some poses are keyed into certain muscle groups. That way I can provide people with a resource.

But then, through the practicum, I decided I'd like to teach. Introducing people to yoga has been a great thing. It opens people up to something different. People realize they can do more that they thought they could.

When people are first introduced to yoga or from a visual standpoint you see people stretching. But as you practice more and when you're with teachers who are well versed in it and who've been working with it, you realize there's a lot more to it than, "my thigh is parallel to the floor."

With yoga, the whole mind-body connection and getting people in touch with how the body works can be a phenomenal thing. People lose touch with a sense of their own bodies. Yoga brings about a deeper connection with yourself. There are poses that build confidence and poses that initiate relaxation. Getting in touch with that can be a powerful thing.

The Mama Nirvana training is unique. The class size is around 15 or 16, so you get a lot of attention when you're part of a group that small.

With the practicum you begin your teaching before you're out of the program. I don't think there's another program in the area that does that. You get to go through the initial phases collectively, with fellow students and under the guidance of teachers that you trust.

I would describe the training as a deepening of your own practice, getting a better understanding of the practice of yoga itself. You start to explore the spiritual parts, then there's a part where you learn to have fun with it. I think a lot of people go into classes quiet and serious. In advanced beginner and intermediate classes you just kind of get in love with it and start to have some fun and freedom. You start to let loose with it.

What I like is that with Ruth Anne and Josh you get different sides of the same coin. Josh is really into the more structural side of things and Ruth Anne is the other side: how does it feel on an emotional level, more of the spiritual side, more from an energetic standpoint, the deeper parts of the practice.

As a teacher, I hope to give students both sides of the coin: to have enough Ruth Anne and enough Josh and meet in the middle.

Tina Stevens, Principal and Creative Director of Stevens Design Studio:

Ruth Anne brings more than posture and exercise to her yoga classes. She showed me that yoga is not just an exercise. In her classes I learned how much yoga really was about meditation and intention and I wanted to learn more about that.

Still, I didn't necessarily think I'd become a teacher. I have a business that I run, I do a lot of other things. Also, I didn't think I could be good at teaching. But then I realized I can do this. Now I've been doing my student teaching and I really like it. The teacher training helped me be better in so many things I do. In my business I have to communicate with clients and employees. A lot of that is teaching, when you think about it.

In the training, Ruth Anne shares a lot of her self with people. She has a lot to offer. She has her own perspective on things. She really brings everything she has to the table with her.

Josh is really patient and encouraging. He always says, "That was great," when we practice teaching. He taught us facts and anatomy, but he was also great at encouraging us.

Ruth Anne and Josh together, the combination of the two of them is very unique. They are very different people and they give two different points of view. But they both share the same

respect for yoga and they are both one hundred percent there. I really admire them. It's very much a sharing, caring thing and they're really great at it.

Ruth Anne and Josh made me fully prepared, they taught me really well how to be a teacher. I felt totally confident. I still have trouble remembering all the Sanskrit names of poses, but I always remember everything I learned about safety, anatomy, what poses are appropriate for beginners and which modifications I can offer. All I had to do was to bring 'me' to the teaching. A good teacher takes you on a journey. When you're the teacher you have to lead that journey. I'm excited about it.

When you take a class as a student, it doesn't look so complex. But now I can see how much comes into play. To be a good teacher you have to bring yourself to it, and you have to really understand yoga and how to teach a class.

I would like to continue teaching and one of the things I'd like, as a breast cancer survivor, is to lead classes for people with cancer or breast cancer. When you're being treated for cancer you need medical care, but you need more. You need some nurturing. That would be a really nice thing to offer people through yoga. I'm working toward that.

The training is a serious effort. But it's also very manageable. You can fit it into whatever else you are doing.

Laura Mankowsky, 42, mother of two children, ages 4 & 7

Before my kids were born I taught in the Springfield Public Schools and there was a yoga class offered after work. I loved it. I wanted to be able to share that with other people. People there in the inner city. I thought, wow, they need this!

I started taking Josh's classes and I loved the resonance of his voice. I was hooked!

I wanted to do the training. I have two children, so I had to convince my husband. But he saw me coming home from yoga class in a state of bliss and my family agreed to help watch the kids so I could do the training. I have a 4 year-old and a 7 year-old. I didn't know how I'd balance it. But things at home are easier with yoga. My responses to things are peaceful and calm. If a kid spills something, it just doesn't bother me anymore.

At first I said I just wanted to take the training for myself. Now I can't imagine not doing more: teaching, sharing it. What made the difference? Confidence.

I am one who can say yoga is for everyone. The training is very adaptable to different people, to different learning styles. I'm a perfect candidate to say that because I have learning disabilities. I have ADHD and I wondered if I could learn what I needed for the training. But Josh has lots of different methodologies, he does a lot of hands on teaching and he includes lots of differing learning style in his teaching. Also, with my attention span I didn't know if I could sit through long classes and meditations. Now I can do it.

I am focusing more in my life, too. The balance poses help with focus. Your whole body, your whole chemical balance; it helps balance mind, body and spirit.

The training has been a lot of fun. We laughed a lot. I thought we'd just be studying our books and there'd be tests, but there have been no tests. There were assignments, but it was all very reasonable and relaxing. We have a practicum, but there's no pressure. No one observes you.

It's been very deep on an emotional level, too. It's very connecting for the whole group.

Ruth Anne is very supportive of people and their personal issues. If there's something stressful in your personal life she can help you find a way to deal with it better. She's very open to emotional feelings. I've seen her help a lot of people.

When my kids get bigger I will probably go back to teach school and maybe I'll teach yoga, too. I'd like to teach classes for young kids to help de-stress them. I want to share the bliss!

When the training ends there will be a ceremony and banquet. They make a big deal of it. Family can come. It's really uniting for people.

I think if everyone did yoga there'd be no wars. People would be happy. We'd still have problems, but we'd deal with them better

Amy Andrew, Florence, MA

I started doing Yoga in the 4th grade. They taught it to us in gym class. Then, fifteen years ago, after my baby was born, I started doing more classes. Now I have a consistent home practice.

I came to Mama Nirvana's because I was looking for a Teacher Training. I wanted to get a certificate. With Mama Nirvana's I felt like I could trust them and they know what they were talking about.

Most trainings are a month long and you have to go away from your family. This is a good training for people with families because the schedule is great. I don't have to leave home and go away someplace; I don't have to quit my job. Also, it's a nice balance with the two teachers; it's good to get both perspectives. I think that's so important. You go to other studios and they're like we're the only path, that kind of fundamentalism. The good thing about this yoga teacher training is I have to make my own decisions. It does help you be more self reliant.

I love the practicum. They guide you through the teaching process. It's really good that you get to start teaching during the training. I'm getting a lot of hands on experience and I'm really excited about it.

It's a good value in terms of time and money. The teachers are both really knowledgeable.

I've been pretty self-directed in my spiritual practice. I like to have a spiritual practice. I don't want to organize that around my job, I want to organize my job around that.

I really liked Ruth Anne's part in the beginning, talking about history and philosophy. I loved learning about anatomy. I loved doing all the coloring in the anatomy book. It was really good. I've learned a lot about sequencing. We've learned to use our voices when we teach. It's hard for me. It's easier for me to just use my body, but I'm learning to translate the poses into words, I'm getting better at it. I've learned a lot about postures that I didn't know.

Kate Stenson, 38, mother of 2.

I want to teach yoga so I can reach out and possibly help people with emotional, spiritual and physical development issues. I believe that the point of Yoga is to help reduce someone else's suffering if not your own. We're all connected to each other and Yoga unites us to something bigger than ourselves. I also like to connect yoga to the natural world and to things happening in the world. What I found meaningful was that when I started taking yoga classes regularly it helped me help someone else who was emotionally depressed. We need to reduce the suffering in ourselves in order to reduce suffering in others. It's like the dedication that's sometimes said after a yoga class: Lokah Samasta Sukhino Bhavantu, meaning, "May all beings everywhere be happy and free. And may my life contribute in some way to that happiness and that freedom for all." I chose the Mama Nirvana Teacher Training because of the way it's set up, 2 half days a month plus 2 classes per week. It was easy on my family. The Training has been my priority these past 18 months. Some people think it's hard to get to 2 classes a week but I think it's a luxury. What else would you want to be doing? It's a good balance. The first year I was really impressed with all I was learning: new poses, meditation and pranayama. Ruth Anne taught a lot about meditation. I've met a lot of new people through the program and in my life outside the program. When I tell people that I'm training to be a yoga teacher it sparks so much conversation and interest. I think it's unique to have two teachers who have different opinions about the postures. That proves the point that there might not be one definitive way to do things and we as teachers can teach yoga in our own style. It's also good to get a male and female's perspective on how different bodies can balance or hold postures. Josh says things that make me laugh. For example, he once said that sometimes we need to seek to fail, then when I fell, I started laughing and every time I fell I laughed because I succeeded!

Rebecca Robbins, 35, Physical Therapist and mother of 2

I've had an interest in yoga and Pilates for a while. I liked Mama Nirvana because it was well known.

I decided to take the Teacher Training because I thought that if I was going to invest my time in the personal practice, I wanted to grow that beyond myself. If I decided to teach in a class format or use it one on one in my physical therapy practice, that would be helpful, too.

I wouldn't say the teacher training is hard, but I would say it's very time demanding. You have to be ready to have a huge commitment of time. I live on the Huntington Chester line, so the commute is hard and I have two children. But Ruth Anne and Josh help everyone try to keep perspective. They offer a nice balance between understanding and compassion for your time situation. They encourage open communication. They reiterate that they will try to work with you. They both have high standards, which is one reason I was attracted to them as teachers, because I have very high standards for myself.

As a physical therapist, I saw people in my practice with yoga injuries, so I was apprehensive at first about being a proponent of it. But that's changed a lot. Now, I'd say to any other professionals who do physical therapy, nursing, speech therapy ... that the caliber of teaching that Ruth Anne and Josh offer is professional level teaching. Somebody who already has a level of professional knowledge will still benefit from their teaching and this training. They offer opportunities to modify exercises and they make things accessible to people who have physical limitations. The quality of the teacher and the dedication of the students has to be high. Do they really think yoga is about putting their leg behind their head? Or is it about their body and their practice, and using their body as an instrument of learning?

I had a meditation and prayer practice before yoga, but that's also changed a great deal. In my meditation practice previously, I noticed some stumbling blocks. But spending time with Josh and Ruth Anne gave me some tools to overcome those obstacles. I learned about my own propensity toward mental distraction, the things that draw me away from being in the moment. That awareness changes my life on a daily basis. It helps me stay centered every day.