

Amnesty International World

Words: Heather George



2 hours yoga – all styles – all nations – all people

**WORLD
YOGA
DAY** Amnesty International
A 24 hour world wide yoga practice for human rights

On Sunday, February 3rd, Heather George organised two workshops at River Bourne Health Club in Chertsey, England with three other teachers: Garry Freer, Debbie Wherlock and Sandy Lee. 60 people took part and others made donations, which raised over \$1,200 for Amnesty International.

We joined yoga teachers and schools worldwide donating their time and space to a 2-hour yoga session devoted to human rights. Classes were held 11-1 local time in each time zone, which led to 24 hours of continuous yoga practice. We aimed to generate a powerful impact by devoting our thoughts and energy globally to the human rights issue.



I knew it was going to be a success as soon as I mentioned the idea at a few classes and had received such a positive response. Yoga practitioners and dear friends Linda Lowe and Richard Barham, who are members of River Bourne Health club, quickly volunteered to do the marketing and administration with my partner Tony Davis. Frank Bennett, Studio Coordinator at the club, was equally enthusiastic and offered us their two studios for the event with capacity for 50, later expanded to 60 by removing equipment. With everyone's determination and focus, in just a few weeks we had not only filled the places available but also had a waiting list.

The eager anticipation built up during the weeks preceding the day as we excitedly discussed and planned the event after classes. The venue was set, the places were being filled and I was very fortunate to be able to call on the assistance of three extraordinary teachers:

Garry Freer, who I met whilst doing my ChiBall training. He blends classical Sivananda Yoga with Stott Pilates into a dynamic, flowing yoga. He also has an extensive career in TV, film and theatre and is a teacher of salsa dance.

Debbie Wherlock is a former fitness instructor and now a Sivananda-trained Yoga teacher. She holds diplomas in Anatomy & Physiology and Massage & Remedial Therapy. Her style is to move slowly through each posture with particular attention to anatomical precision, explanation and adjustments for remedial work.

Sandy Lee, a British Wheel teacher and teacher trainer, was one of my original teachers, having a breadth of knowl-



edge in philosophy, pranayama and asanas. Her background in choreography and as a professional dancer has led her to develop her "Yoga in Expressive Melodic Movement" (Yoga EMM).

On the day two teachers shared the class in each studio. One gave an introduction to the purpose of our day and then taught the warm up, sun salutations and standing postures. This was followed by the other teacher with seated postures, balances, twists and relaxation. We supported each other by adjusting students as necessary. After the classes we all joined in the lounge to relax and share our experiences. Everyone agreed it was worth doing again.



This initiative is part of a campaign by Amnesty International in the run-up to the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Amnesty International are urging the Chinese authorities to keep their promise to improve the human rights situation in China, especially in the areas of death penalty, fair trial and prevention of torture and ill-treatment, protection of human rights defenders and freedom of expression and information.

The 2008 Summer Olympics will take place August 8-24 in Beijing, China. Amnesty International believes China's hosting of the Olympics provides it with a unique opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to human rights. They want to make sure that this opportunity does not pass by without notice, action and sustained improvements.

When China was bidding for and awarded the Olympics, the Chinese authorities stated that the Beijing Olympics would help the development of human rights in China. We need to draw attention to these promises – which have also been echoed by the International Olympic Committee – and hold the Chinese authorities to account on them.

Amnesty International has stated that for China to live up to its promises to improve human rights, the Chinese authorities should:

- Put in place measures to significantly reduce the use of the death penalty as steps towards full abolition of the death penalty in China,
- Take concrete steps to bring all forms of detention in China into line with international human rights law and standards, including measures to uphold the rights to fair trial and prevent torture,
- Ensure that human rights defenders are free to carry out their peaceful activities in line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and
- End all censorship of the Internet in China which constitutes a violation of the fundamental human rights to freedom of expression and information.

I would like to thank the generosity of all who took part or donated money; the staff of River Bourne Health Club for their time and support; Sandy, Debbie and Garry for their inspiration and generosity and Linda, Richard, Frank & Tony for their belief and enthusiastic help.



Heather George is a Yoga & Pilates teacher and Life Coach based in Surrey. She has been practising yoga for over twenty years and teaching for seven with diplomas in Yoga (International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centre in India and the BSY), Anatomy & Physiology and Life Coaching. Heather teaches in schools, health clubs and spas and provides private classes and workshops for individuals, groups and corporate clients.

Details of the forthcoming Yoga Festival in Egypt & Jordan and other events are available at www.omtropy.com.

