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Our Second CYT 1000 Graduating Class!

Interview with Robb Mills

Maggie is thrilled to announce her second set of CYT 1000 graduates, who have completed 1000 hours of study over 2 years. With the program accredited in 2014 by the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT), these grads are well on their way to becoming C-IAYTs -- IAYT Certified Yoga Therapists.

Robb Mills of Oregon is one these recent graduates, and he agreed to let us interview him about his experience with Yoga Therapy International. Robb and other grads will be applying for a C-IAYT designation from the IAYT after graduating.

Tell us a bit about you and your background, including your name.

My name is Robb Mills. I'm an Indiana native who's spent the last 20-plus years living on the U.S. West Coast. I'm a musician; a bit of a workaholic; an observer; a perpetual student of yoga, life, and the people and things that make it tick.

Years ago, a music degree led me to California and a career as a music composer and sound designer for the game industry. I was introduced to yoga in 2005 when my employer began offering onsite classes. I was impressed with the recharged and balanced feeling yoga produced after spending hours sitting at a desk. I attended classes on and off for some time.

Jump ahead to 2009: now a successful freelancer, my workload was increasingly demanding; my stress levels and lack of sleep were chronic; and my "you can rest when you're dead" midwestern work ethic eventually landed me in the hospital for 3 days with severe atrial fibrillation and a heart rate of 197bpm. Three days later, my heart beat was back to normal, but I was left feeling fragile, broken, and unstable.

For months, I carried a near constant fear of having another attack along with the feeling that something wasn't right. I returned to yoga and discovered that intense asana practice alleviated these feelings and made me feel strong, stable, and healthy again.



I began to take yoga more seriously. In 2012, I completed my 200-hour yoga teacher certification under teacher and author Mark Stephens. I began teaching at a local gym and at a trauma healing center, and I began playing live music for hospice patients. My wife and I traveled to Colombia and Panama to bring movement and music to disadvantaged kids.

Amidst all of this, I continued to work ridiculously long hours, isolated, at a computer, watching my health and my relationship suffer from lack of work-life balance. I decided it was time for

real change. Guided by my interest in yoga and the body, I began taking anatomy and psychology courses at the local community college in preparation for physiotherapy school when a friend sent me a link to the IAYT website.

It was the first time I had heard of "yoga therapy," and it got my attention. I appreciated the "whole person" approach to healing, its recognition that we are more than just tissue, blood, and bone; that our thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors are equally important contributors to our well-being; that every person requires unique care, specifically tailored to their individual wants and needs; and that we have the potential to take control of our lives and make the conscious changes necessary to promote greater well-being. To me, yoga therapy was simply what yoga was originally meant to be, and I wanted to experience that, to go deeper into the practice, beyond just the physical aspect of asana and into breath work, meditation, philosophy, and principles of therapeutic yoga. I wanted to do this for my own self-development and to be of greater service to others. A brief conversation with my wife resulted in an agreement to put our home on the market to subsidise what would become a 2-year odyssey of traveling, training, and spiritual development. I applied and was accepted to Yoga Therapy International's 1000-hour training program. I stopped accepting new work projects, wrapped up current obligations, packed up, and moved to Canada.



What brought you to Yoga Therapy International?

I wanted to attend an accredited program, and I discovered YTI on the list of accredited schools on the IAYT website. Several factors went into my choosing YTI over other schools. Some practical and some personal. First, the depth and scope of training offered by YTI was well-rounded and diverse. It adhered to classical yoga practices and philosophy while also including a diverse and impressive line-up of specialist faculty who represented a multitude of different experiences and techniques. YTI has a deep respect for lineage, yet it embraces therapeutic practices and knowledge from other healing disciplines. I appreciated this balanced approach. Second, I liked that YTI offered a full 1000-hour program. Many programs offered 800-hour trainings, and I felt I would benefit from the additional hours. Finally, I was intrigued by the extended intensive training in Chennai, India. I love to travel, and having the opportunity to study yoga in India with master teachers was a big selling point. Education and adventure? What's not to like?

On a more practical level, the program was relatively close to home. Vancouver, BC, was only a day's drive from my Oregon home, which made relocating for several months and returning home for practicum periods easier to manage. I'd always wanted to go to Vancouver, BC,

long before discovering the YTI program. It seemed serendipitous that the opportunity to do so was aligned with bigger plans. Finally, the exchange rate between the US and Canadian dollar made both tuition and renting a place to live more affordable.

What's one thing you would say to anyone who has never experienced yoga therapy?

To paraphrase a cancer survivor who participated in a workshop I attended, "My chiropractor, my acupuncturist, my massage therapist and my doctor all do things to me. I am passive in the treatment. I'm poked, prodded, measured, and manipulated. With yoga, I am doing the doing. I am moving me. I am listening deeply to my body and choosing how to respond in a way that's skillful. For one hour a week, I feel as though I am finally in control of some aspect of my treatment."

The message being, yoga therapy promotes self-discovery, self-awareness, and compassionate self-care and does so through physical movement, the breath, and mindful awareness of thoughts and actions. The yoga therapist is ultimately serving as a guide, a helper whose aim is to foster and promote conditions that allow a person to transition from unconscious habitual behaviors and into a place of intentional movement, intentional living. Yoga therapy wants you to become curious about you, to become your own best advocate and care taker. Lastly, it's about bringing your head and your body together into the same place at the same time and creating a truly functional relationship between them.

What's one thing you would say to anyone who is considering studying with Yoga Therapy International?



As with any educational endeavor, examine your expectations. Ask yourself, "What do I want this program to give me? What skills do I want to possess when I'm done?" Compare that to what YTI is offering and ask yourself if it's a match. Then, ask yourself if you're open to things that may lie outside of your expectations and experience.

The YTI program is rooted in the lineage of T. Krishnamacharya and T.K.V. Desikachar while hosting a diverse range of excellent specialist faculty members whose backgrounds and methods vary. There's a good chance you'll be presented with things you knew nothing about, were only marginally aware of, or, in some cases, may not agree with.

Be aware that you will be learning principles and foundations of yoga therapy and not necessarily a static set of "in case of x, do y" instructions for specific conditions. As you will discover, no two people are exactly alike, and therefore no one sequence of poses,

pranayama practice, or repetition of mantra can be consistently relied upon to meet the needs of everyone.

Due to differences in personality, culture, anatomy, mental outlook, and life history, even two people with the same symptoms will likely require different approaches to healing. The ability to draw from foundational principles while adapting and tailoring the practice to an individual's needs is what makes yoga therapy special.

After becoming a CYT, what do you hope and/or plan to do? Is there a special project or initiative that you want to undertake and, if so, where and when?

My wife teaches movement and dance to young children and to children with special needs. Our plan is to open a studio together, to work together, providing group and private therapeutic yoga to adults along with dance and creative movement to children.

What person (living or passed)/lesson/experience has inspired you most on your journey to becoming a CYT?

Anyone who lives authentically, who values play as highly as they value work, who loves freely, who pauses, has faith, and understands that we are all in this together as equals.

The 14th Dalai Lama, for his unyielding commitment to living a life of compassion and kindness amidst suffering, all while not taking himself too seriously.

My wife, Kellee. She seems to have been born with a level of compassion, love, and human goodness that I aspire to achieve someday through practice.

Is there a really good question we should have asked you?

Q: ?Do you have somewhere to do your required practicum work and observational hours in between summer sessions??

I would recommend that students secure, or at very least have an idea, where they will do their practicum work before beginning the program.

How would you have answered that question?

A: ?Um . . . no.?

Mine was a special circumstance, being that we sold our home and no longer had a home-base to return to. However, I believe it may be important to check with incoming students.

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