

Santosa Yoga Camp 2005 – 2013:

Eight years, ten camps: the inside story...

(if you'd rather listen to the story, you can hear Uma telling it on u-tube version here [LINK](#))

As we gear up for the most fabulous Santosa Yoga and Bhakti camp ever, I felt some of you might be interested to know the inside story of how this heart warming yoga and bhakti event came to be...

This is a chance for me to say THANK YOU to all the amazing folk who helped this unique community camp grow, and to let you know how VERY special it is (and when you know all this, you'll probably want to come and join us this year...)

The story begins forty-three years ago, in 1969, when a four-year old girl in North London is captivated by a Thames television programme called *Yoga for Health with Richard Hittelman*. She practices on the sitting room floor with her mum, and is devastated every week when the gorgeous ladies in the long hair and leotards disappear for another seven days. She longs for the next episode, practices in her bedroom everyday and pesters her mum to get the book of the TV series, full of pictures of *asanas* and guidance on yogic life. She learns the poses by heart, and adjusts her mum's hand position in *Dhanurasana*: 'This is how to do it properly mummy!' The mother gives up after a couple of weeks, but by that time her four-year old daughter is completely in love with everything yoga. She wants there to be yoga everyday. She dreams a dream that one day she will live in a place where everyone can practice yoga all day long!

Twenty years on, and that little girl is a journalist in London, attending weekly yoga classes to help manage stress, seeing how much she needs the yoga to balance a too-busy city life.

Thirty years on, and the stressed journalist has returned to academia, got a PhD, taken a yoga teacher training course, and is part-timing as a yoga teacher in Camberwell. (She also got married to a fellow yoga teacher in India, but that's a whole other story...) The little girl's dream of a place where everyone can practice yoga all day long, has never really gone away. She's even been to ashrams and yoga centres where this does happen, but since the birth of her son she's begun to realise that families need yoga too. Being married, with a little baby boy in tow, even this keenest yogini, who's now called Uma, finds that not all ashrams and yoga centres are very family friendly, as she's discovered, and so the quest is on: to find a place where you can practice yoga all day long, and have your kids there too!

So in 2000, she heads out to the Isles of Scilly to join her friend Amanda Brown, with partners and babies in tow, to run a camping yoga retreat there: hard work with the babies, and managing gale force winds for a week, but a special place to be.

By 2003, we're all at the Yoga for Health Family Yoga Festival in the Ickwell Bury Yoga for Health centre: Amanda Brown, and Uma Dinsmore-Tuli and all our families (three little boys in total now!), loving everything about it, but complaining about the lack of kids activities, and then putting on a programme of our own, including an incredible puppet show of the Ramayana, featuring a min figure of Chewbacca from Star Wars as Hanuman! It's the perfect place for a summer yoga festival, with meals on the lawn and amazing yoga programmes in the huge medieval barn and yoga studio, thanks to the fabulous organisation of Paul Fox and Andrea Newman.

By the time the Yoga for Health Foundation closes down, and the last full Yoga Summer festival happens in 2004, Amanda and Uma are determined to create a replacement festival, a peaceful and supportive place where yogis and yoginis can practice all kinds of yoga from dawn til dusk.

Meanwhile, Uma and Nirlipta have been to the Gaunt's House Summer gathering, and picked up a few ideas. Uma's working full time now as a yoga teacher and teacher trainer, and in the summertimes before the Ickwell Bury festival starts, she's been helping to grow the yoga programme at Jacob Jones' magical Healing Field Gathering. There to support the wonderful Glastonbury yoga teacher, Wendy Teasdill, Uma and her sons run Family Yoga sessions twice a day, and sing at nights in the Babaji Healing Temple.

So, putting two and two together, Uma asks Jacob and Ash how it would be to have use of their Healing Field Meadow to trial a new camp, especially just for yoga. Jacob and Ash are up for the idea, and the first Santosa Yoga Camp is on! Amada organises the schedule of thirty teachers across all different yoga traditions. We had faith and enthusiasm, we had a Cornish horsebox to provide the catering, and we had, by the middle of August, not a single punter booked. The amazing Outer Regions Tibetan café got on board, recommended by veteran festival goer Dennis, and we turn up with hope in our hearts and no money in the bank. At the opening weekend, a hundred and fifty yogis arrive at the gate, wanting in.

By the second year, Stefan Cartwright describes the event as 'An Ocean of Love' and persuades us to run it for longer. So that's how it started: with the desire for a clear, pure space, alcohol and drug free, full of inspiring teachers and practitioners and their families, all welcome to practice yoga together, sharing and openhearted. It was never about the money – it was always about sharing, and learning and practicing together, and every year it came together and something beautiful happened. It's a great big yoga family, gathered in a meadow to share joy!

In the eight years that followed, we've had ten camps: eight in Jacob and Ash's beautiful Somerset meadow, and two amazing June camps up in the Cotswolds. We've grown an incredible community of bhaktis and yogis and hard working volunteers who have worked together to create camp after

camp under all kinds of conditions: we've had seventy-mile an hour winds that nearly lifted the enormous Whale tent up, up and away over the Glastonbury Tor! We've had blazing sunshine and pouring rains, and people singing their hearts out in the middle of fantastic lightening storms. We've had kids in the hot tubs at dusk, and fire dances in the dark, and, as I trailed up and down the meadow, thirty eight weeks pregnant and very huge, I almost gave birth to my daughter Rajakumari Prayaag up at Santosa, under the watchful eye of Dr Daisy, mother of four and GP from Cornwall who assured me 'I'd love to help deliver your baby, you could give birth in the yurt. Go on – it would be great!' In the end my daughter, being a proper Virgo, waited until we got back to the yoga room in Brixton hill before making her first appearance, on her due date!

We've had every kind of yoga you can think of: from Acro yoga and Kashmiri Yoga to Ashtanga and Yin, and Avatar and Kundalini and Laughter Yoga and Vedic Chant. We have Yoga Nidra three times a day and the beating heart of the camp is a superb bhakti yoga programme. It's all beautiful.

And every single morning, of every single camp, at dawn with the larks (except when I was too ill to move in 2011 and had to lay in my yurt singing instead!), I have taken the greatest joy in awakening the energies of the Santosa camp each day by singing mantras at sunrise, to protect, enliven and inspire the day's activities in the most beautiful yoga camp I can imagine. Other camps have grown, some inspired by Santosa – and now there is an Irish sister Santosa camp, and a Cornish Surya camp, and Hari Pyari's gorgeous Bhakti Camp, and the Babaji Ashram Camp, and the delightful Independent Yoga Network Summer Yoga Festival. I've enjoyed all these camps, but to me the original and best, the mother of them all, always has to be the camp that I saw in a dream in 1969. I'll be there again this year, and I hope to welcome you to the dawn mantras if that's your bag. With great respect and love, from Uma Dinsmore-Tuli

Acknowledgments: Since 2005 there have been many ups and downs, and many, many helpful hands and hearts have helped make this dream of Santosa a reality. Thankfully, the chaos that can ensue when one busy woman tries to organise a huge event pretty much all by herself, has now been taken in hand by the truly inspired and committed organising team of angels: John and Tanya Carter, and Ian Wood, and Janine Hurley. Sincere and heartfelt thanks to those generous beings, and also to all of you over the years who have been friends to Santosa, especially Amanda Brown, Annette Ananda and her son George Catlett, Nikki East, and Pumper (Peter Giles) and their daughters, to Lowenna and Chief, to Barry and Jo Elms, to Stefan Cartwright, Bharati and Dinesh, Habiba and Buddhenath, and to Alex Whittall, Aradhana, and Faith and Mark, and Angela Brew and her son Joseph. Thanks also to Ramdas and Atmashraddha, and to Donna Southwell and Joey Miles, whose families have enjoyed the camps over the years. An especial thanks to my husband, Nirlipta Tuli, who hates camping but comes anyway. Jai Santosa!