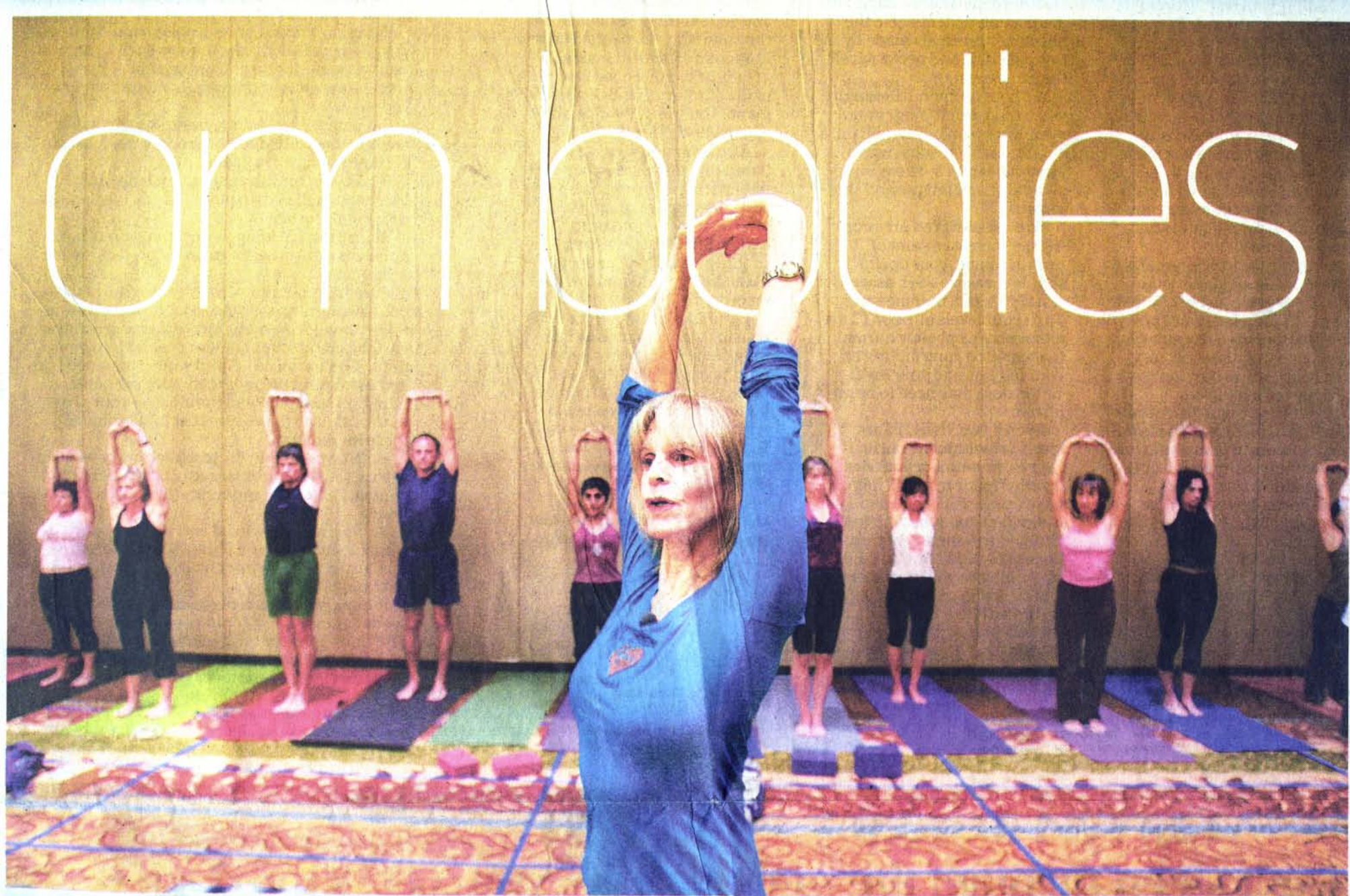


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MICHAEL FRANCIS MCELROY PHOTOS, SUN SENTINEL

Patricia Walden, who some consider a successor to the famed B.K.S. Iyengar, leads a class at a yoga conference at the Weston Diplomat Resort and Spa in Hollywood.

*Rock star
instructors
touch down in
South Florida
with a message:
Yoga has come
a long way, baby.*

By Nick Sortal
STAFF WRITER

More than 5,000 years of sitting in the lotus position and we're still fiddling with yoga? Why?

Look through any fitness magazine: Tantra Yoga. Laughter Yoga. Even Dog Yoga. Not to mention Bikram Yoga, Partner Yoga, Power Yoga and everything in between.

More than 800 people from South Florida and beyond gathered this month for *Yoga Journal* magazine's Florida conference. Most paid \$450 in registration fees (and another \$250 a night) for a weekend at the Weston Diplomat Resort and Spa in Hollywood. They were hoping to meet the rock stars of yoga, to see if some of their chi would rub off, to understand the evolution of yoga ...

Four distinct ways to find yoga bliss. **Page » 5**



“Your relationship to gravity is a many-splendored thing. It can change, and it can't change.”

Matthew Sanford

Instructor Matthew Sanford, paralyzed at age 13 in an auto accident, uses yoga “as a way to reconnect my mind and my body.”

Yoga instruction for the paralyzed can help heal, if not cure

C'mon, get happy!

In one Kundalini class, students hold their arms above their heads and recite a children's song:

*I feel happy!
I feel good!
I feel happy!
I feel good!*

"Try walking into work Monday morning saying that instead of, 'Oh, I'm sooo tired,' and see what reaction you get," says the instructor, Gurmukh Kaur Khalsa.

Created in the eighth century, Kundalini wasn't introduced in the United States until 1969. This form of yoga is about using the mind to get past pain.

Khalsa, who co-founded a Kundalini center in Los Angeles and trains instructors, wrote a book (foreword by Cindy Crawford) and developed a DVD teaching expectant mothers to use the techniques to overcome what can be hours of enduring pain. Makes sense.

About 60 students in her class criss-cross their arms in front of their faces for what seems like an hour (really about seven minutes).

"The movements themselves are simple," Khalsa says.

Jamie Chapman, of Hollywood, teaches yoga and used Kundalini during her daughter's birth.

"It takes you past the threshold of pain, and it can change the karma for your unborn child," she says. "Nothing opens up that portal to the universe more for me than Kundalini."

"You may look at this pose and say, 'What the hell is that?' Well, I made it up. There you go."

Cameron Shayne

From a wheelchair

Elsewhere, Matthew Sanford shows his students the wonder in small details. Like how closing your fingers in Downward Dog can alter your balance, or how putting your hands on your thighs makes your chest pop up.

He does it from a wheelchair. Paralyzed at age 13 in an automobile accident, Sanford, now 43, uses yoga "as a way to reconnect my mind and my body."

He created a six-week "Intro to Adaptive Yoga" mind-body course especially for hospitals and the disabled. He wants to change how patients and doctors view disabilities, and uses the line: "Healing is possible, even when curing is not."

After the conference, East Boca Yoga instructor Susie Huard stays an extra day to watch Sanford work with paralyzed patients from South Florida hospitals.

"In the past, you'd have a person in a wheelchair and you'd work their upper body," says Huard, who has taught for 12 years. "But he's showing teachers how to get the student to bring energy into body parts they can't feel."

"I think it's going to take us into a whole new world."



MICHAEL FRANCIS MCELROY, SUN SENTINEL

Scott Pfeiffer, foreground, and Cameron Shayne demonstrate the unconventional *Budokon* flow yoga, at a conference at the West-on Diplomat Resort and Spa.

Beyond bliss

Yoga began as a way to prepare the body for meditation, to train the body to sit for hours in a healthy position so you could focus on your mind.

Patricia Walden started yoga to "reach *samadhi*," or ultimate bliss. She has since adopted a yoga that is more about the body.

Some consider her a successor to India's B.K.S. Iyengar, who emphasized strength, balance and flexibility. Iyengar is one of three living yogis at the root of most popular yoga forms. His teachings spurred the yoga surge in the United States 25 years ago.

"You could see how the West would have been ready for him," Walden says, because Westerners tend to prefer stretching the body more than adapting the Eastern philosophies to stretch the mind.

Today's instructors play off yoga's ancient roots out of human nature, Walden said. Just as no singer performs the same song the same way, we all have thoughts and experiences to build from.

"Some will take what their teachers taught them and stay with the lineage. But some break away, and I think that's wonderful."

Skin and cello shots

Cameron Shayne blends martial arts, life coaching and traditional yoga into what he calls *Budokon* Yoga (Japanese for "Way of the Spiritual Warrior"). Maneuvers include the Floating Frog, in which students hop from Downward Dog and balance briefly on their hands, looking as though they are hanging in mid-air.

Shayne works the room of about 120, accompanied by his wife. Two shirtless men walk around adjusting poses, and an electric cello plays background music.

His workshop typically lasts two hours. But students at the Diplomat are so engaged that the class goes over by 10 minutes.

Why do offshoots such as *Budokon*, which he launched eight years ago, emerge?

"As the world begins to shrink, our exposure to new movement, philosophies and technologies is going like this," he says, bringing his hands together. "So, how can we not bump into each other?"

So fiddling with yoga is just part of people's DNA. Which is why, even though it's been around 5,000 years, yogis still call what they do a practice.

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Strike a pose

Check out photos from the conference, and of other pros doing yoga. SunSentinel.com/fit

"The top of your spine is linked to your smile. But with frowns, you clench your jaw and you are literally closing down your C-1 [vertebra]. The interesting part is when you do that fake smile, you close down the top of your spine the same way."

Matthew Sanford

"We're finally experiencing 'the fear of not enough,' something the generation before us grew up with."

Gurmukh Kaur Khalsa
(on the economy)

"Keep the action in yoga in your arms and legs, not in your face. If they took a picture of your face at any time, it should look as though you are meditating."

Patricia Walden

Want more?

Check out these Web sites:

MatthewSanford.com details his work with disabled patients.

GoldenBridgeYoga.com is Gurmukh Kaur Khalsa's site. Hear *Feeling Good Today* from her Kundalini class at SpiritVoyage.com.

Yoganow.net has more about Patricia Walden.

Budokon.com is home to Cameron Shayne information.