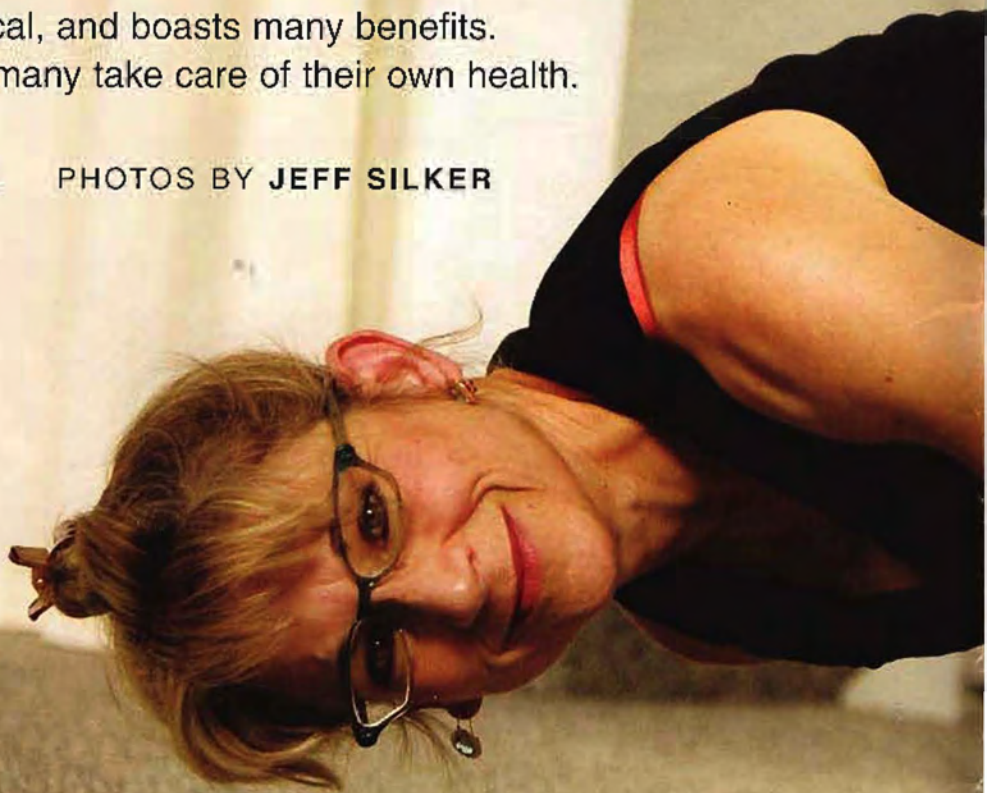


# Inner Connection

It's natural, economical, and boasts many benefits.  
It's yoga, and it's helping many take care of their own health.

BY MONA CENICEROS    PHOTOS BY JEFF SILKER



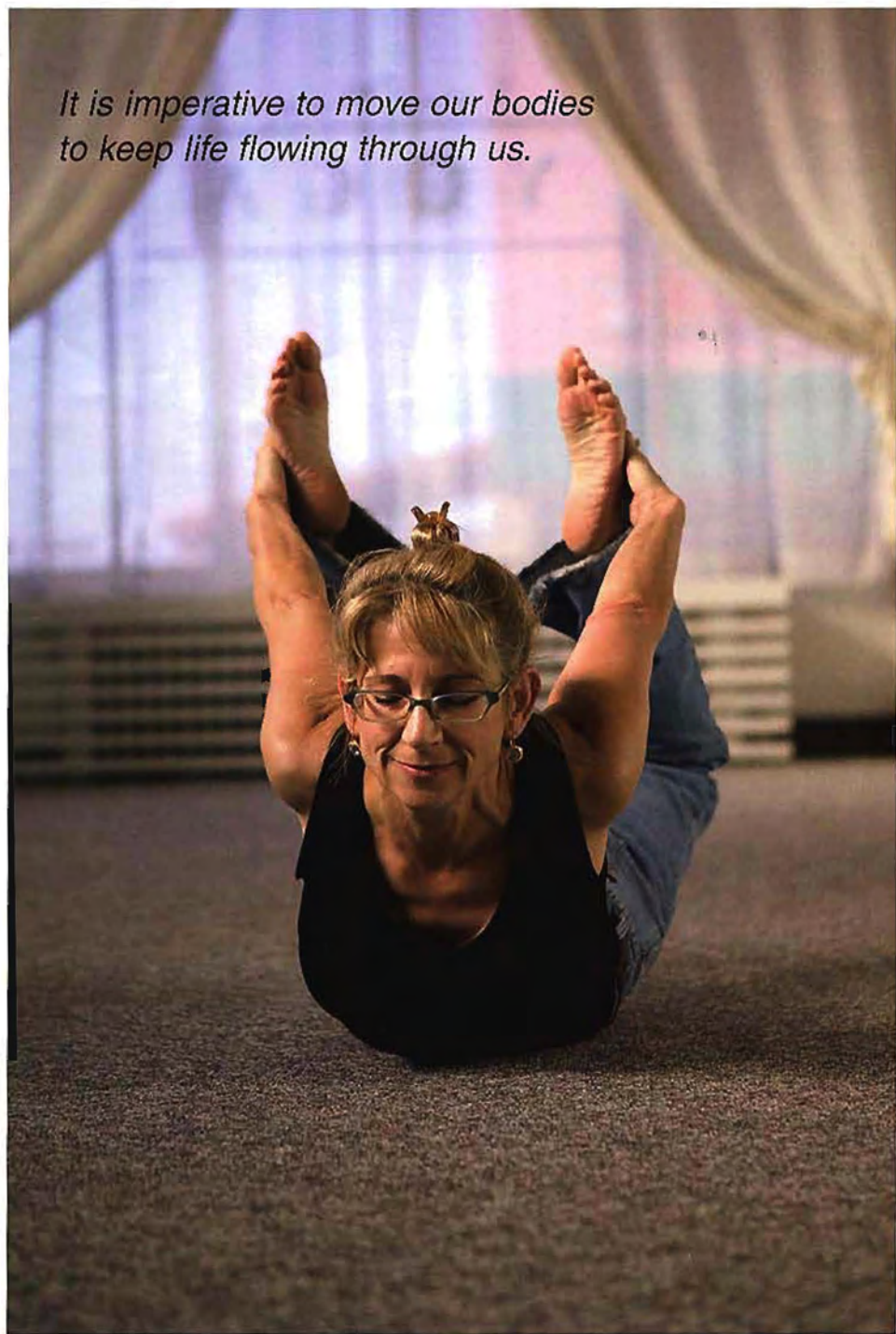


**T**he mind-body connection is one of the most powerful forces we have working on our own behalf. Yoga is simply an ancient technique for developing this connection. Yoga means union – translated from the word “yoke” – and it is much more about connecting with the interior of your body than it is about how your body looks.

Connecting with our bodies is connecting with ourselves. Disconnecting from our bodies disconnects us from our authentic selves. We connect with the interior of the body by regulating and concentrating on our breath. Anyone that can breathe can do this. When we move our bodies mindfully, listening to internal feedback, we build a positive relationship with our bodies and improve our immune system and our health. Someone running on a treadmill listening to music on headphones or watching a television screen cannot achieve this connection because they are unable to concentrate on their inner self.



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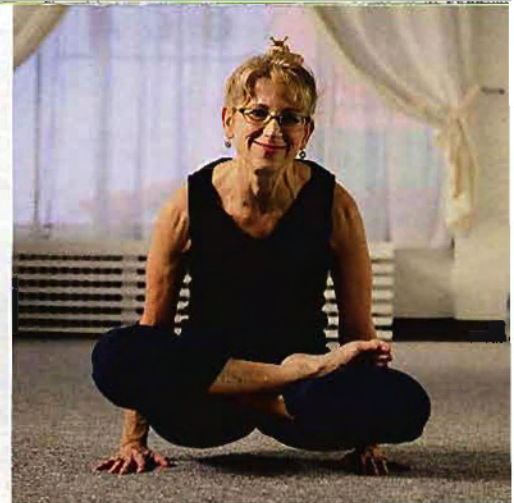
It's important to think of exercise and movement as a way to nurture and heal your body – rather than as a way to “whip it into shape.”

When we hate our thighs and hate our stomachs, we hate ourselves, and this can lead to symptoms of depression and anxiety. Only we have control over what we say to ourselves, how we care for ourselves, what environments we choose to place ourselves in, and what people we surround ourselves with. Learning to listen to our bodies – sometimes after decades of disconnection – can be therapeutic and transformational.

What we take in through our physical senses and the thoughts we think affect us physiologically. Our bodies are like giant walking history books of our lives. Everything that has ever happened to us – every sorrow, every joy, resides within. It is imperative to move our bodies to keep life flowing through us. When we are sedentary, it is much easier for resentment, jealousy, anger, or grief to settle deep into our tissues and bones. It's important to think of exercise and movement as a way to nurture and heal your body – rather than as a way to “whip it into shape.” We must not be discouraged by images from our culture or feedback from our friends, family, and co-workers.

Research from the field of human performance has shown increased strength and flexibility in 90-year-old nursing home residents who exercise regularly. Although doctors said Christopher Reeve would never regain movement, he was eventually able to open and close his arms and legs when lying in a pool, and could feel sensation over 70% of his body, as opposed to 12% when first injured. It was through therapy, exercises, and stimulation to his muscles that Christopher was able to make such improvements. Clearly, movement is essential for health.

Yoga is a grassroots, natural, economical path to health that has many benefits. Yoga is free. We go to classes for instruction and



inspiration, but all yoga teachers encourage home practice. No equipment is needed (mats are nice but it was practiced thousands of years without). Yoga is economical because it is preventative. With rising health-care costs, yoga is a complete system to take care of our own health. Yoga can be done alone at home or in a group. Yoga practice includes doing physical postures and poses (asanas) with breathing exercises, relaxation, and meditation. Yoga will make you physically stronger and more flexible, better aligned, and it will improve your balance, core strength, and posture. Mainstream acceptance of yoga is

evident as it is offered in health clubs and fitness centers. Yoga also helps with depression, grief, stress, anxiety, self-esteem, and body image. For these issues, a calm quiet studio setting may be better.

Yoga can be a life-long activity. Yoga looks at aging in a positive way and has many practical techniques to help maintain bone density, urinary control, balance, and other concerns. If you haven't created a plan for your own aging, get a calculator and choose an age you realistically think you might live to be. Subtract your current age from that number and multiply by

365 days in a year. The remaining total is a rough approximation of your days left to enrich your life and become more of who you are. Remember, what we take in through our physical senses – and the thoughts we think – affect us physiologically! Doctors help us when we are sick. Flu shots, surgeries, and prescription drugs have their places, but there is so much more to be gained by taking the time to connect lovingly with yourself. Strengthening your immune system, muscles, and bones through the practice of yoga can have a positive impact on your physical and emotional health. *W*