



Yoga Bitch: One Woman's Quest to Conquer Skepticism, Cynicism, and Cigarettes on the Path to Enlightenment

By Suzanne Morrison

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What happens when a coffee-drinking, cigarette-smoking, steak-eating twenty-five-year-old atheist decides it is time to get in touch with her spiritual side? Not what you'd expect...

When Suzanne Morrison decides to travel to Bali for a two-month yoga retreat, she wants nothing more than to be transformed from a twenty-five-year-old with a crippling fear of death into her enchanting yoga teacher, Indra—a woman who seems to have found it all: love, self, and God.

But things don't go quite as expected. Once in Bali, she finds that her beloved yoga teacher and all of her yogamates wake up every morning to drink a large, steaming mug...of their own *urine*. Sugar is a mortal sin. Spirits inhabit kitchen appliances. And the more she tries to find her higher self, the more she faces her cynical, egomaniacal, cigarette-, wine-, and chocolate-craving *lower* self.

Yoga Bitch chronicles Suzanne's hilarious adventures and misadventures as an aspiring yogi who might be just a bit too skeptical to drink the Kool-Aid. But along the way she discovers that no spiritual effort is wasted; even if her yoga retreat doesn't turn her into the gorgeously calm, wise believer she hopes it will, it does plant seeds that continue to blossom in surprising ways over the next decade of her life.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Yoga Bitch is an unabashedly romantic book, in the very best way--like watching your funniest, most sardonic friend realize that she's head-over-heels in love." --Claire Dederer, Author of *Poser: My Life in Twenty-Three Poses*

"A smart, funny, and keenly observed travelogue of a modern yogini's quest for awakening. *Yoga Bitch* flows like a quirky vinyasa, with each pose just twisted enough to be hilarious." --Anne Cushman, author of *Enlightenment for Idiots: A Novel*

"Suzanne Morrison has been through the yoga wars, she has the literal scars to prove it, and she's produced a hilarious and thoughtful memoir."--Neal Pollack, author of *Stretch*

"Brings the higher path down to Earth with refreshing honesty."--*Kirkus Reviews*

"Thoughtful, honest, and hilarious."—*Publishers Weekly*

"I love this book. In an era of so much truth telling and blogging and reality shows we forget how well true stories can be told, when they're in the right hands. *Yoga Bitch* has sucked me in and made me laugh and made me think about my own spiritual fucked-up state. You had me at 'Do they make you eat your own poop.'" — Lauren Weedman, Author of *A Woman Trapped in a Woman's Body* and former Daily Show correspondent

"Morrison is unflinchingly honest, poking easy fun at herself, her companions, and her surroundings...The lessons from Bali ultimately led her to stop pursuing the life she was supposed to want and start leading the one that nourishes her." —Patty Wetli, *Booklist*

"Writer/performer Morrison offers a totally different take on the yoga experience...she candidly discusses her issues with meditation, exercise, and relationships." —*Library Journal*

"*Yoga Bitch* had me hooked. It's a hilarious read by an author who isn't afraid to delve into the messy innards of yoga culture." -Jenny Rough, *Whole Life Times*

"Morrison's funny riff on yoga and perspective." - Dan Kois, *New York Magazine*

"[Morrison's] funny and honest discussion about her yogic journey is riveting and revolting, raw and fresh, and immensely enjoyable." -Nancy Alder, *Elephant Journal*

"Wickedly entertaining yet tragically honest." -*Chatelaine.com*

"Had me laughing out loud at the author's irreverent commentary by the second page, and, ultimately unable to put the book down until a very un-yogic early morning hour [...] I couldn't recommend *Yoga Bitch* more highly." -- Jay Winston, *Elephant Journal*

"Morrison offers a fresh and new voice in the yoga memoirs genre that is one part deeply exploratory and

another giggle-inducing." -- Nancy Alder, *Yoga Dork*

"Suzanne Morrison recounts her reformatory journey at a two-month yoga retreat in Bali with a sense of humor so wicked it would even make Bikram sweat a little." --Dorothy Robinson, *Metro*

"Morrison is a funny and engaging writer, at once sincere about her spiritual aspirations and aware of all the clichés they entail." --Laura Moser, *Slate.com*

"[YOGA BITCH] is a hilarious, thoughtful and only occasionally profane account of one young woman facing mortality and bad habits head on [...]Morrison is whip-smart and irreverent." - Amy Scribner, *Bookpage*.

About the Author

A writer and solo performer currently living in Seattle, SUZANNE MORRISON has a one-woman show, *Yoga Bitch*, which has been called "Ambitious, ballsy, and hilarious" by *Seattle Weekly* and "New Age Nirvana" by *Time Out London*. The show has played to sold-out houses in New York City, Maui, Seattle, Memphis, London, and Oxford. Her work has been covered in the *Seattle Times*, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, *Seattle Weekly*, and in blogs such as yogajournal.com and seattlest. You can find Suzanne at *Huffington Post* and at www.suzanne-morrison.com, where she writes about absolutely everything she's reading, writing, and rehearsing.

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1. Indrasana

. . . and before Kitty knew where she was, she found herself not merely under Anna's influence, but in love with her, as young girls do fall in love with older and married women . . .

—leo tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

Today I found myself strangely moved by a yoga teacher who spoke like a cross between a phone-sex operator and a poetry slam contestant. At the start of class, she asked us to pretend we were floating on a cloud. As she put it, "You're oh-pening your heart to that cloud, you're floating, you're blossoming out and tuning in, you're evanescing, yeah, that's right, you're evanescing."

I briefly contemplated giving the teacher my yoga finger and walking out. I've been practicing yoga for close to a decade now, and at thirty-four I'm too old for that airy-fairy horseshit. As far as I'm concerned, floating on a cloud sounds less like a pleasant spiritual exercise and more like what you think you're doing when you're on LSD while falling out of an airplane. But I tuned out her mellifluous, yogier-than-thou voice and soon enough found myself really meditating. Of course, I was meditating on punching this yoga teacher in the face, but still.

At the end of class, she asked us to join her in a chant: gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate?..?..?which means, she said, her voice shedding its yogabot tones, gone, gone, gone beyond. She was young, a little cupcake of a yoga teacher in her black and gray yoga outfit. Maybe she was twenty-five. Maybe younger. She said her grandmother had recently passed away, and she wanted to chant for her and for all of our beloveds who had already gone beyond. In that moment, I forgave her everything, wanted to button up her sweater and give her a cup of cocoa. I chanted gone, gone, gone beyond for her beloveds and for mine, and for the twenty-five-year-old I once was.

I turned twenty-five the month after September eleventh, when the stories of those who had gone beyond that day were fresh and ubiquitous. I was working three jobs to save money to move from Seattle to New York, and whether I was at the law firm, at the pub, or taking care of my grandparents' bills, the news was on, and it was all bad. So many people looking for the remains of the people they loved. So many images of the planes hitting the towers, the smoke, the ash.

I had never really been afraid of death before that year. I thought I had worked all that out by the age of seventeen, when I concluded that so long as one lives authentically, one dies without fear or regret. As a teenager, it seemed so simple: if I lived my life as my authentic self wished to live, then death would become something to be curious about; one more adventure I would experience on my own terms.

Religion was an obstacle to authenticity, I figured, especially if you were only confirming in the Catholic Church so that your mother wouldn't give you the stink-eye for the rest of your life. So, at seventeen, I told my mother I wouldn't be confirming. That Kierkegaard said each must come to faith alone, and I hadn't come to faith—and she couldn't make me.

This was all well and good for a teenager who secretly believed herself to be immortal, as my countless speeding tickets suggested I did. But by twenty-five the idea of death as an adventure struck me as idiotic. As callous, heartless, and, most of all, clueless. Death wasn't an adventure; it was a near and ever-present void. It was the reason my throat ached when I watched my grandfather try to get up out of his chair. It was the reason we all watched the news with our hands over our mouths.

I had recently graduated from college, having postponed my studies until I was twenty-one in order to follow my authentic self to Europe after high school. Now I was supposed to leave for New York by the following summer. Before the attack on lower Manhattan, I had been nervous about moving to New York, but now what was supposed to be a difficult but necessary rite of passage felt more like courting my own annihilation.

Everywhere I looked, I saw death. My move to New York was the death of my life in Seattle, of a life shared with my family and friends. Given the precariousness of our national security, it seemed as if moving away could mean never seeing them again. I remember wondering how long it would take me to walk home from New York should there be an apocalypse. I figured it would take a while. This worried me.

Even when I wasn't filling my head with postapocalyptic paranoid fantasies, death was out to get me. Once we got to New York, my boyfriend, Jonah, and I would move in together, and I knew what that meant. That meant marriage was coming, and after marriage, babies. And only one thing comes after babies. Death.

I came down with cancer all the time. Brain cancer, stomach cancer, bone cancer. Even trimming my fingernails reminded me that time was passing, and death was coming. Those little boomerangs of used-up life showed up in the sink week after week.

I measured out my life in toenail clippings.

"Stop thinking like that!" my sister said.

"I can't."

"Just try. You haven't even tried."

My sister, Jill, has always been the wisest, the most grounded, of my three siblings. But she couldn't teach

me how to live in the face of death, not then. But Indra could.

Indra was a woman, a yoga teacher, a god. Indra taught me how to stand on my head, how to quit smoking, and then lifted me off this Judeo-Christian continent, to fly over miles and miles of indifferent ocean, before dropping me down on a Hindu island in the middle of a Muslim archipelago at the onset of the War on Terror. Indra was my first yoga teacher and I loved her. I loved her with the kind of ambivalence I've only ever had about God, and every man I've ever left.

Indra introduced me to the concept of union. That's what hatha yoga is all about, uniting mind and body, masculine and feminine, and, most of all, the individual self with the indivisible Self—who some call God.

When I was seventeen, I was proud that I had chosen not to confirm into the Catholic Church. I figured everybody I told—all those sane people in the world who did not share my crazypants DNA—would agree with me. I was right; most of them, especially my artist friends, did. But one teacher, my drama teacher, said something I've never forgotten. After rehearsal one day, she listened indulgently while I bragged about my lack of faith, a half-smile on her face. Then she said, "It's okay to fall away from the Church when you're young. You'll come back when people start dying."

People were starting to die. And as if my drama teacher had seen something in the prop room's crystal ball, spiritual memoirs started accumulating on the floor beside my bed. I told no one what books I was reading. If I had, I wouldn't have said that I was reading them in the hopes of finding God. I would have said that they were works of fiction, really, redemption narratives dressed up in the styles and mores of different times and places. I would never have admitted that what kept me reading was the liberating expansion I felt in my lungs as narrator after narrator was transformed from lost into found.

Maybe that's what led me to Indra. I don't know. All I know is that one night in the fall of 2001, I walked in off the street to my first real yoga class. I had done yoga in acting classes, and once or twice at the gym where my sister worked, so I knew the postures already. I had never been especially attracted to the idea of a yoga practice, but now I walked into this studio as if I had spent all day weeping in the garden like Saint Augustine, waiting for a disembodied voice to sing, Pick your ass up off the lawn furniture and go work your shit out, for the love of God.

That night, I stepped out of the misty Seattle dusk and into a warm, dimly lit studio. Candlelight glinted off the hardwood floors. The low thrum of monks chanting emanated from an unseen speaker, and a stunningly beautiful woman with straight, honey-colored hair sat perfectly still in front of a low altar at the front of the room. Indra. She wore flax-colored cotton pants and a matching tank top. Tan, blonde, tall: I've never been one to worship at the altar of such physical attributes. It was more the way she sat, still and yet fluid, that attracted me, and her eyes, which were warm and brown, with friendly crow's-feet lengthening toward her hairline.

Soon we were stretching and lunging and sweating. The lights stayed low and her voice stayed soft, so that eventually it almost seemed as if her instructions were coming from inside my head. Toward the end of class, we were doing something ridiculously hard, lying on our backs with our legs hovering a foot off the ground until my abdominal muscles felt like they would burst. Without realizing it, I had folded my hands at my solar plexus. "That's a good idea," Indra said, nodding at my hands as she kneeled beside me to adjust my hips. "It always helps me to pray when I don't know what I'm doing."

I had to laugh at how baldly she acknowledged my incompetence, but even as I laughed I wanted to point out to her that I hadn't been praying. I had been thinking, Kill me. Please kill me. I wouldn't pray. Who on earth

was there to pray to? Or, for that matter, who not on earth?

But by the end of class I was thanking the gods for this teacher. Before I left, I wrote her a check for a month's worth of classes, and told her I'd be back soon.

Indra co-owned the little studio on Capitol Hill with her partner, Lou. Lou was older than Indra by at least ten years, but they were both the same height and weight—both tall, both strong. That was one of the first things Indra told me when I asked her about Lou, as if this were proof that she and Lou had been designed for one another. I didn't go to Lou's classes much—afterwards I always felt like my tendons had turned to rubber bands, but he was too intense and his gaze too penetrating for me. Also, his classes were full of smelly drum-circle types. But Indra's classes felt like home.

I don't know if I can fully express how bizarre a statement that was. Indra's classes felt like home. Not long before I met Indra, I would've mocked myself mercilessly for saying such a thing. Before her, my idea of exercise was walking up the hill to buy smokes. Rearranging my bookshelves. Having sex. Maybe an especially vigorous acting exercise. Most of the time I lived above the neck.

I'm a reader. Being a reader means I like to be in small, warm places like beds and bathtubs, whether I'm reading or snoozing or staring at dust motes in a shaft of sunlight. At twenty-five, the idea of physical exertion put me in a panic. I would actually get angry, sometimes, when I saw people jogging, sort of in the same way I would get angry at people who wanted me to believe in a God who requires us to be miserable all the time if we're to get into heaven. All joggers believed in an afterlife, I figured. They must; why else would they be wasting so much time in this life, which by all rational accounts is short and finite? In my hometown the population was split. Half the people in Seattle jogged and believed in an afterlife, and the other half read and believed in Happy Hour.

At twenty-five I was firmly entrenched in the latter half of Seattle's population, so it came as an absolute shock, not just to me but to everyone who knew me, when I found myself going to Indra's yoga studio in leggings and tank tops four times a week, sometimes more, to sweat and stretch and experience what it was to use my body for something other than turning over in bed. I would arrive at the studio feeling like I'd spent the day tied by the ankles to Time's bumper, my fingernails scraping the earth. I walked out upright, fluid, graceful, as if Indra herself was the pose I needed to master. My acting teachers were always telling us to find characters through their walks, that if we could physically embody our characters, we could begin to map their mental and emotional landscapes. So, when I walked somewhere alone, I walked like Indra. Spine erect, chin lowered, I was all straight lines when I was Indra—tall and long, my softer curves elongating into her ballerina sinew. My steps were deliberate and faithful. No need to look down; Indra would trust the terrain.

In class I watched the way she eased her body into each pose. No matter how excruciating the posture was for me, no matter how mangled and unbalanced I felt in it, Indra's face was always calm. She seemed to be somewhere beyond the pose, even, as if she were only faintly aware that her body was being sculpted into the posture by an unseen hand, her arms pulled into perfect alignment, trunk twisted and massaged, the arches of her feet caressed into graceful caverns. Her toes splayed out one by one like the feathers in a burlesque dancer's fan.

Indra made me want to buy things. Things like hair straighteners. Even Indra's hair expressed a certain serenity, while my wavy, fluffy hair, forever escaping its hairbands, said no such thing about me.

She made me want to buy yoga mats and books with titles like City Karma and Urban Dharma and A

Brooklyn Kama Sutra. I left her class every morning and walked straight to Trader Joe's, as if the purchase of organic cheese and tomatoes and biodynamic bubble bath was an extension of my yoga practice.

And according to Yoga Journal, it was.

But the most amazing thing of all was that Indra made me want to quit smoking. After class one morning, just as I was putting on the long wool coat I had worn out to the bar the night before, she asked me if I was a smoker.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Stephanie Rodriguez:

The feeling that you get from Yoga Bitch: One Woman's Quest to Conquer Skepticism, Cynicism, and Cigarettes on the Path to Enlightenment is a more deep you excavating the information that hide into the words the more you get interested in reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to know but Yoga Bitch: One Woman's Quest to Conquer Skepticism, Cynicism, and Cigarettes on the Path to Enlightenment giving you joy feeling of reading. The writer conveys their point in selected way that can be understood by simply anyone who read that because the author of this book is well-known enough. This book also makes your own personal vocabulary increase well. Therefore it is easy to understand then can go together with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We advise you for having this Yoga Bitch: One Woman's Quest to Conquer Skepticism, Cynicism, and Cigarettes on the Path to Enlightenment instantly.

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