

# YOGI WRITINGS: *Gardeners Back - Andrew Glazier*

*Top Photo by Kathy Prekoski*

I cannot emphasize enough how nice it is to sit here and write with no back pain for the first time in twenty years. As a long time landscaper and gardener, I have left the better part of my youth in gardens and parks scattered across California. I always tell young gardeners to watch their backs and they usually look at me with a puzzled expression.

In 1991 I was building a koi pond. It had large boulders framing the pond with large, flat rocks for the waterfall. I was getting ready to place the final rock. It was at least two hundred pounds and my assistant couldn't come that day. I decided to try to place it. Remembering to bend my legs, I snapped it up, and placed it on my shoulder. For a moment, all was well and I took a shaky step toward the place where this boulder would go. Suddenly my lower back made an audible crunch and I dropped the rock. A searing pain burned in my lower back as I fumbled for my car keys. The next twenty-two years left me with a dull ache that affected my sleep, my posture and my ability to do my job.

Many folks with back injuries wind up spending loads of money on doctors, chiropractors and unfortunately, narcotics. Anyone can pop a painkiller and get a good night sleep. I saw many folks who started out with legitimate injuries become enslaved with addiction. I knew not to go there but what to do? X-rays, MRI's, and numerous doctor visits found nothing but a bulge between my fifth and sixth lumbar vertebrae.

Years later, I was talked into a yoga class and after following the other students, I noticed my back felt a bit better. This started my long path of going to yoga classes and enjoying the short term, good feeling that could last a few days.

I began going to Valley Yoga studio, as I knew a few of the teachers. They would do yoga at the nature



preserve where I work and I decided to try two of the classes, gentle yoga and restorative. Normally in yoga classes, one talks in hushed tones or keeps quiet. I finally worked up the nerve to ask my teacher, Alicia, about what stretches might help my lower back. She showed me the cat/cow sequence, plank and cobra. It did seem to really help and as I was leaving I told her I appreciated the individual attention. She told me that if I really wanted to help my back I needed to do private lessons and not give up.

While it cost a bit more than group classes, the private lessons helped me get specific questions answered and provided coaching as the teacher stud-



ied my posture from different angles. After a few weeks, I felt better, longer after the classes. I was excited and felt a new urge to keep on the path of righting the wrongs I had dealt my body.

Recently, I was noticing improvement with my wrists after years of pain. I couldn't help but notice how much better I felt. Alicia has been making adjustments with my posture and has challenged me through salutations. I was sweating but it felt good. I was coached from start to finish, over and over to maximize my efforts. Exhausted, I left the class, and went home to take a hot bath.

The next day I was using Andrew workheavy equipment in the field. Gas powered tools will make any gardener tired quickly. As I finished, I noticed my back didn't hurt, at all. I could see clearly the private yoga sessions were working. As I sit here writing this, I feel great. I wanted to share my story because I felt like a prisoner who had just been freed from years of solitary confinement.

People who are otherwise healthy and who have no major injuries will enjoy group classes and the social support it provides. Those who have injuries or for whom time has not been kind, will find a compassionate, supportive environment in the private lessons. A therapist can cost well over a hundred dollars an hour. It's nice to talk and goodness knows it has been helpful in the past, but my back still hurt. Doctors will always be necessary and many medicines have valid reasons for existing. We spend more on our cars upkeep than we do on ourselves. Why should we wait until we break down to do proper maintenance? A simple cost analysis will show this to be true. I don't need to do it. I already know it's priceless.

Thank you Valley Yoga.  
Pain free and loving it.