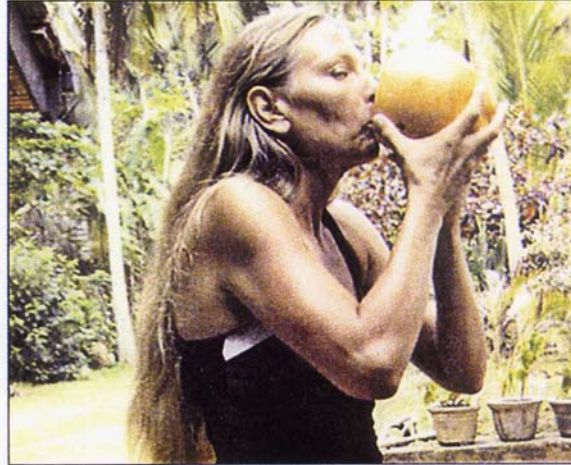


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Good People — Good Places — Good Things Happening

Coming Full Circle Beth Cole in Sri Lanka



Beth Cole revives herself after yoga practice with coconut juice.

Beth Cole

Spine straight as an arrow, legs wrapped in lotus position, sitting on the floor of my home yoga studio the directive to return to India came as I was meditating New Year's Day 2005. There was no doubt, no hesitation. I trusted this guidance and knew that within a year I would be traveling back to India, the birthplace of yoga.

A few days before this a tsunami crippled many countries and horrified the rest of the world. For days after this tragedy I would find myself sitting staring into space feeling totally numb thinking "What can I do?" Inaction was not an option. Without any previous experience in the world of fundraising I organized a yoga workshop and silent auction at the Tradewinds Island Resort. During five weeks of planning I was continually amazed at people's generosity, the willingness to give of their time and money as well as the eagerness to educate a neophyte in the art of fundraising. This event successfully raised almost \$15,000, all of which went directly to UNICEF.

As I was diligently working on this event I was wondering if my friend, Anthony, survived the tsunami in Sri Lanka. Finally a message appeared on his website that neither he nor his yoga center sustained any damage. Following several correspondences back and forth he sent out a group email asking for donations to directly help the people of Sri Lanka. "How can I ask for more money?" I thought. Casually I mentioned Anthony's efforts to a couple of friends and was surprised when they responded "I'd be willing to give again". Once again, on a smaller scale, I collected funds. In one village the only available food for three months was rice, dal and jaggery (sugar). Imagine the joy when Anthony appeared with fruits, vegetables and fish for the week for 29 families, all for only \$250, so little goes so far in the third world.

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Sri Lanka: Coming Full Circle *continued from page 1*



Silent Beach: the swimming/snorkeling beach.

This led me to add Sri Lanka to my India itinerary. Subsequent to a month long stay in Mysore, India, visiting my guru, Pattabi Jois, I flew to Colombo, Sri Lanka. Instantly upon arriving I was put in touch with the beauty and generosity of the people of this land. It took several bus changes and seven hours to arrive at my final destination, Goyambokka, a village nestled on the winding coast of Tangalle. The signs on the buses were in characters, not letters so I wandered through the crowd searching for an English speaking person. A kind man took me under his wing and informed when the bus I wanted arrived. For those of you who have never traveled via local transport in the third world let me give you some insight. Often the buses are crowded with people standing and squeezing themselves down the aisle. I've even seen people standing on the steps hooking their arms through the windows to prevent themselves from flying out. Buses rule in this land and tear through towns blasting their horns. Needless to say, it's an insanely jarring ride. Every muscle engages to hold you in place. This particular evening I must have been looking pretty pitiful trying to remain upright and hold onto my luggage simultaneously. Within five minutes a man offered me his seat. The same man that guided me onto the bus, guided me off, paid my fare and negotiated a tuk tuk (Sri Lankan auto rickshaw) to my resort.

I had arrived in paradise. To me, Sri Lanka is the land that time has forgotten. After decades of internal conflict, tourism had finally returned only to be quickly swept away by the tsunami. Without much

foreign influence via tourism, this country has remained pristine and pure. The first morning I walked out of my modest bungalow onto the porch and caught my first glance of the Indian Ocean framed by coconut palms.

Every day began sitting in meditation. With only a few steps through the fragrant frangipani trees I arrived at the yoga shala, a rectangular screened-in room with mint terrazzo flooring. Gazing outside, the beauty of the surrounding banana and papaya trees always put a smile on my face. The type of yoga practiced at Rocky Point Beach Bungalows is ashtanga yoga. Ashtanga is an energetic, flowing set sequence of postures linked together like a dance. This class was taught Mysore style, named after the city in which the guru lives. You practice the sequence on your own with the teacher guiding you via verbal cues and physical adjustments. Between the intensity of



the practice and the Sri Lankan humidity, rivers of sweat poured out, purifying our bodies and leaving our skin glistening. The yoga shala buzzed with a laser-like focus as an international crowd moved through their own practice. Yogis had gathered from South Africa, Hong Kong, Japan, Belgium, Canada, United States, Israel and the United Kingdom.

To replenish lost fluids and cool our steamy bodies, we

walked to the kitchen where coconut juice straight from the king coconuts were waiting for us. Every morning before breakfast I strolled through the path leading to Silent Beach. Every direction in which you look is postcard picture-perfect. Desolate white sand beaches fringed with a thick stand of coconut palms lead out to the blue swell of the Indian Ocean.

The owner of Rocky Point, Fred, invited me to swim out in the open sea to the "Blue Hole". Quickly he noticed my hesitancy due to being caught in the current a few days before. After a short swim I had turned around and began swimming back only to notice that despite my best efforts I was remaining stationary. Soon panic set in and decades on the yoga mat kicked in to remind me to breath and relax. Being the kind soul that he is, Fred arrived the next morning with a pair of fins bringing me both a sense of security and freedom. This began my long swims and discussions with Fred that I soon began to treasure. Amongst his many accomplishments, Fred is the cofounder of Earth Day.

After hours of expending energy it was time to refuel. Breakfast was a bowl of local fruit consisting of small sweet bananas, vibrant orange papaya and juicy pineapple topped with passion fruit picked straight from the trees on the property.

Whether I ate with the group or at Fred's house with his cat, Tsunami, I had a panoramic view of the sea and cool trade winds caressed my skin. The air is so fresh, you savor every breath.

Afternoons were spent at Palm Beach, just to the east of Rocky Point. On the top of the hill overlooking the beach, cows grazed peacefully looking down on an abandoned fishing vessel adding ambiance to the scene. Whereas the morning beach was the swimming/snorkeling beach, the afternoon beach was the boogie board/body surfing beach. It's so rare that we have the opportunity to body surf in Pass-A-Grille so I was thrilled to be able to play in the waves every day and get tumbled in the sea often returning to my bungalow with a wad of sand in my suit and my hair a tangled mess,

a sign of a good day at the beach.

One afternoon I rode on the back of my friend, Anthony's, motorcycle out to the newly established village where several of the families that we helped had relocated. Driving for miles and miles inland I felt a tugging in my heart as we drove further from the sea. Later I asked Sarath, the young Sri Lankan manager at Rocky Point with the surfer haircut, if the people were relieved to be away from the sea after the tsunami or were they sad. He looked me straight in the eyes and replied, "They are very sad, Beth". Many of the men now have to ride a bus all the way into town and back to



Dilam's family's home and restaurant are being rebuilt via Anthony's fundraising efforts.

Delicious. The staple in Sri Lanka is red rice and curry. Bowls full of savory curry in a base of coconut milk were spread before us. My very favorite curry, pumpkin, was sitting amongst the other curries, sweet potato, bean and carrot, breadfruit, eggplant, okra, dal and coconut sambar, fresh shredded coconut with Sri Lankan spices all accompanied by papadam, fried lentil flour.

Towards the end of my time in this magical land I met Martina, a German pediatrician living in Los Angeles. She had traveled to Sri Lanka on her own to provide relief work during the tsunami. As she was leaving, some parents begged her to return to continue helping their children. "Please don't abandon us," they pleaded. These pleas propelled the

formation of a new non-profit, Real Medicine. The day Martina and I first met; our eyes remained locked during the course of an intense two hour conversation. It was instant soul recognition, although neither one of us realized it at the time.

Returning home I browsed through her website, www.realmedicinefoundation.org and was swept with an overwhelming sensation that I was meant to be a part of this humanitarian relief organization. Martina welcomed me with open arms. Shortly afterwards we were brainstorming together on the phone when she made the decision to create a new division, Team Whole Health and placed me in charge.

From conducting my first fundraiser, to traveling to see the fruits of my effort in a Sri Lankan village, to being appointed the head of a Holistic Health department in an innovative relief foundation, everything has come full circle. ■



Yogis gather for a Sri Lankan feast at Rocky Point Beach Bungalows.

continue to make a living from the sea, consuming a few hours each day.

To show their appreciation, one of the families invited us to lunch. The first thing we noticed as we stepped into the house was the swarm of flies. Screening is not a priority in the third world. The infrastructure was not yet complete in the village and this family had not received electricity. A feast was set out for us on the table, one of the few pieces of furniture. The table also functioned as the altar to their ten year old daughter who was swept away in the tsunami. Imagine eating and gazing up into the eyes of this beautiful girl who spent too little time on this planet.

As we sat down the flies surrounded us and the food. Without electricity the fans were useless. Our hosts became human fans waving us with newspapers for an hour as we ate. Try flapping a newspaper for five minutes, let alone an hour. This family was so gra-

REAL MEDICINE FOUNDATION

One person helping one
person is how it starts.



The Real Medicine Foundation is a humanitarian organization that provides support to people living in disaster, post-war, and poverty stricken areas. We believe that "real" medicine is focused on the person as a whole by providing not only the physical treatment, but also emotional, economic and social support.

We have teams of people ready to fulfill our promises to the children and their families across the globe and here at home. We need your financial support.

Call local St. Pete Beach resident, Beth Cole to donate whatever you can - today!
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