

Published February 8th, 2017

A new chapter for Orinda yoga instructor

By Kara Navolio



Teaching youngsters the joy of yoga is a major sentiment in Dana Dowell's new book. Photos Dana Dowell

As a yoga instructor and practitioner of the exercise that combines meditation and movement for overall health, Dana Dowell wanted to share the yoga philosophy with children. She sees yoga as a way to help children, to give back to the community, and this is her motivation for writing her first children's book "Yoga Girl" (Lulu Publishing, Dec. 2016).

The book, which is illustrated by Kevin Coffey of San Francisco, is intended for children ages 5-10 and shows how yoga can give people of all ages more confidence, more physical fitness, more peacefulness, and bring people together. "My goal is to help girls, empower girls. Everyone can do yoga regardless of age, body type or size. Yoga can help kids feel better and perform better, both physically and mentally," says Dowell, an Orinda resident who also grew up in Orinda and attended Miramonte High School.

Dowell's mother has been practicing yoga for over 40 years, raising her and her siblings as a single mom by teaching yoga before it was popular. In her 80s now, she's still teaching at the Orinda Community Center and Hacienda de las Flores in Moraga and is an inspiration to Dowell.

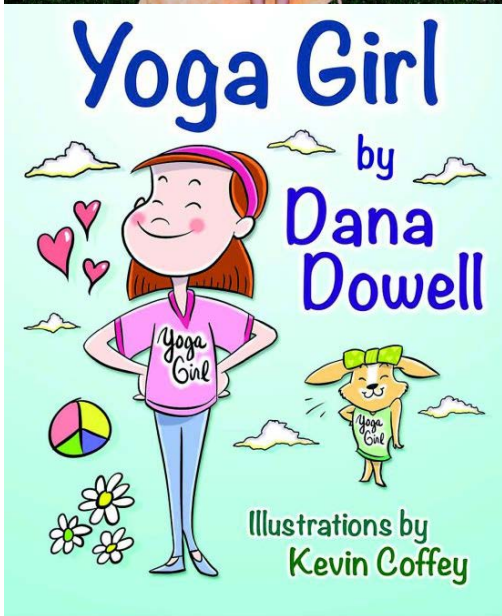
The "Yoga Girl" story, which is somewhat autobiographical, also touches on themes of friendship and bullying and dealing with overscheduling. As a mom of three sons, Dowell sees overscheduling of kids as a big problem in today's race to get kids into the best colleges. Kids don't have enough down time and time to reflect. In the story, Riley, the main character, must make some choices about her time commitments. Yoga also serves as a way to help Riley center herself during stressful and busy times.

This focus on mindfulness and meditation is not new to Dowell. In addition to her teaching of yoga and practicing it since she was 8 years old, she and her mother started an online retail store called The Green Buddha in 2008. It was a way for her to stay focused on the things she was grateful for and to help others do the same during a difficult patch in her life, as her marriage was dissolving and the whole country was falling on difficult financial times. Products sold on the website www.thegreenbuddha.net support a life with an attitude of gratitude.

Dowell's past career as an actress is an asset in her new career as independent author as she has to promote herself as she promotes her book. Dowell has been reading her book at local schools and at Orinda Books last month. The readings include the teaching of several yoga poses. She is presenting the book to Girl Scout troops and donating "Mom & Me Yoga" classes to all of Lafayette's Elementary School fundraising auctions. Dowell teaches yoga at Studio E in Moraga on Monday mornings and is happy to sell the book directly to interested buyers for a discounted price. She can be reached at danadowell@me.com.

The book can also be found at Orinda Books, Barnes & Noble, Amazon or on her website: www.mpwbooks.com. It will soon be available, along with Yoga Girl t-shirts and leggings for girls and Yoga Girl t-shirts for women, on thegreenbuddha.net website as well.

"Writing and publishing this book was one of the hardest things I've ever done. It was on my bucket list, and it's been worth all the hard work," says Dowell.



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