

teenie yogini

Warrior Momma: Lessons of My Second Pregnancy

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At five feet tall and just over 100lbs, I've never been accused of Amazonian proportions. I have been called feisty; my husband might even say 'fierce.' We teeny yoginis sometimes think we have to be forceful to make an impact. We hold on to this way of thinking until we discover a different kind of warrior strength, a discovery that I made during my second pregnancy.



When I discovered I was pregnant for the second time, I immediately envisioned myself with my fully pregnant belly, standing strong and proud in Warrior II – Yoga Momma!! I was excited. How cool would it be to learn to teach prenatal yoga by experiencing yoga in my prenatal body? I felt sure the experience would strengthen my personal practice as well as my teaching skills.

When I fell on the stairs eight weeks into my pregnancy, I didn't dwell on it. There seemed to be only minor surface damage, so I did a little Reiki self-care and I was on my way. My daily practice proceeded as usual, with modifications of course as I worked around my growing belly. I bought some prenatal videos to tide me over until I could make it to a prenatal class.

After one video session of 'hip openers' I noticed with a hint of curiosity, but no alarm, that there was some discomfort in my left hip. My curiosity quickly transformed to panic, however, when I later lifted my right leg to get out of the shower and suddenly froze in pain. It felt as if my entire pelvic floor had gone into spasm. I could tell that the baby was fine, but I couldn't lift my leg to get out of the shower. My husband had to lift me out, and as I lay in bed I realized that since it was a holiday weekend, anyone who could help me was unavailable. Short of a trip to the ER, I had to figure this out for myself.

Since I could tell the problem wasn't with the baby, I ruled out the ER. Something structural had definitely had gone awry. So I lay on the bed in Savasana, releasing all

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the tension in my pelvic floor and hips, breathed, and waited. Eventually the muscles released, the pain subsided and I was mobile again. If I could walk, I could do yoga, right? A week later I was back in class, and though I kept checking for pain, I only felt minor discomfort. But I was Warrior Momma; a little discomfort wasn't going to stop me. I was wise enough, though, to avoid anymore 'hip openers.'

When I finally made it to Corinne's class at Sweet Peas, it turned out the only class I could attend was only scheduled for another two weeks. During that one class with its Viniyoga focus, however, I experienced the total ease and lightness of movement that can come from surrendering to the breath. I believe that this was the foundation for the other lessons that I was to learn during this pregnancy.

After the class I mentioned to Corinne that I was having some difficulty with my hips. She suggested a physical therapist might help if it didn't get better. I should mention that I've had chronic sacroiliac (SI) joint problems since my early adulthood. The problems after an unpleasant popping sound was heard as I went into a split during a dance rehearsal. I used Bridge Pose (setu bandha) and a "transformational work" series which I learned from Kari Tomaschik and the late Roger Eischens to keep that area stable. When all else failed, my wonderful chiropractor could always get the joint back in place. By the fourth month of the pregnancy, however, even chiropractic adjustments didn't seem to stick.

Since things weren't getting any better I conceded to try physical therapy. Maybe a PT could rescue my rapidly fading Yoga Momma image. The therapist pronounced my unstable SI joint to be the culprit, compounded by the relaxin hormone and extra weight of the pregnancy. She gave me a series of pelvic stabilizers, and cautioned me to avoid all asymmetric poses. That meant Warrior II was out of the question.

During the first part of the pregnancy, I was teaching at Bloom Yoga Studio. I must admit that I enjoyed announcing before each class that the students shouldn't be alarmed as it was perfectly safe for me to be doing yoga while pregnant. I delighted in adding that though I might look close to full term it was only four months into the pregnancy so they needn't worry about me going into labor. That wasn't an exaggeration. I knew from my first pregnancy that it was possible for my body to laugh in the face of all known laws of physics. In fact, people asked more than once how it was that I didn't fall over! By the end of the pregnancy, I measured about the same from waist to tip of head, as from waist to tip of belly!

Since I was teaching, I was struggling to keep my home practice going. After seeing me limp off my mat once too often (after doing only symmetric poses) my husband finally

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asked if I didn't think I should stop. By this point I was sleeping sitting up because it was too painful to roll from one side to another – I could hear bones snap into place as I rolled over. I had to admit that he was right. There was no fierceness left. The Yoga Momma image had popped.

What's a yogini to do when asana is out of the question? Well, the other seven limbs of the eight-limbed system, of course (though I must admit samadhi still eludes me)! It seems that in quest of my warrior woman image, I had lost track of some of the major principles of yoga. Ahimsa – the practice of non-harming would preclude the constant repetition of poses that produced discomfort, if not outright pain. Satya – the practice of truthfulness should have caused me to admit to myself, even sooner than I did, that the image was not a reality. And finally Santosha – the practice of contentment, the implementation of which allowed me to be happy with my body, even in the face of discomfort and pain. I was even able to calmly endure the incredulous stares and insensitive comments of people who really didn't mean to cause hurt feelings but just couldn't believe the size of my belly.

Shortly after I ended my asana practice and stopped teaching, I picked up Vanda Scaravelli's "Awakening the Spine" out of curiosity. I'd always been fascinated by stories of her and wondered what she had to say. Her instruction about allowing the body to be supported by the Earth was the eager answer to my prayers about how I would continue in this uncooperative body. Even with an extra twenty-five pounds (and growing) I could still learn to move from a deeper place. I could stand firmly on two feet and feel the Earth push back against my weight, lifting my heavy body and lightening my load. I could sit and allow my burdened hips to sink into Her loving support and feel them settle into a place of balance. And I could joyfully practice Santosha and appreciate the life that was growing inside me. I could "do yoga" even when my body couldn't tolerate asymmetry and 'poses.'

As I learned to be supported, I also learned to let go of resistance. My former teacher Roger always used to say, "It is what it is." I realize that is the essence of Santosha.

With the benefit of hindsight I see that the image of the Warrior Momma wasn't really a fallacy. The strength that I gained through letting go marked the beginning of the end of fear for me. Allowing the Earth to support my weight during pregnancy also allowed me to use that support for the delivery. I allowed my body to do what it needed, embracing the pain rather than trying to transcend it. I used my breath to let go of resistance and invited the Earth to help me. My baby girl was born (in the wheelchair!) within 5 minutes of arrival at the hospital – no unbearable pain, no stitches. I had been waiting at home for the "real pain" and it never came.

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As of this writing, baby Kaia is 7 months old and on any given day (as babies do) can be seen doing downward facing dog, baddha konasana, and sometimes even pigeon pose. I didn't teach her. She's learning to use the support of the earth so that one day she might walk from a place of balance.
