

Healing Waters

Yoga Rejuvenates in
Glenwood Hot Springs Pool

Age-old traditions have brought people to hot springs to “take the waters,” feel invigorated or restore their health. Now, folks are combining two ancient healing practices—hot mineral waters and yoga—for 21st century results in the Glenwood Hot Springs Pool.

About a year ago, Elaine Hallett, who suffered a serious injury after colliding with water in its cold, crystalline state, saw a yoga class in the pool, and was welcomed to join in. “As an amateur competitive ice skater, I slipped off an edge a few years ago while pulling a hard twist and landed on my back on the ice. The impact and wrenching led to injuries that doctors could not help me with. One opinion was that I ‘tore a bunch of muscles.’ Another said that I had nerve impingement that could not be rehabbed and would only respond to injections in my spine. I declined.”

The class that Hallett joined was taught by Annig Agemian Raley. As Agemian Raley approached the end of her 25 years teaching eight water aerobics classes a week for Colorado Mountain College, she too had had an injury; it prompted her to explore yoga. From the first class, she felt that she’d come home to a new way of moving, a new way of being.

Fourteen years and more than 500 hours of training later, Agemian Raley is credentialed to teach yoga to all students, including training other yoga instructors. Often, her students are trying to recover from injuries. She tells them that with yoga practice, follow-up, alignment, therapeutic exactness and patience, they can heal. “If you believe you can get better, you’re right. If you believe you cannot heal, you’re right. I try to catch people in their words because our words and our thoughts are so powerful.”

Hallett says, “While Annig’s water yoga class is a highlight of my week, I also work with her out of the water for additional therapy, and



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PHOTOGRAPHY HOWARD RALEY

the benefits have been significant for me. Injuries aside, the classes are simply a joy. The Glenwood Hot Springs Pool is a magical environment and Annig is a great teacher.”

A lifetime water baby, who grew up on the ocean in Brooklyn, New York, with a mother who was a professional swimmer, Agemian Raley claims, “Only the enticement of dessert would get me out of the water as a child!”

In addition to teaching water aerobics, Agemian Raley is an accomplished concert pianist who teaches private students. “When I discovered yoga, I was studying on the mat, but I felt as if there was a separation inside of me because I was teaching aerobics in the pool and I could hardly wait to be on the mat to do my yoga,” she says. “Then I also had my piano. So I had these three different worlds. I wanted them to come together. How was I going to do that? I decided to start teaching yoga in the water. Over time, I grew, the class evolved as my concepts developed and H2Yoga (H2Yoga.net) was born.”

Agemian Raley’s student, Barbara Palmer, explains, “Around 2001, Annig began incorporating some yoga moves at the end of our water aerobics class. Then she created a class where she adapted many classi-

cal yoga poses, using the side and bottom of the pool as a 'mat.' Immediately, I loved this class. We, her students, are amazed at her knowledge of both anatomy and yoga philosophy."

"As I age, I find the water to be an increasingly friendly environment in which to exercise. Annig's gifts have allowed me to remain with yoga far longer than I ever imagined."

Agemian Raley describes herself as intrinsically a teacher and a person for whom practice and focus form core elements of her DNA. She recalls that she practiced piano for hours every day and swam 600 miles a year for 10 years. Whether it's swimming, water aerobics, bread baking, piano, or yoga, when she masters a subject, she joyfully shares it through teaching.

Much to her surprise, Agemian Raley's elation with yoga inspired her piano. She had intended to retire from teaching piano. Instead, she now loves it more than ever. "The practice of yoga, the practice of concentration and focus, supports patience, humility, vulnerability and a valuable connection I have with whoever walks into my life."

Students come into Agemian Raley's life from a breadth of situations. Siouxzy Sundheim began water aerobics classes in 1986, when she was pregnant. "Annig was knowledgeable, always made me feel welcome and made me laugh as I transitioned into a new phase of my life."

After a child-raising hiatus, Sundheim returned to Agemian Raley's classes about 13 years ago, as H2Yoga developed. "Annig, the hot springs pool in the mornings throughout the seasons and yoga—I felt like I had come home!"

Connie Minter, a student for the past six years, says, "I had a respiratory problem and was a patient at National Jewish Health in Denver. My doctor recommended I use the water for exercise. I was in the pool; Annig and her students were just there. I approached them out of curiosity. Her classes have taught me to use my breath, to open spaces inside my body."

Lynn Dwyer and Kathy Ezra, both students for more than a decade, explain that the water is a friendlier environment for their exercising. Ezra says, "I am healthier in mind, body and spirit. What more could I ask for? Annig's passion is infectious and I'm grateful for that."

While local students regularly attend Agemian Raley's classes to maintain or build their health and to recover from injuries, she also attracts curious guests of the Glenwood Hot Springs Lodge. Antonia Carey and Nick Palazzo visit the lodge during the Telluride Film Festival.

"We always wanted to try yoga. The problem was that years of a relatively sedentary lifestyle made us realize we weren't as coordinated or as strong as we once were. The idea of yoga in the pool seemed to be a perfect and safe way for a beginner, so we stepped outside our comfort zone and went to our first class. What fun and what an eye-opener! The biggest surprise was how great it felt to be able, with Annig's gentle direction, to actually start doing poses in the first class. She is such a warm and patient teacher, who enjoys watching her students' gradual mastery of the moves. Although we live in Illinois, we are making plans to come back to take more lessons from Annig."

H2Yoga classes splash into the Glenwood Hot Springs Pool every Monday morning and are included in the cost of pool admission. Class times change with seasons; check the HotSpringsPool.com website for details.

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