

Yoga is child's play for local author

by **GLENN COOK**

Saint City News

A St. Albert yoga teacher-turned-author is hoping she can inspire a whole new generation to mix poses with pencils.

Akinsdale resident Donna Freeman is an expert in yoga for kids and teenagers, and recently wrote a book entitled *Once Upon a Pose: A Guide to Yoga Adventure Stories for Children*, that is opening up the world of yoga to teachers and students in schools.

Freeman said that, even though they may have a few more limitations than their older counterparts, the kids love it.

"When I come into schools, they usually run down the hallways going, 'Yippee! It's yoga day!'" she said. "They absolutely can't wait."

Freeman has been teaching yoga to kids in schools for 13 years now, but admits she got into it a bit by accident when her oldest son was in kindergarten.

"I was volunteering in the classroom one day, and there was a [substitute

teacher]," she recalled. "It happened, in their day's schedule, that they had P.E. time. And the sub was totally unprepared for 25 kindergarten kids — 16 of whom were boys — for half an hour in the gym; she was like, 'Oh my goodness, what am I going to do?' I looked and her and went, 'Do you want me to do yoga with them?' and she went, 'Please!'"

She started in that class with a simple routine of animal poses, around which she weaved a story about going to the zoo, and that sparked a new passion for her, as she spent time researching and developing new ways to bring yoga to young people while engaging their creativity and imaginations.

"I could see how desperately the teachers wanted to access the benefits of yoga and how much the kids needed it in their lives," she said. "It was just kind of a natural progression."

Aside from the physical benefits of doing yoga, Freeman — a school teacher by trade — said kids can reap a host of mental

benefits as well.

"If you can give kids a physical and mental break, then they can learn better," she said. "They're better at focusing, they're better at concentrating. And you can teach them the relaxation skills; so many of our children are overprogrammed, and they don't know how to relax. Sitting in front of the TV or playing video games, that's not relaxing."

While most of the mechanics of yoga don't change when Freeman teaches kids compared to adults, her approach does alter in order to get her young students on board.

"The poses and the breathing techniques are the same, but you approach it from a more playful attitude. You play yoga with kids," she said. "Most kids can't perform the poses perfectly ... but they jump in with their whole being. Their enthusiasm is wonderful."

While she has gotten her foot in the door in many traditional schools, a fair amount of Freeman's success has come from parents who home school

their children, she said.

"A lot of home school parents are just looking for any resource to meet their daily physical activity requirement," she said. "The teachers are the exact same; they have the same goal to give their children the best foot for their future that they possibly can."

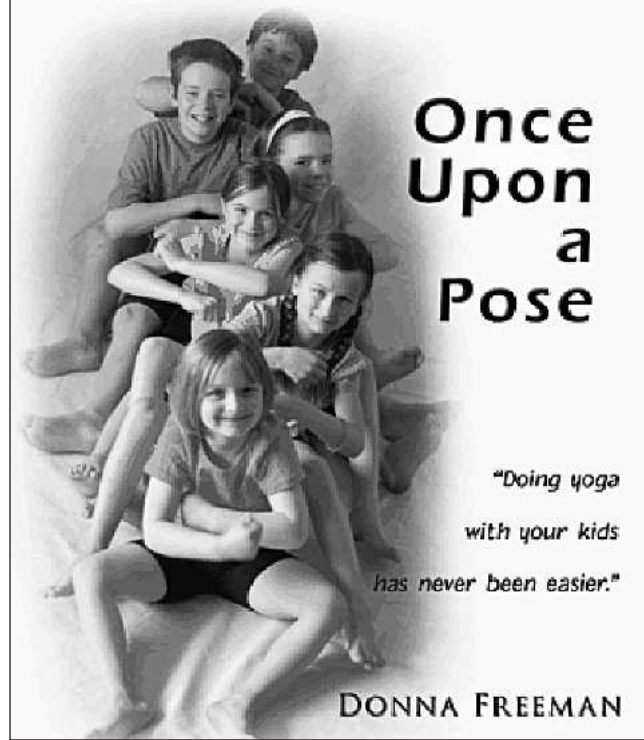
Because she has mainly geared her books and lessons to a North American audience, that's where the majority of visitors to Freeman's website come from. But word is spreading far and wide.

"I get hits from everywhere — Latin America, Brazil, New Zealand, India," she said. "I had one the other day from Norway; I was like, 'Cool! Someone in Norway visits my website.' That's just really neat to how it's spreading."

But, even though her efforts have attracted international attention, she is glad to be based in St. Albert, where yoga has a very strong foothold.

With the book on shelves and the school programs going strong, Freeman said the next step is to enter

A Guide to Yoga Adventure Stories for Children



Once Upon a Pose

"Doing yoga with your kids has never been easier."

DONNA FREEMAN

ARTWORK SUPPLIED

St. Albert resident and yoga teacher Donna Freeman can now add author to her list of titles thanks to her new book, *Once Upon a Pose*.

the realm of instructional videos, starting with her own YouTube channel.

"Sometimes the verbal descriptions and written descriptions aren't enough for people; they need to see it," Freeman said. "We're very visual learners nowadays."

"A lot of people are

scared — 'I don't know yoga; I'm not a yoga instructor. I'm going to hurt somebody.' No — have fun. Play. Explore. Smile," she added.

Once Upon a Pose is available through Freeman's website at <http://www.yogainmyschool.com> or through Amazon.ca.

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