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Bending over Backwards to Please: Toddler Yoga at Orinda Library

By Cathy Dausman



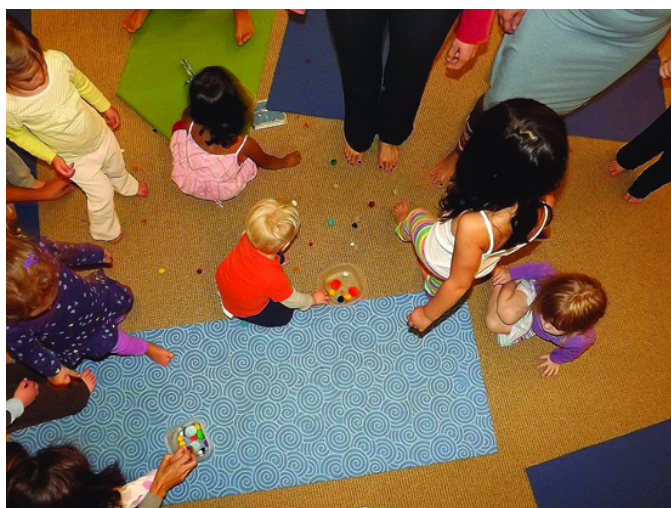
Namaste! Beth Houghton (center) with her children's yoga students photos Cathy Dausman

The half-hour class ran long, but participants didn't mind. The children shed shoes and socks to play "toe-ga" (yoga for toes), working to put colored fuzzy balls into containers on the ground with their feet. They sang "Wheels on the Bus," holding yoga poses. They learned how to exhale by blowing colorful scarves back and forth to Houghton.

Susan Bosch brought grandchildren Mirabelle, 4, and Emmett Eriksson, 2, to the class. "I thought the class was fabulous and my grandchildren loved it," she said.

After a second "om" - pronounced "ahh for the doctor," then "take a bite of cookie, mmm" - it was time for Namaste, or good-bye.

"It's never too early to teach kids to think about kindness, stillness and to be in touch with their breath and bodies," Houghton said.



Yoga plus toes equals "Toe-ga."

It began with an "om" and ended with Namaste - "the spirit in me honors the spirit in you" - but this was not your parents' yoga class. The 14 students, ages 2-4, were part of a children's yoga class offered October 24 at the Orinda Library taught by Beth Houghton. The program was sponsored by Friends of the Orinda Library and arranged by Orinda Children's Librarian Lin Look.

Houghton, or "Bendy Beth," of Bendy Berry Yoga, specializes in yoga for children. Both Look and Houghton clearly love it. Who would imagine toddlers could execute up dog, happy baby, chair and hero pose stances, or learn to breathe in the Pranayama and Kapalabhati manner, lying still on a yoga mat through the course of a soft song?

Houghton actually prefers teaching children because they are more "interactive and fun."

"I can more easily incorporate music, storytelling and games into the classes," she said.

Asked to describe a typical class, Houghton said, "High energy, musical and bouncy." And why her fruit-based business name? Because Houghton's favorite thing in the world is a strawberry. "I thought it proper to nod to the berry, while also nodding to yoga," she said.

Reach the reporter at: cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com

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