



# EPISODE 103

## Chair Yoga With Carolyn

Released April, 2018

TRANSCRIPT

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*Intro: Hi everyone and welcome to The Enchant Me Podcast. I'm Kim Selby and I'll be your host as we go looking for creative inspiration every day life. In each episode, we'll talk about a quick one or two hour excursion we go on that's meant to feed our creative spirit and refill our reservoir of internal inspiration. Our excursions are based on the concept of the 'artist date', one of the tools in "The Artist's Way", a book by Julia Cameron that's a great book to read if you're looking to bring more creativity into your life no matter what form you find it. So let's get started.*

Hi everyone and welcome to Episode 103 of The Enchant Me Podcast. I'm Kim Selby and I'll be your host as we go looking for a creative inspiration in every day life. This is the third episode that we launched with so if you're with us for the first time welcome, and thanks so much. And if you're returning listener, thank you too so much. We're really excited to be here we have some interesting things lined up to share with you so thanks for everybody's listening. If you are liking what you're hearing, we'll be posting new episodes on Tuesdays so check back and we thank you, thank you, thank you.

So I mentioned before that I lived in New Jersey and this winter has not been fun for us. We had four nor'easters in four weeks back at the end of February and into March, so there were a couple days that we were spared from bad weather and it was on one of these nicer days - and when I say nicer weather - I need above freezing that I decided to take advantage of and get out and get some fresh air. Now when I started doing this I never thought of the gym as artist dates. They did not cross my mind at all but as I was contemplating what to do on this nice day that we have this break from the winter weather and wind chills and falling trees and storm-like conditions, I thought maybe this might be something little bit different than what I had planned and it got me out of the house.

I've been doing yoga for the past 15 years probably on and off maybe even a little bit longer with periods of time when I fell out of practice, but always came back to it. I've always enjoyed it and it's a great way to not only get some exercise but to de-stress and to just take an hour to just be present and be with your own body and your own mind and I've always just really enjoyed it. So today I decided to take a class that I've never taken before and that class is chair yoga.

I'm a member of a health and wellness center that's affiliated with one of the major hospitals close to where I live. They have a lot of other programs other than just straight forward gym facilities. They have what you would expect weight rooms and cardio rooms and class rooms but they also have a cardiac care unit they have two or three pools one of which is designed for rehab and physical therapy. They have a lot of people who are there for some degree of rehab whether it is a cardiac event or broken limb - there's a lot going on there other than just regular things that you would assume are part of your gym. One of the nice things about this gym is it has a room that they called the mind-body studio. It's nice because it's tucked away from most of the other main activity that's going on in the gym although it is right underneath one of the areas where there's a lot of weightlifting going on so every now and then you'll hear a big weight dropped - on what seems like your head - but it's actually being dropped on the floor above where this mind-body studio is. They've done it really nicely in very soothing colors. It's a large room and has little twinkle lights that are strung around the outside walls and are turned on during some classes. it's just it's a nice place to spend an hour practicing yoga.



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I've taken a lot of yoga classes over the years, and a lot of different styles of yoga, but I had never done a chair yoga class. I didn't want to go to the class with any pre-conceived notions that because of this being "chair" it would be easier. I wasn't really sure what to expect. Being that yoga is something that you can vary the challenge while you're in the class - if you're looking to do something a little bit more strenuous than what's being taught you can push yourself. If the class is a little bit too challenging than where are you are that moment in time, you can modify or you could take it down a little bit.

I entered the studio and I saw that they had the chairs - about 20 of them - arranged in a big circle. On each of the chairs was a strap and two blocks which are typical yoga props that are used and there was also on everybody's chair around rubber ball that looked a lot like a dodgeball. I had a little bit of an elementary school dodgeball flashback and couldn't help but wonder if after yoga everybody would start pelting each other with these balls just as an extra bit of stress relief. Although I highly doubted that would actually happen it just struck me as funny.

At 1 o'clock to sell our instructor dimmed the lights and turned on the twinkle lights and we knew it was time to get started so we all took our seats around the circle. The class was full and Gisele, our instructor, invited everyone to do a quick introduction so we went around the room and introduced ourselves to each other which I thought was nice. Being a newcomer to the class it was a nice way to see where everyone was from and see what their background with yoga was. I had never introduced myself at a yoga class before so I thought that was a nice touch. It was very casual and there was a good vibe in the room.

I was sitting next to a woman on my left who intrigued me right away when I sat down. She was an older woman with straight dark hair cut into a bob. She was wearing dark sunglasses and she was sitting with her feet propped up on that two of the yoga blocks. I was looking forward to hear her introduce herself because she was so interesting looking and I wanted to hear a little bit about her. I did my quick introduction about who I was and how I had made it there that day. I could not wait to hear about who this woman was.

She fixed her sunglasses. She smoothed her hair with her hands. She stood up and she said: *"Hello my name is Carolyn and today is my 83rd birthday."* Everyone was silent for a millisecond and then you just heard everyone gasped and then everyone broke out into applause. Spontaneous applause for Carolyn's 83rd birthday. She had taken over the floor and she talked for two or three minutes straight about how she is 83 and she exercises every day and she teaches tai chi. She moved to the center of the class and started teaching us tai chi. I've taken one tai chi class and once you understand the movements, you kind of get into a pattern and it becomes a flow, but it's kind of tricky to get started - to remember with the movements. She started a flow of arm movements and was talking about what tai chi does, and how tai chi she keeps the energy moving and keeps the body moving and the whole energy in the room changed. All eyes were on Carolyn as she stood in the middle of our circle and give us a tai chi lesson. The instructor absolutely welcomed her to lead the class for the first few minutes and I've got to tell you it was just completely unexpected.

I had a feeling there was something more to this quiet woman in the dark glasses, and she kept her glasses on while doing tai chi by the way in case anyone was wondering. They stayed firmly on her eyes the whole time. It was interesting how no one shook their head or balked at her kind of taking over the beginning of the class. The teacher wound up incorporating some of these tai chi our movements into the actual chair class. It was a really cool vibe that Caroline on her 83rd birthday set in motion. Once we have gone through a few minutes of



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the flowing tai chi movements, Carolyn sat back down. She got a huge round of applause. I thought everyone was going to break out into the happy birthday song but that didn't happen but I felt like it was very close to happening. I've never been in a class like that before that something like that happened.

So what about the class itself, besides the enjoyment that Carolyn brought to the class and the unexpected bonus that we got from her and her birthday celebration? I definitely enjoyed the class. I would go back and take it again. Like I said before, I didn't want to prejudge it just because it was yoga done in a chair. I think it might be easy to assume that this might be an easier class, or that this was a class for people with limitations. It really wasn't. You actually got to do some good work in the chair.

We were led through series of flows. We worked on balance. We worked on flexibility. It really was a challenging class and perhaps it was challenging because it was new. Where you get used to doing things a certain way and then when you try and do something that you think you know in a different way, it presents a challenge. And challenges help you to grow and something that you might have presumed to be more basic than you are able to accomplish, don't exclude it. Don't cross that off the list. Give it a shot, you never know. Throughout the class I was doing my very best to stay present and focus on my movement and focus on my poses and my breathing, but I just couldn't help it sneaking a peek because this was so new and because we had such a nice surprise at the beginning of class. I was being nosy and curious about how others were enjoying themselves.

One of the assumptions that I had about this class was that maybe people were taking this class because they had a certain limitation, and that may have been true. But when you think about it we all have limitations and we all have things that we need to work on. Boundaries that we try to push past and goals that we try to reach. And this class was really about that. In most yoga classes, they talk about finding your edge and I think the edge that I found was understanding how you think you could know something and then you find out you really don't. Or, you find out you know some things, but not everything and that there's always something more to learn.

So taking a look at the class as an artist date, and how chair yoga may have helped to support living a creative life, I had three main takeaways from this excursion. First: don't judge a book by its cover. Which can apply to a lot of things, but in Carolyn's case, the fact that I had found her so curiously dressed and the way she presented herself as very confident yet quiet, and with the sunglasses, you would think she was, maybe she had had eye surgery. Maybe she had sensitivity to light - but the lights were dim in the room. Maybe she just liked wearing her sunglasses inside. All of these things piqued my curiosity. And as it turned out, she stood up and captured the attention of the entire group by getting up and talking about the fact that it was her birthday and then leading the class for the first five minutes or so to our surprise. So I think we're all little bit guilty sometimes of judging things by its cover. I was a little bit guilty of judging chair yoga. I assumed it would be a little bit easier or that it was maybe for people who were dealing with an injury or a limitation, but that wasn't the case at all. I was curious about Carolyn and I had maybe prejudged her as a quiet person, or someone who didn't want to call attention to herself because of the glasses, and yet she was front and center for most of the time and people went right up to her after class to talk with her but she - she definitely trying to sneak out and I did hear the instructor say to her I hope I can get you next week and talk to you next week - so I guess she is definitely a little bit of an enigma and people have been curious about her even before I got there.



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The second takeaway from chair yoga is: that sometimes it's nice to go back to basics. And by that I mean something that you think you know and you think you've learned and maybe studied for years there's always something new to learn and maybe by taking what could be construed as a step backwards, is actually going to set you into a path to move you forward. Maybe chair yoga is seen as a more basic practice, but I got a lot out of it. I learned new ways to stretch. I learned new ways to target problem areas that I have a hard time stretching in a normal practice, and I would've learned that if I hadn't gone to this class.

My third takeaway is: sometimes if you take something you know and you flip it on its head, you can learn something new. By taking yoga and doing it in a chair, which is the complete opposite of how I've ever done it, I learned something new. It opened my eyes. It gave me a new experience. It gave me a new level of understanding and a new perspective on something that I've done for years. So for example, if you paint and you always use a specific brush, maybe trying a new brush. If you paint with a small brush, swap it out for a large brush. Swap it out for a brush that you would use to paint the outside of the house. If you write, and you write in a way that's stream of conscious, try to take a look at the way you write maybe try and write in a different style or in a different order or try and write a short story in 100 words or less. Taking something that you know and that you're very familiar with and approaching it from an opposite direction can sometimes open you up to new ways of doing things and new ways of finding creativity and finding inspiration and ideas. Ideas for new projects, ideas for new subject matter. And it's not just painting or writing or quote, end quote "artistic endeavors". Maybe you love to cook and you've never tried using a spice blend or flavor profile from a different country. Maybe it's taking a dish that you cook every day and swapping out three of the ingredients for something new.

There's that saying that familiarity breeds contempt, and sometimes I think we get stuck when we're doing the same thing over and over again and we maybe get bored with it or maybe we grow to resent it. By taking the things we love and love to do and just shaking it up a little bit, I think that will help me as I work towards living a more creative life and trying to work on the five or six projects I have going right now that are in various stages of completion. And I'm now going to take a look at them from this angle and see, am I judging it? Am I judging a book by its cover? How can I go back to basics and how can I take something that I know and it flip it on its head a little bit and I think I have Carolyn to thank for a lot of this. I hope I'll see her again soon in another class and maybe one of these days I'll actually have the courage to go up to her and thank her for getting up and teaching us tai chi on her 83rd birthday and for letting me see things that I wasn't expecting to see.

So thanks everybody again for listening had a really great time with this episode. I'm Kim Selby and will see you again soon on the next episode of The Enchant Me Podcast.

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