



SPREADING

INNER PEACE

Virginia “Ginger” Hill brings the healing art of yoga to Lake City.

By KAYLA LOKEINSKY | Photos courtesy of Virginia Hill

For years Virginia “Ginger” Hill was a workaholic. Putting in 18-hour days as an academic at the University of California, she gave it all up to return to her roots in Lake City. Now, she has channeled her passion for teaching and learning into yoga, traveling the world to learn the healing art, then bringing it home to share it with the people of Columbia County.

“If you told me what I’d be doing five years ago I probably would have laughed at you and then punched you in the face,” Hill said.

What started out as a way to de-stress and clear her mind has turned into a deep passion and desire to share the healing art of yoga with the world.

Returning to Her Roots

For years yoga was part of Hill’s daily routine. She began doing yoga 18 years ago while in California as a way to relax her mind and have more energy to get her through her long work days. Then in 2012 Hill, 41, moved back to Lake City to be with family.

“Lake City is a really special place,” Hill said. “I came here for healing.”

Hill’s family has lived in Columbia County for seven generations, and she knew that the best place for her to heal was in the place she grew up.

“When stuff hits the fan you go for family,” Hill said. “You go for deep roots.”

It’s her roots in Lake City that inspired the name for her yoga practice, Alligator Healing Arts Yoga. Hill lives on Alligator Lake, and her family used to own the land that currently makes up Alligator Lake Park.

“It’s about my deep roots,” Hill said. “It has to do with my personal roots and the town’s roots.”

When Hill returned to Lake City, she wanted a place where she could practice yoga every day, but she never thought she would be teaching yoga. However, four years after moving back to Columbia County Hill went in for her first teacher

training, and was certified after completing a 200-hour teacher training course at Discovery Yoga in St. Augustine.

Hill, who had spent years teaching in California, didn’t realize how much she missed it until she started pursuing her yoga teaching certification.

“I burst into tears during my first teacher training practice,” Hill said. “I forgot how much I missed teaching.”

In addition to getting back into teaching, yoga has also helped quench Hill’s thirst for learning. A philosopher by trade, yoga has taught her just as much as she’s taught others.

“Yoga opens up so much study,” Hill said. “It allowed me to heal and bring philosophy into practical practice.”

While studying many yoga techniques, including asana (posing), meditation and pranayama (breathing techniques), she also studies theories of self and theories of progress. To her, philosophy and yoga go hand-in-hand.

“I’m a scholar first and a yogini second,” Hill said. “I’m still a philosopher.”

Yoga Around the World

After Hill earned her yoga teaching certification, her gut instinct told her to go to Scotland.

While most people would opt to go to a country in Asia where yoga is more widely practiced, Hill has always loved the natural beauty and rich educational opportunities in

Scotland, so she followed her instincts and traveled to Trossachs, Scotland to attend a teaching at the Lendrick Lodge, a holistic retreat and spiritual center.

"I went to where the teachers were," Hill said.

Since then Hill has found her home base with the Himalayan Institute, a retreat center for yoga, meditation and wellness located in Pennsylvania. Hill has returned to both Pennsylvania and Scotland since to study under her teachers. She became a part of an international community of colleagues, thanks in part to a yoga for business course she participated in. It was through that course that Hill decided to venture to Thailand, where she took meditation and gong meditation classes. She also spent time in temples and studying with Buddhists

"I don't travel to get away," Hill said. "I'm always traveling to something."

She encourages those who also have a desire to see the world to think about what they love, and go to wherever in the world has that.

"Think of it as a time of cultivation," Hill said. "Don't run away from something. Run to something, and then bring

something back."

In order to help fund her yoga travels, Hill has been able to take her training and combine it with her editing and teaching experience to find a steady source of income: editing yoga teaching manuals.

"That's what's paying the bills and allowing this to happen and to grow," Hill said.

The next stops on Hill's yoga travels will be Fort Myers, Florida where she will be studying Mantra and Boulder, Colorado where she will attend a conference on meditation and mindfulness for end-of-life care.

Hill hopes to eventually host international retreats so she can bring others around the world to learn yoga.

Yoga at Home

Hill has spent countless hours working towards getting certified in different areas of yoga. She has taken two, 200-hour teacher training courses and is currently working on a 500-hour teaching training, which is basically like a master's degree in yoga. In addition to being a Kripalu Certified Instructor through Discovery Yoga, she is also Hatha and Vinyasa Flow Certified through Yogacara Global in Vancouver, Canada and is a Yoga Alliance, 200-hour registered yoga teacher.

Through her Lake City-based yoga practice, Alligator Healing Arts Yoga, Hill offers workshops and private yoga sessions. She will start offering weekly classes in January once she finds a bigger studio space.

"It's grown a little bit too big for this space," Hill said.

Hill currently teaches private yoga clients out of her studio in Lake City, which is also her grandparent's former home. Through her private lessons she is able to personalize the class based on the client's desired goals.

"I make it really specific," Hill said.

Hill considers herself a Jnana Yogi. Jnana Yoga is "the yoga of knowledge or wisdom," and according to ancient philosophy a Jnana Yogi uses his mind to inquire into its own nature.

"It's ultimately about peace of mind," Hill said.

Because of this Hill specializes in yoga and meditation, and has helped many clients and workshop participants through introducing them to the art of meditation.

"My goal is to get people doing seated meditation for five minutes per day," Hill said.

There aren't any studios in Lake City that are solely dedicated to yoga, and Hill is happy that she can help introduce so many local people to the healing art of yoga.

"I love that we have a small town and I can bring something global to it," Hill said.

Yoga changed Hill's life, and she is introducing it to others to help them change their lives for the better.

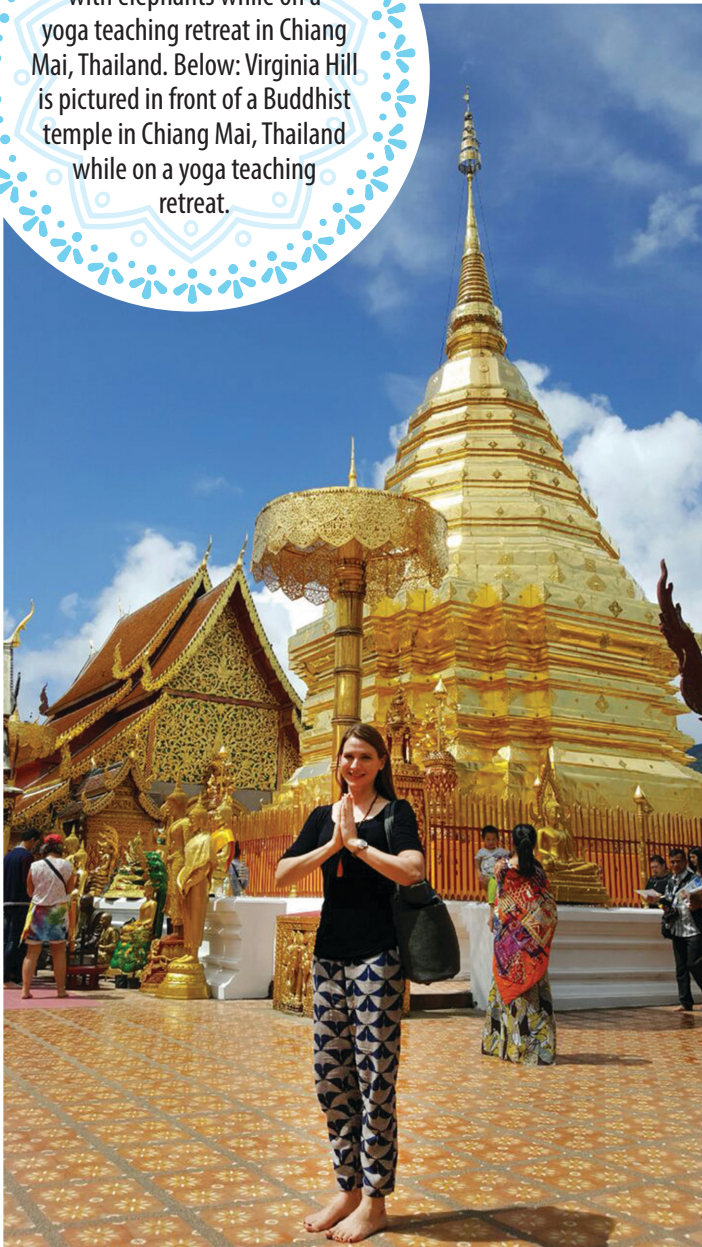
"It's why I can get up every day and be happy," Hill said.



Lake City Yoga Instructor Virginia Hill practices yoga in the Royal Gardens in Edinburgh, Scotland. Hill has traveled all over the world for yoga teaching retreats, including to Scotland, Thailand and parts of the United States.



Above:
Virginia Hill poses with elephants while on a yoga teaching retreat in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Below: Virginia Hill is pictured in front of a Buddhist temple in Chiang Mai, Thailand while on a yoga teaching retreat.



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