



personal reflections from a participant in our last 30 day yoga challenge

Day 0 - Oct 1

It's Orientation Night and the last day before the challenge begins. I've spent 2 weeks hyping myself up about the 30 day challenge at Hari Om—it feels a little surreal to think that it's almost here. My feelings are mixed because I know it will be rewarding and fantastic, but it will also be exhausting, frustrating and, at times, just plain hard to schedule all that yoga into the limited hours of “regular life”. But this is what it's about, I keep telling myself, making yoga part of the everyday routine. I'm sitting in front of my office computer and I smile for a second-- realizing for a moment that yoga as part of my everyday routine cannot possibly be more irritating than some of the things I already have to do everyday!!

I'm so excited to see how effectively I can embrace this and wonder if I'm going to come out of the challenge just a little bit different than I am right now. Orientation comes and I can't make it because I'm helping a friend move. I miss out on seeing everyone else but decide that there will be plenty of time to bump into them all in the studio in the coming weeks. I get to bed early that night and decide that this is going to be just great.

Day 1 - Oct 2

Two of my coworkers, Warren and Kyla, have decided to sign up for the challenge. We spend the day looking at the class schedule, thinking about which classes will make up our evenings and weekends for the next month. I am slightly awed and humbled to think about how much time a person really can spend on a practice if they want (and how much time I haven't, up to now!). All that time though, has to come from somewhere—time spent doing other things. Rescheduling things is proving interesting already...

Sacrifice, I decide, is going to be an integral part of this month. I am going to have to tell my sister that I can't make her Grey's Anatomy TV party on Thursday nights. I will likely have to eat dinner at 8:30 pm every night and never mind extravagant and busy weekends---I have yoga class. We have to tell our friends and family not to expect too much company this month.

When I tell people why I'm going to be busy, they think I'm weird. “Why would someone WANT to do that much yoga??”: I have been asked, numerous times. I can't answer this question satisfactorily, usually. “For fun,” I say to some, “because I like yoga that much,” to others. Quizzical looks. For a select few, I say silly things like, “because I want to be able to sit at my desk job and not freak out all the time!” or “it's better than sitting on the couch watching TV and wiping cheesy Dorito crumbs on my shirt....” Really, I can't articulate why I'm doing this. Slightly compelled, minor wonderment, lots of quirky, insatiable madness! Also, I want to challenge myself and see if I can. Part of me says, I can do this and the other part quips back, “Well you've never done it before---so prove it...”.

Warren, Kyla and I decide that we'll start the challenge with Cormac's Friday night hot class. I see Sean on the way out of 4:15 power and says his legs are already killing him from too much hockey. haha! Other crazies are here!! In fact, there are over 30 names on the list!!! There is a buzz as people look around and figure out who else is submitting themselves to this mad dash for yoga self-supremacy. I become formally acquainted with a few faces that I've seen around the studio: Kelly, Nicholas and Tom all have the happy look of excited challengers and the calmed appearance of a good Power class. I can't wait to start meeting everyone else and taking all of these classes!!!!

Day 2 – Oct 3

Vince comes in for hot flow and informs me that, at Day 2, we are 6.66% done the Challenge! We laugh knowing this is going to be long, but one class at a time, we progress closer to our goal.... Candlelight class was really nice. So far, I don't feel any different than normal, really. But still excited to be here and still enjoying the hype.

Day 3 – Oct 4

Power Hour this Sunday has 17 people and almost all of them are 30 Day Challenge members. The room is amped, high energy. The class is fun and not too hard. I meet Lorraine at the front desk who seems to be doing great. Christine doubled the other day and, I think, is happy to be back to once a day! Diana played football AND doubled yesterday. She laughed and said she's quite sore today. I meet one of the Andreas and she's so excited and happy to be doing this! Thrilled actually and it's so nice to be bumping into such enthusiasts—very inspiring. I laugh when Sean comes in because his voice is hoarse from a long night of weekend fun and HE'S STILL AT YOGA TODAY! Valeria and Cormac are very pleased with the turnout and seem to be more excited than the 30 Day Challenge members. Cormac's sticker set-up is really fun and I'm sure I'm a little bit excited just to see those cute, shiny, proud stickers go up one-by-one beside my name. I can't wait to see those white boards get filled up with all those stickers! If all 35 members come for 30 classes, over 1000 yoga classes will have occurred! I wonder if Cormac has priced out all those stickers.....

Day 4 – Oct 5

Monday is my lazy day. Always. The only day Monday is not my no-yoga day, is when I have plans on Wed or Thurs. I'm usually very busy on the weekends and by the time I drag my sorry butt, kicking and screaming, through Monday at work, all I want to do on Monday night is eat dinner and pretend that Monday didn't happen by watching escapist TV and relaxing. I still feel this way today, but instead of listlessly and languidly relaxing on the couch with my sister's dogs, I am going to yoga class. Again.

On top of this, I packed a delicious looking lunch, but my roommate ate it when he got home late last night.

So I toss some spinach and trail mix into my bag and dash to work. I'm HUNGRY by quitting time and thank goodness my 30 Day Challenge support team (Kyla and Warren) are hungry too! So we go for sushi before Carol's Yin/Yang class. It's yummy and I feel better. Carol makes me feel better too, because her class is lovely. It's so warm in the room with 25 bodies in there and everyone is so close hands touch on the way up to and down from Mountain Pose. I've attended classes at other studios where the mats are so close sometimes you have to rest your legs and arms on your neighbour in twists and folds. For some people, classes this large are very different and I can tell some members here are uncomfortable with the intimacy—(especially some of the non-30-dayers who are wondering why the studio is being hijacked for a whole month)... Carol talks about "Blossoming your bum" a FEW times and I chuckle inside because yoga can be so silly. I chuckle audibly because other people think it's silly too.... It's great. I eat second dinner when I get home and manage some doggie snuggle time with the end of the Canucks game. I'm in bed by 10pm and sleep so, so well.

Day 5 – Oct 6

I wake up this morning feeling great. I decide I'm going to double today. I bust ass on my bike after work to get there in time for 4:45 gentle class. I'm proud because I just beat Warren to the studio and he drove! So I'm already warm when class starts. Gentle is full with people who may not want to be subjected to Valeria's Power Level 2 or Cormac's 8pm Hot Class. A "gentle plank" and dragon series later and I'm already feeling sufficiently yogad-out. I bump into Lisa in the change room and we've already practiced beside each other a few times now. I know because I've admired her tank top and heard Carol do the same on Monday. I loiter around after Gentle and wait for Level 2 to start.

Valeria decides we are going to stoke the "Fire in Our Bodies." Nine chaturanga's in several sets..... lunges, squats... my goodness. I'm sweating like I would in a hot class. Halfway through class, the arches of my feet start to hurt---really hurt! I'm not sure why and I really don't understand it. I remember doing a juice cleanse once and one ear started to launch stinging pains into my head. Someone told me that your body sends strong and weird messages to you when it's detoxing and to just push through. So I did and I do (though I'm not completely happy about it).

Valeria instructs us to "Blossom our Bums" in Sun Dial pose and Christine and I laugh together... along with just about everyone else. I think most of us weren't really sure where our bums were in this pose, it's so pretzeley.... I ride my bike home after class and swear I will never under-estimate how hard it is to do a Tuesday night "double" again.... My roommates laugh at me when I eat a big dinner and fall asleep at 9:15 on the couch. "Too much yoga?" they both ask. I'm not quite sure how to answer. I think I tried to say "Never!" but I'm not sure if it came out in an inaudible grumble or not....

Day 6 – Oct 7

I'm officially starting to feel sore today. I go to Cormac's 4:45 power class and meet Sharon who tells a funny story about her partner Terry's clothes after Hot class last night.... Sharon is not quite sure what she's in for with Cormac's upcoming class and he's teasing her (like he does everyone else!). I'm even sore when we're standing in the opening Mountain Pose, but I think that every minute in Mountain Pose is one LESS minute in the Dreaded Cormac Plank Poses. I'm so glad it's only an hour class because class is a challenge for me today. I do feel open, but my hips are still on fire after last night (although my 24 hour Flash Plantar Fasciitis attack has simmered down!). I ate a granola bar at 4 and I'm regretting it now. I have finally (after many years of suffering) reached a point in my practice where Downward Dog actually seems restful. I can handle Cormac's downward dogs right now... but here we go into plank, warrior and boat..... The class goes fast and it's only 5:45 and I'm done for the night. Time to reeeelax. Ahhh!

Day 7 – Oct 8

Today is a long day at work. Everything seems to be going wrong and it feels like the wrong time to be working in employment. I'm happy though because today is a Venice day, which means I'll be feeling good later on. She delivers on her promise.

Venice gives me a big hug before class. She's thrilled to be part of the 30 Day Challenge and admits her admiration for us and our quest. I can't believe how amped she is after her Hot Class and her energy breathes vigor into a very full class. This is an amazing 1.5hrs of my life. Everyone works so hard and Venice is proud of us! She loves her students—emanates positivity. The class is smattered with her ecstatic expressions, "Ya!", "You guys are awesome!" "There you go babe! Looks great!" and "I LOVE you guys!" I feel fantastic when I leave.

When I get home, I eat dinner and take a hot bath to calm my now-tender muscles. I keep thinking about how we've come full circle. One week. A lot has happened and more to come! I have so much energy I can't fall asleep. When I finally do, I sleep so soundly that I wake up in the morning in the same position I fell asleep in. Brilliant.

Day 8 - Oct 9

Warren and Kyla are going to restorative tonight but, to be frank, I don't want to be at the studio until 9:30pm. Not that I have plans or anything. I just don't want to. So even though my legs are generally feeling tired, I am going to Hot Class with Cormac where I know he's going to kick my butt even more. I had the kind of Friday at work where I didn't have to meet with people, so at the end of the day, I'm not feeling stressed and totally drained. Then my sister tells me she's coming to Hot with me. I'm now really excited for class!!! It's vibrant before class and busy in here.

Patricia is in the front row and I can see her working hard even though she's teaching the next class. On the way in, I worry that I might be scaring Ashley away when I say it's going to be hard, hot and 1.5 hours long.... she's trooper though and sticks out a lot of the downward dogs for a good class. She comments in the car ride afterwards about the community spirit. Esperanza, Keli and I chit chatting about class, the challenge, Esperanza's husband and other things. The change rooms after that are filled with relief and well-deserved sighs of hard work. I meet Graham after class who says he's doing good and pulling a double tonight. I'm so glad to be going home!

I take my hard working sister out for a fruit smoothy and enjoy the rest of the night with her and our boys relaxing on the couch. tootsies up!

Day 9 - Oct 10

I had a hard time sleeping last night. I have a lot of energy right now, which is weird because when I'm out of class, my legs are tired, but in class I'm fine. In bed the last couple of nights though, I've been so full of life it's preventing me from a lazy sleep. I get out of bed this morning because I have to be at the studio for 10am to help with front end while Valeria leads the gentle class. It's cranberry festival and Cormac is running the booth in Fort Langley. I know they were up hours before me, but I still feel like getting up at 8:30 was a chore this morning! I want to sleep, sleep, sleep! I get on my bike and the air is nice outside. Cool but sunny. LOTS of 30 dayers are here for gentle. I can hear them upstairs and I'm sort of glad to be coaxing my way into the day with a cup of tea. I'll take candlelight tonight. I'm looking forward to it.

Plans change and it's a slow day, so I jump into 1 hour Hot with Kenda instead of my original plans for a loamy practice. I'm tired and grumpy so I take it eeeeasy in Hot class (nothing personal Kenda!). My folds are not too foldy, my warriors are shabby and not menacing at all. But I finish the class warm and loose and good. I take off and spend some time relaxing on the couch watching The Notebook, snuggling with my sister's dogs. It's Ladies Night at the Vanilla Room and Hari Om Yoga will have a table set up. I get dressed up and meet Cormac at the club at 9. I'm tired, but he's been working since 6am! I decide that Valeria and Cormac have got to be the hardest worker pair around. We look sideways with awe, shock and astonishment at some of the clothes and dance moves going on. I encourage him, but Cormac does not pull out his Rock-the-Baby-on-the-dance-floor move. I leave at 11 and abandon Cormac. I have got to get to bed.

Day 10 – Oct 11

I wake up and decide I'm going to eat pancakes for breakfast. One huge monster pancake, actually, with a protein shake and some fried veggies. I thought I had enough time to digest before Cormac's Sunday Power or, new name, "Thanksgiving Calorie-Reducing Class", but I was wrong. So wrong.

I decide that each pose, no matter what, has one name, "Pancake Permitting."

I am not loving plank and definitely not cobra. Downward Dog is okay, because Cormac starts acting like a turkey and moving his feet like one, so I don't feel so bad taking a knee while everyone else busts a gut laughing. This is the day of the "Turkey Dog" or "Downward Turkey."

Day 11 – Oct 12

Today is the hardest day to bring myself to class. I didn't stay out late, but I went out last night and wanted to sleep in. There goes Valeria's morning power class, which turned out to be a Cormac power anyway. I drag ass out of bed in time for Noon Hour Power. Vince notices that I'm walking a bit like a zombie and I'm not sure if it's because I'm extra tired today, or extra stiff. It's a busy class as people squeeze an hour in before Thanksgiving dinner. More Downward Turkey. Cormac pretends to play nice with Carol because she is brave enough to invite him over for Thanksgiving dinner tonight! General mood seems tired, sore and wanting to get on with yoga and return back to a long weekend of excessive eating and resting.....

Day 12 – Oct 13

Today, I feel amazing. Just great. I can't wait for class tonight. I slept weird the other night and I'm looking forward to stretching out the kink in my neck. Kyla is so sore from doubling Cormac classes yesterday that she said her legs shook in the supermarket when she bent down to pick something off the shelf. I feel bad for her, because I know the pain of inflamed and angry hip-flexors, but I feel fantastic today! I do agree, though, that this weekend was the most difficult few days yet. Sore, tired and wanting to be elsewhere, being on the mat was multiply strenuous. We realize that at Day 12, we are not even half way through.

I spend a large part of the day pondering whether I'll take gentle and head home and do chores (boo) or take Gentle and Power Level 2 and go home to eat, write and sleep. The latter is clearly the better laid plan, but it wasn't until Shavasana in Gentle Class that I firmly decided that I feel energetic enough and very bendy---a perfect combination for Valeria's Level 2 class.

But, Cormac is Valeria's stand in, and I'm glad I was feeling mostly energetic because it was brutal. Downward Dogs, Planks, 3 legged Dogs and Planks. Bird of Paradise and Shoulder Stand were saving graces! I still feel good when I leave, although I turn down Sean's offer to stay for Hot at 8pm. Anne remarks that a few people have been sick, and still coming every day. We see Vince on the way out and Sean remarks that he's walking like he's got sore hips. Vince has ventured out of his comfort zone this past 12 days and tried many teachers whose names are not Cormac and he's feeling it, but doing great! He's a new convert to Luna and I'm pretty sure that's what part of this challenge is about. I'm looking forward to Hatha Class tomorrow to break up all these power classes. Patricia gives me a new mantra for Cormac power classes when times get tough, "my arms are going to look great!" I love it!

Day 13 – Oct 14

I look forward to Heidi's class all day. I can't wait to have a relaxing practice. Heidi describes the class to come as "gentle with a few challenging moments." We do one high lunge and she tells us to relax into child's pose after doing "such hard work". How thoughtful!

Day 14 – Oct 15

A day of hilarity. Work was pretty bad and I leave feeling quite stressed and so TIRED. I think I'm battling quite hard to fend off a cold and it's leaving me drained. Regardless, Warren and Kyla decide we are going to double today. Venice for Yin/Yang, Venice for Yin. When we step into the room, there are pools of sweat on the ground from Kenda's 1 hour Hot Class. These poor yogis look exhausted! A few of them stay for Venice's class too (very brave).

It's warm and I plant myself in the back of the room. Venice illuminates us with a thought about Truth and how there is no room for Ego on your mat when you practice daily. It's really moving and I hadn't thought about the challenge that way. The hilarity begins almost immediately. Warren provides his own version of the Downward Dog which Kyla is now calling the "Downward Facing Dog Face Plant Pose" because randomly, and without provocation, his toes slip off the edge of the mat and he falls, disastrously, crumpling and landing on the side of his head. It is unexpected and dramatic! Surely he doesn't deserve this! Downward Dog is hard enough!

Kyla and I can't stop laughing. We both feel bad, but every time Venice puts us into Downward Dog, the blood rushes to our heads and we start giggling, pondering the newfound bloodlust of this cruel pose. We giggle and giggle. Then we start doing planks and my abs are already sore from so much upside down laughing.

In class, at one point Venice asked "Who hasn't farted in yoga class?" More giggling.

Venice can't stay for Yin, so Cormac is teaching this class. I talk for a few minutes with Giselle in the change room about why she came to Hari Om for the 30 day challenge and how she is enjoying it. Giselle was one of the doublers. She did a nice job. I tease Sean about not working very hard in his second of the evening, just because I know I'll get a rise out of him. Cormac comes in and it's hips day. Kyla and I still stifle giggles through groans of sore hips. Frog is an adventure for pretty much everyone and we can hear Diane giving Cormac the gears for all the hip work. "Happy Frog" is a rendition for her, apparently. The boys, it seems, are not loving this pose very much. I adore it. It hurts and it sucks, but it's so worthwhile! Kyla can't believe what's happening to her. She's never done this one and she's not happy about it. I felt the same way in Double Pigeon when I thought my legs were going to be forcefully ejected from my hip sockets....

We are all tired at the end of the night from 3 hours of yoga, and our only immediate thought is Hot tomorrow or Restorative? Hmmm....

Day 15 – Oct 16

I lean over my computer in the morning to turn it on and discover that my left hamstring is so sore it doesn't want to support my weight. I quickly plant my right leg and save an embarrassing moment. It does loosen up over the course of the day, and I'm thankful.

I deliberate all day about Hot or Restorative and finally, at the last minute, decide to go to Hot at 6pm. I meet Monika and talk to Patricia about her dance performances. We also discuss how hard it is to work full time and still come to yoga every day. I have lots of energy when class hits and enjoy Cormac's class immensely. I see Vince who was away for 2 days because he got really sick. Now he's still getting over his cold AND he has to make up those classes. I realize I'm lucky so far to be in the healthy club! Although, I'm not 100% sure if that potent Oil of Oregano Valeria keeps talking about is really worth the price of admission.....

Day 16 – Oct 17

I want to take Gentle class at 10am so I can go spend the day shopping and roaming Vancouver. It's raining (which means I'm not going to ride my bike!) so I take transit. Transit in Langley is completely abhorrent, in case you weren't aware. This is a 10 min drive usually, but I have to leave my house at 8:45 to get there for the 10am class. I'm not terribly thrilled about getting up so early on a Saturday (I stayed up late watching romantic comedies with my sister), but I do get myself out of bed and get there. I sit in Carol's car beforehand and we talk about the classes we like the most/least and why. We talk about a baby shower she's going to and how she bought I Love You Forever, a book we have both never stopped loving.

My hamstrings are always sore after Friday night hot and they don't disappoint this morning. Plus, I'm just plain stiff for a morning practice. We ease in and when we finish I'm warm and a little looser. I have all day to waste now that yoga is done!

Day 17 – Oct 18

I sleep in. I decide I'd rather drink a fruit smoothie and eat spicy french fries for breakfast than head to 1pm Power Hour. I'm not going to relive the Pancake problem from last weekend. It's a gorgeous day and I get on my bike and stop at Home Depot before class. Yin happens at 4pm and I'm so glad to hear that Valeria is feeling better and that she will be leading class. This is only my second class with her in the challenge! It is wonderful. I stretch out parts that need it and other parts that I didn't realize were so sore! I feel great today. I love the weather. I love yoga. I love the 30 day challenge! I get home, eat and have so much energy that I spend two hours cleaning. I even try my hands at a construction project, and I'm bummed when I can't figure out the stud finder, so the renovation is put on hold. I clean the kitchen for my sister and wash my yoga mat. Ready for Day 18!

Day 18 – Oct 19

I feel really good today. Carol's class is a relaxed pace and I leave feeling loose and rested. The routine of daily yoga is firmly set. I go home and, like the last 17 days, finish my night with food and sleep. Even though we're over half way, it's doesn't feel like we're on the easy descent to the finale yet. We still have 12 classes yet. A lot of effort is still required to keep the momentum going. Kyla and I decide that once we have less than a week left, the (psychologically) easy slide into Day 30 will be much more noticeable.

Day 19 – Oct 20

Today is a good day. I get to 4:45 gentle class with Cormac and it's a great warm up for Valeria's level 2. Valeria enters the class and lets us all know that because she missed last week, we would have to do 2 classes in 1 today, "so let's start in downward dog." We dive right into class. It's busy, warm and a few people have the harried look of not quite knowing what they got themselves into (i.e. In Reverse Triangle...!). Valeria is getting excited for the "Battle of the Sexes" and wants her girls to be in good shape. Lunges, Twists, Back Bends, Lunges with Twists AND Back Bends, Core Work and more..... Valeria is relentless and it's clear she has a larger repertoire of difficult poses, and more imagination, than we have stamina. She finally lets up when everyone's excessive sweating starts to drip from the ceiling.

Day 20 – Oct 21

Work is so busy I don't even have time to think about yoga later. I'm a little sore from class last night, but good sore---like I worked hard and became more resilient. My hamstrings, however, are starting to feel as though they'd like to stage a revolt against my legs. I will try to be gentle with them... I probably need another hot bath. Alison tells me that hot baths and Epsom Salts are her tool for sore muscles.

Straight to Hari Om after work to help with downstairs while Cormac leads Power Class at 4:45. It's a bit slow. 7 people in Power. 12 in Hatha. I wonder if Leanne's class will be very busy. A few people have not been able to keep up with the challenge. A few have been sick and took days off-only to make them up on top of the regular schedule. Heidi's class is deceptively difficult. She has the amazing ability to coat the intensity of a pose with her sweet, cooing voice. I leave feeling like I took a soothing Heidi class and still got a high energy and intense practice.

Day 21 – Oct 22

I love Venice day. I look forward to Venice all day, every Thursday. My biggest conflict on Thursdays is which class to take. She will be leading the 4:45 Hot, 6pm Yin/Yang and 8pm Yin. I decide that 4:45 Hot will allow me to *gasp* go grocery shopping and *gasp* watch Grey's Anatomy with my sister! I need a few hours of normalcy, I think. I've been feeling very pinched for time and a little stressed from excessive busy-ness and, well, groceries and clean laundry.

Venice starts the class with an entry from her own 44 Day Challenge journal. Venice is one of the teachers whose philosophizing I could listen to for ages. She never says anything worth drowning out. At one point in class, as if this is how she thinks naturally, Venice says, "lose yourself in the euphoria of your success, and not in the places in which you wish you could have been." I feel like I'm being taught yoga by a poet sometimes. It's beautiful.

She proceeds to run a class with lots of squats... cruel harbinger of sore quads! eek! I love how hands-on Venice is and how simple is it to move someone into the right feel of a pose. We struggle sometimes and look at other people to compare how our own posture should feel, and where the disconnect between looking and feeling occurs, a helpful hand is usually the best assistance. Then we do Horse Pose, which is often used in Karate, along with, yes, arm movements derived from punching, and it's amazing how dynamic a class can be. It's so much fun and I regret that I'm not staying for the next class.

But, I take the night off. I see my sister for the first time in almost a week (we live together, but work opposite shifts sometimes—all this yoga isn't helping either!). We talk, eat and watch our favourite TV shows for a few hours. We both cry during Grey's Anatomy and laugh in the Office. When I go to bed, I feel like I've had a perfect day.

Day 22 – Oct 23

Warren tells me they did Head Stands in Yin/Yang last night and I'm a bit bummed that I missed it, but I'm so well rested that I don't really mind. I organized my schedule at work so I don't have to meet with many people today. I spend a large part of my day catching up and thinking about the yoga poses I haven't seen in a while and would like to perhaps work on at home. One of my clients brings me flowers and one of my coworkers brings me a spaghetti squash from her garden. I feel so thankful to have such richness in my life.

Vince and Patricia are in class and we talk about the classes on the weekend. Patricia will be busy this weekend with teaching and taking classes on top of her dance schedule. Sean says he'll need more "Liver Twists" in tomorrow's class after tonight. In combination with his 4am work shifts and 14 hour days, it's a marvel that Sean is here, everyday AND always pushing himself! Hot class is great and I feel STRONG. I really work hard.

Well, except in that weird Plank Pose where we slide our foot under the other and towards the opposite side. My body doesn't understand this pose, not to mention my mind doesn't like it, so I take it easy a little here--- when Cormac isn't looking, that is.....

When I get home, my mom and dad are over for dinner and my sister had a special salad prepared for me. I give her the flowers and drink a glass of wine with my favourite people (who all happen to think I'm a little crazy, but love me anyway!).

Day 23 – Oct 24

I'm at the studio just before 9:30am to open for the Gentle Class at 10am. Valeria is taking workshops this weekend and Cormac will be at a trade show until this afternoon. It feels weird to be in here with no one else around, considering how busy it has been at Hari Om this month. I've hardly been in a class with less than 15 people in all of October. The energy is fantastic, but it's alluring to see the place so vacant and still. I look into the empty studio. It's amazing really, the accomplishments that happen when people assemble together in a large room. I resist the urge to cartwheel from one corner of the studio to the other....

This morning, I get to meet everyone as they come in. Tired, but happy faces! Callie and I talk briefly about how hard Valeria and Cormac work here to keep everything going. Graham tells me he likes the early Saturday class (even though he had a late Friday night) because it gets him ready for work. As always, Esperanza appears nothing short of elated to be here. After class, Esperanza comes down and says Patricia's class was so beautiful it almost made her cry. Before Luna starts, Karen and I talk for a moment about some of the emotional baggage opening up as a result of the challenge. She says she has very few friends her age that do yoga, and it feels a little alienating. I tell her that I have very few friends that do yoga as well, and that it might be universal for yogis to feel a bit alone at times.

Patricia's Candlelight is quiet and satisfying. After this class, I only have 7 left. I'm proud of our accomplishments, and eager to celebrate them with everyone at the potluck! I can't help but feel a bit sad too because this has been a lot of fun and I've developed a lot so far. I fear I'll quickly lose everything that I've gained. I contemplate making a commitment to practicing, at least for a few minutes, every day at home. Hmm. Not sure about that.

Day 24 – Oct 25

It's supposed to rain today. The morning has a kind of glum feeling, but when I leave the house it is still clear so I ride my bike to the studio to open up. Patricia runs the Power class at 1pm. The satisfied challengers come downstairs well-worked and knowing they have the rest of the day to themselves.

Valeria is on the last day of her Chris Chavez workshop. Cormac gets back from football and it seems quiet in the studio. It's a fireplace and book and pot of tea kind of day, you can tell. Cormac runs the 4 pm Yin in Valeria's absence and it's a small enough class to practice in a circle. He is, as always, ribbing us about how many Downward Dogs we might have to do and possibly Planks, but only if Teena is there. Cormac tries to take our minds off of Pidgeon by having us imagine a litter of kittens in the middle of the circle, clawing at our heads. It works because we all giggle and lose track of the possible discomfort of the pose. Into Double Pidgeon, and this is the first time I have put my forearms on the ground since I started commuting on my bike in August (my hips and I have an uneasy truce right now...).

I head home (it is now solidly raining) and spend the rest of the night reading and relaxing by the fireplace.

Day 25 – Oct 26

I'm tired today and for the first time in a while it's because I stayed up late reading, not because I'm tired from yoga! Ha! I'm happy to be going to Carol's class later today.

It is packed and a delightfully fun class. We do a lot of partner work including putting over backs, legs and feet into each others' hands. We all try to wipe the sweat off before this can happen: a polite gesture. But I think we all end up with more than we bargained for....

Day 26 – Oct 27

Slept weird on my shoulder and it's sore. I'm at the point now, where I know that if anything hurts, stretching it will make it go away. Or something else will be more sore and the focus just shifts to that.... Vince brings his motorcycle (at my request), but I can't ride home with him. I feel bad because he rushed to get here!

Gentle class is very nice and I'm so excited for Level 2....Valeria is back! She had a great time with Chris Chavez and tells me he'll be coming to Hari OM in December. Valeria runs a great class. She asks us why we practice and suggests that for this class, we focus on that.

She pulls us into Dolphin pose and asks us to put our hands on our chins (and balance on our elbows). It's weird and silly! A few people (myself -almost- included) sound like they face planted. Valeria tells us that Chris Chavez had them doing that from Headstand (?) not sure if that is right, but I can't picture it either way!!! I would love to see that! We do some Back Bends, Lunges, Twists and then the best question, "Are you warm now? Ready to play?" I absolutely adore Valeria's classes. When Valeria runs class, I feel strong and beautiful. I look up to her a lot. In her practice, career, beliefs (on various topics), Valeria is an exceptional person. In Shavasana, she reads us a poem about Joy. I can't remember the poem, but thinking about my practice today, this poem makes me think another by Maya Angelou called "Phenomenal Woman":

I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It's the fire in my eyes
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing of my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

After Valeria reads the Joy poem, and I think about how wonderful Maya Angelou's writing is, I think, "Speaking of wonderful people, Vince there is a pretty amazing person. He is so thoughtful, considerate, not to mention funny, and a strong practitioner. I am glad that he's around!!!" I hope he brings his motorcycle another day for me to try.... Oops. I shouldn't be thinking so much in Shavansana.... Focusing can be so hard. Oops I just thought that. Stop it. Focus on your breath.....

Day 27 – Oct 28

My back is a little sore from some of the Twists and Backbends. I'm glad to be going to yoga tonight to stretch out the kinks. Heading to Power and Hatha with Heidi. Heidi's class is completely satisfying, without being completely relaxing. I break a sweat and find myself working hard! Mostly, I think, because Heidi is so flexible and makes it look and sound easy, so I challenge myself to do the same. A great class. I know that a few people, at least, will be heading to Leanne's class at 8pm. I wonder what the looks on their faces will be as they leave her class. Probably a lot like ours right now, a little flushed from exercise, and mostly sleepified, attached to a jello body, from a solid practice.

Day 28 – Oct 29

Today is going to be a killer day! Warren, Kyla and I decide that we are going to (attempt) to complete ALL 3 Venice classes tonight!! We order a bunch of sushi at lunch for our snack, dinner and second dinner later. Venice hits us with Hot class and my quads are killing me! It's a high-energy and dynamic class. Amped from Hot, Venice bounds into Yin/Yang and a big class (30 of us probably) keep the energy going. She starts class by expressing her appreciation for us. She tells us that a teacher can only be as good as her students. I'm 100% sure it goes both ways. She glows and so do we. We do some really fun (and difficult) arm balancing. When we start head stands, Venice demos with two versions. She explains as she goes and we all quietly appreciate her expression of and seeming ease in these strenuous poses. She is fantastic and I can't believe she's still talking when she does this! After we all try headstands, she says congratulations to all the people who tried it, and to all the people who thought about trying it. We laugh, all of us proud of our own (and the class' achievements) and move into Yin portion of the class...

Venice's classes always have very loud breathers. While we're in a gentle pose and everyone is "audibly breathing", the Darth Vader inspiration for this breathing strikes me as kind of funny and I almost audibly laugh out loud. Kyla commented once about this. I also remember some of my first yoga classes where the weird breathing was so foreign and sounded so bizarre--like these people don't even realize that they sound weird.... fast forward a few years and I understand now the power of the breath and embrace my true Darth Vader and continue breathing in the pose, making sure my neighbour can hear me too.... I still relish in finding it funny from time to time though!

After Yin/Yang, a few of us eat snacks and congregate outside the studio doors--chitchatting about yoga, food and the upcoming potluck. Sean starts talking about books and the conversation rests on a book called Shantaram by Gregory David Roberts. Venice has a copy here. She starts reading excerpts from the Acknowledgements and the first page. We all decide to bulk order a copies so we can read it. Graham walks in and right into our book club. He is drawn in too, though, and stops to listen. Have I mentioned that my 2 favorite things are Yoga and Literature? I seem to be getting solid doses of each during this challenge. and I love it!

Yin is so nice. Relaxing. I think my legs would have fallen off if this third class was any more active. 3 classes in a row is fun and challenging, but a bit much... I was tired, but tired not enough, at the end of the first. I had lots of energy in the second, but exhausted when that one was through. But Yin is, in Venice's words, "bliss". Everything is warm, stretched, and open already when I start. I benefit immensely.

Day 29 - Oct 30

I couldn't sleep last night, but I wake up feeling fantastic. I wonder: if I spent 4.5 hours every day doing yoga, could I stop sleeping altogether and still function normally? Hmm.. doubtful. I get to the studio at 5pm. Valeria is finishing class upstairs. Cormac is fiddling with iTunes, trying to get a playlist together for tomorrow's Battle of the Sexes class. Patricia leads 6pm Hot and I hold down the fort downstairs so Valeria and Cormac can go on to a Chris Chavez class in Richmond. Restorative is surprisingly full. I check everyone in and dash upstairs for class. After the Triple Threat last night, Restorative is perfect.... Patricia is a beautiful teacher and runs a lovely Friday night class.

Day 30 - Oct 31!!!

Potluck day!!! No time for cooking or baking. I bring mandarin oranges with jack-o-lantern faces. and Oreo Cookies. I don my red angel wings and I'm so pumped for class!!! When I get there, Venice tells me 2 brilliant pieces of news: she found several copies of Shantaram and has them here AND she made vegan-friendly chilli (in part) for meeee! It is so thoughtful of her!

We start heading upstairs and my job is to split the class into 2 sides. It isn't really Boys vs Girls because the numbers just don't work. It's really non-competitive anyway, so it ends up not really mattering. A few people dress up and it's so much fun! The kicker? When Valeria and Cormac enter, Valeria is dressed like Cormac and him like her!! Tight pink tank and all!

We all bust a gut laughing!

They lead us through a sweaty, energetic and FUN practice. There's a lot of bumping into other challengers, laughing, ribbing each other and general enamoured yoga silliness. There's the feeling of this being the end of something great, and we all pour ourselves more completely into the practice. At the end, we filter downstairs to EAT with the plan of coming back upstairs for wrap-up.

The potluck is momentous for me because there is real food that I can eat! Courtesy of my sweet yoga friends. Venice brought a very special chilli, Sean spent hours cooking coconut curry and rice noodles, and Karen brought a fantastic cranberry quinoa salad. Esperanza's daughter brought another vegetarian stew! This is the FIRST time (seriously) in a potluck since I went vegan (a long time ago) that I have eaten more than raw veggies and fruit salad. I am struck with how selfless, thoughtful and generous is this community. I am so fortunate to have met everyone here and to have spent so much time with them. I am so glad that they are wonderful cooks and I am eating good, hot, fulfilling vegan fare! There is so much food, and everyone brought yummy and different dishes! We all fill our plates one more time and head upstairs to talk about the challenge.

A few people share their stories and what the challenge meant to them. Esperanza could have died in a car accident and her first thought was "I haven't finished my yoga!" She is such a sweetie. Others have similar meaningful stories of the importance of their challenge to them. Cormac and Valeria are asking everyone to write a paragraph and share their experience. A lot of people have been graciously following my journal, but I can't wait to hear what the other 30 Day Challengers went through. We're all tired and full and a bit quiet now. I think a bit of nostalgia is going through the room too... The prizes are drawn! The best prize, I think, is the sign and card that Sean put together. We all pitched in and, hopefully, we all had the chance to sign the card. It's a beautiful alumnimun sign for our front. Valeria and Cormac are shocked because Sean has been lying to them about the sign for almost a month! They are so surprised and, I think, very touched. It is clear that more happened than 30 days of yoga here. The community that was forged during this challenge can never be taken away. We will always share our individual accomplishments with each other and we will likely continue bumping into one another here and there. Everyone starts to filter downstairs and out towards their respective Hallowe'en activities....

Well, that's it. The challenge is complete.

Post-challenge - Nov 2

I took yesterday off and went to the Langley Chiefs game with my family. I haven't seen my mom or my brother in a month... They are so proud of me and wonderful at the task I just completed. My brother asks me what the weirdest pose is that I can do. I tell him. My loved ones are prouder of me than I am, I realize.

Post-challenge - Nov 3

I wake up today STIFF. I want to get back to the studio already! I can't keep away! I plan to get there very, very soon.....